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Two Years On:

an analysis for supporting the review of the Brazilian National Action Plan on: Women, Peace and Security

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Introduction

On March 8th 2017, Brazil adopted a two-year National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), with a clear commitment by the government for integrating gender perspectives in peace and security policies. Through the development of a national strategy, the Brazilian government formally endorsed the principles of the United Nations Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. As the expiration date of the Brazilian NAP is fast approaching, there is currently a debate in Brazil on whether it should be reformed or extended – and, if so, for how long.

In light of this debate, we argue that it is crucial for civil society to continue pushing for inclusive dialogues with governmental actors involved in these processes. As part of this effort, our analysis aims to provide a brief overview of the key aspects of the Brazilian NAP and make recommendations with the purpose of informing public debate and decision-making processes. In doing so, we argue that, although there are important advances in the NAP, limitations in terms of content and implementation strategies persist and, if not properly addressed, they might significantly inhibit the attainment of its goals and objectives.

Content and implementation strategies of the Brazilian NAP: main challenges

Content

In its NAP, Brazil has committed itself to increase and improve women's participation in peace and security efforts, and to engage in protective measures against gender violence. These commitments are made in relation to defense and foreign policy initiatives, with special attention to peace operations, conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes, as well as humanitarian emergencies. A highlight of the Brazilian NAP is the inclusion of gender-sensitive initiatives focused on the right of refugees and refugee seekers. It commits to giving priority to women refugees under the Brazilian Resettlement Program and to promoting access to medical and psychosocial services to female refugees who have survived gender-based human rights violations. The NAP also provides emphasis on the incorporation of gender perspectives in activities related to demining, as well as disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration (DDRR) in post-conflict scenarios.

Notwithstanding these important contributions, the absence of measures for tackling the structural and institutional barriers that contribute to women's underrepresentation in peace and security is concerning. There is a notable lack of reflection on some of the major obstacles that contribute to hinder women's participation in a meaningful way, including institutional restrictions to women's recruitment to combat positions, gender wage gaps and their exposure to sexual and moral harassment in spaces dominated by men.

The NAP also lacks an intersectional approach to gender equality, despite the diverse challenges faced by black, indigenous and rural Brazilian women in areas related to peace and security. This results in critical invisibility that effaces the plurality of Brazilian women and the challenges and opportunities they encounter depending on class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The adoption of an intersectional approach that deals with the overlapping of gender and other identity categories is a fundamental step towards the promotion of effective policies on women's participation, empowerment, and protection. Beyond the search for gender balance in institutional settings, gender-mainstreaming policies should also be attentive to which groups of women are being included and benefiting from these initiatives and who might be potentially excluded or silenced by so-called gender-inclusive policies and programs.

It is also remarkable that the NAP commits to a zero-tolerance policy with respect to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in peace operations. Surprisingly, though, there is no commitment of the government to alter the national legislation on SEA by members of the Armed Forces. As for today, sexual exploitation and abuse do not constitute a crime under the Brazilian Military Penal Code. The absence of a criminal definition in military law creates barriers that inhibit data gathering and reporting for judicial investigations. Against this backdrop, the implementation of corrective and preventive measures may not deliver the expected results, adversely affecting the actions taken to end the culture of impunity for these crimes.

The Brazilian NAP is also remarkably silent on violence and insecurities that disproportionately affect women and girls at the national and regional levels, including the impacts of small arms proliferation, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Though these issues are internationally recognized as threats to women's rights and security, they remained absent in the Brazilian NAP. Today, Brazil is both a source, transit and destination country for victims of sex trafficking, particularly of women and children. Drug trafficking and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons also have differential impacts for women and girls. Brazil currently ranks as one of the largest exporters of small arms in the world, annually exporting over 500 million dollars, and its femicide rates are one of the highest in the world. The clear linkages between these issues and the WPS agenda and their devastating consequences for Brazilian women demand the government's attention and dedicated efforts in a future version of the plan.

Implementation Strategies

According to international best practices, a high-impact NAP requires the establishment of coordination mechanisms and well-defined implementation strategies, which are currently missing from the Brazilian NAP. Steps towards the development of an effective NAP include the genuine commitment from the government with four main aspects:

First, the allocation of a specific budget, which is a critical step to ensure implementation of agreed objectives and activities in the long-term. Second, the elaboration of a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the progress and challenges of implementing the agenda. Indicators and goals should be evaluated through data collection and detailed timelines, generating solid evidence to support and improve public policy effectiveness. Third, internal capacity building and awareness-raising activities are fundamental to ensure the sustainability of the NAP and to improve the quality of women's participation and the design of gender-sensitive policies. Fourth, strong coordination across government and between government and civil society is also key to the implementation. Coordinated actions demand well-defined and harmonized goals and a clear division of tasks and responsibilities.

In order to improve the implementation process, coordination efforts could be strengthened in four main ways: identification and appointment of champions committed to the implementation of the WPS agenda in each of the institutions involved in the NAP; a permanent supervision and evaluation committee composed of members of the government and representatives of the civil society; continuous follow-up and reporting of the work developed by the entities involved with the implementation phase; and an independent review to evaluate the implementation process.

Summary of recommendations

- Allocation of a budget dedicated to the implementation of the NAP;
- Elaboration of a monitoring and evaluation framework that clearly defines responsibilities and assigns specific targets, indicators, and deadlines for key activities;
- Effective inclusion of the Brazilian civil society in the implementation of the NAP and in an eventual revision of the plan;
- Adoption of an intersectional perspective on violence and security, which is sensitive to the overlapping of gender and other identity categories such as race, class and sexual orientation, and the particularities of local, regional and international scenarios;
- Inclusion of critical issues for the security of women and girls in Latin America as a whole, and in Brazil in particular, including: (i) the promotion of measures to integrate gender perspectives into policies regarding arms proliferation, disarmament as well arms; (ii) the advancement of policies addressing the gendered impacts of drug trafficking and drug-related violence in Brazil; and (iii) the implementation of policies and programs to fight international human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and men, regardless of age, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Opportunities for Brazil

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda is a major opportunity for Brazil to take on a leading role in advancing values and principles, which are in line with the government's historical commitment to the United Nations. An efficient and innovative NAP can serve as part of Brazil's efforts intended to bolster its international profile. It also holds the potential of stimulating crucial reflections on the realities of Brazilian women and girls and improving state interventions in this realm. The remaining challenge, however, is to articulate domestic, regional and international demands and priorities. We are now presented with the chance of owning the NAP as a multidimensional tool, capable of improving policies on security, human rights, and socioeconomic development through a gender perspective. If it succeeds in reflecting the challenges currently faced by women and girls in Brazil, our NAP may work as a mechanism in favor of more efficient gender public policies at all levels. Brazil now holds the chance of proposing innovative grounds to advance the WPS agenda, potentially contributing to breaking structures that seem to make gender equality a distant reality.

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