

Gender mainstreaming in the field of disarmament

**Presentation by Carolyn Hannan, Principal Officer for Gender Mainstreaming
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I am very happy to have the opportunity to share with you some thoughts and experience on gender mainstreaming in the area of disarmament, particularly during this week when we are celebrating the first anniversary of the Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

I will introduce the mandates for gender mainstreaming in disarmament; then move onto discussing some of the gender perspectives which have been identified in different areas of disarmament; and finally focus on what needs to be done to ensure that these perspectives are addressed in, and make a significant difference to the outcomes of, different types of disarmament activities.

Mandates for gender mainstreaming in disarmament

There are very explicit intergovernmental mandates on gender mainstreaming, or bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention in disarmament, dating back to the first United Nations conferences in Mexico in 1975. The Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, and its follow-up at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, also emphasized the importance of better understanding and addressing the linkages between gender and disarmament.

More recently Security Council resolution 1325 from October 2000 contained a specific paragraph on gender and disarmament which “*Encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants*”. (op 13). Other paragraphs in resolution 1325 also have implications for work on disarmament, for example, those recommendations on increased participation of women in decision-making positions (op 1 and op 2); the role and contribution of women in field-based operations (op 4); the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction (op 8a); local women’s peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution and involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements (op 8b); and respect for the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, taking into account the particular needs of women and girls (op 12).

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy or approach which aims to achieve equality between women and men and contribute to the achievement of other societal goals. Gender mainstreaming is about ensuring that the contributions, priorities and needs of both women and men are taken into consideration and can enrich development as well as ensuring that the benefits of that development reach women as well as men.

Gender mainstreaming is achieved by identifying the linkages between gender and different areas of development and ensuring that planning and implementation of activities taken these linkages into account. This requires firstly analyzing the existing situation of women and men – the roles, responsibilities, priorities and needs and access to and control over resources and decision-making; and secondly assessing the way in which women and men can contribute to planned activities (or be opposed to them), as well as the potential impact of planned activities on women and men.

Gender analysis can reveal differences between women and men and even more important often also significant inequalities. Such an analysis in the area of disarmament could reveal, for example, differences and inequalities between women and men in relation to:

- Participation as armed combatants
- Roles and responsibilities in situations of conflict;
- Ability to cope in post-conflict situations;
- Long-term impact of conflict – socially and psychologically as well as in political and economic terms;
- Perceptions and experience of basic security;

Gender perspectives in different areas of disarmament

Although women as well as men have mobilized for peace, security and disarmament throughout history, the views and experiences of women have tended to be less visible than those of men. Discussions of disarmament have traditionally focused on men as combatants and thus as the automatic targets of disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation programmes. As a result, women remain under-represented on all bodies working on disarmament and women have not been seen as the important potential resource they are in relation to awareness building and advocacy campaigns.

Women have been seen primarily as victims of conflicts or solely in terms of their "caring" roles. This is an over-simplified view of reality since conflict and post-conflict situations clearly affect all groups - women and men and girls and boys - but often in very different ways. Women can have particular problems and trauma as a result of refugee situations; men and boys can be traumatized by the brutality and particular vulnerabilities resulting from combatant roles. Women and girls can, however, have also been combatants. Women may have been forced to take on non-traditional roles when men are absent. The return of men at the end of conflict can result in problems in relations between women and men, with women often being expected to automatically revert to traditional roles, even after long periods of changed roles and responsibilities. Women who have been combatants may find themselves shut out or considered "unwomanly" by their communities. These important gender perspectives must be taken into account in planning and implementing disarmament activities.

Considerable knowledge has been gained on the gender perspectives in all areas of disarmament. I will illustrate with some examples from four areas.

Integrating gender perspectives in the area of *small arms* should include analysis of who owns guns and controls the supply of guns; who uses these guns and for what purposes; who the victims of gun violence are; and in what particular contexts such violence occurs. There are clear gender differences in relation to all of these aspects. It is well known, for example, that men are the predominant owners of small arms and are also the main victims of gun violence. Nevertheless, women are also particularly vulnerable to gun violence in specific situations, in both conflict and non-conflict areas. Small arms have, for example, made security issues in refugee camps a particular problem for women, leading to increased sexual exploitation of women and girls; and in non-conflict zones small arms have increased the fatality rate of domestic violence.

In working with *landmines and UXOs* (Unexploded Ordnances) an analysis of what women and men do and where they do it, can facilitate understanding where demeaning activities should be prioritized in communities and actually make these activities more effective. Use of women as communicators in mine awareness programmes, particularly in areas where men have difficulties in reaching women or where children are a priority target group, is important for effective achievement of goals of mine awareness campaigns. Women are also increasingly involved in mine clearance operations, for example in Kosovo. The roles and responsibilities of women and men can affect their vulnerability to landmine or UXO injuries, depending on where the landmines are predominately placed. Women can be injured collecting firewood on common lands or farming in their fields; men may be more vulnerable because of their greater mobility and use of roads. Injuries and death caused by landmines can have differing social and economic consequences for women and men. Experience has shown that women with landmine injuries are often quickly divorced by their husbands while women continue to take care of their injured husbands. In situations where women become the sole income-earners, mine activity programmes need to ensure that they receive the support necessary for the survival of their families.

To better understand the gender perspectives on victim assistance the following questions have to be raised:

- Who receives immediate assistance?
- Who cares for the victims of landmines? Do they get adequate support?
- What are the gender differences regarding the social and economic impacts of landmine injuries?
- How can women's organizations be involved?

In planning *DDR (disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation)* initiatives it is important to develop an understanding of the different, and sometimes unequal, impact of conflict and post-conflict situations on women and men. Although women and girls may have been combatants as well as men, because of women's subordinate situation in many countries they may have difficulties in accessing the benefits from DDR programmes. These benefit packages can include clothing, food and small amounts of money or credit and other programmes established to assist rehabilitation – things which are essential to successful reintegration. The needs of families of ex-combatants should

also be considered. The vulnerable situations women ex-combatants may find themselves in when they return home need also to be taken into account. The particular traumas and needs of those who have been forced to serve the combatants in different ways must also be addressed.

Questions which need to be raised in DDR programmes in order to ensure that all relevant gender perspectives are identified and addressed include the following:

- What are the goals of the initiative?
- Who is eligible?
- Who is consulted and involved?
- What is offered?
- How are others affected by the initiative?
- What is the timeframe?
- What is the legal, political, economic and social context?
- How can local capacities and organizations be strengthened?

In the new approach to the voluntary collection of arms based on community development approaches - *disarmament for development initiatives* – there are many positive examples of how women have played key roles in the collection of weapons. It is important, however, that women as well as men are also involved in identifying the most pressing development needs of households and communities so that both women and men can both contribute to and benefit fully from these development initiatives.

Efforts to bring gender perspectives to the fore in disarmament affairs

Over recent years efforts have been made to identify and address gender issues in disarmament affairs. To support greater understanding of the importance of the linkages between gender and disarmament and the need to address them explicitly, the Department for Disarmament Affairs¹ produced a series of briefing notes on gender and disarmament. The briefing notes look at gender perspectives in relation to small arms, landmines, weapons of mass destruction, DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) programmes and ‘disarmament for development’ initiatives. In addition, one briefing note highlights the important contribution women’s advocacy groups have made in the area of disarmament. The briefing notes identify gender linkages, point to ways in which disarmament activities might be done differently on the basis of understanding these linkages, and provide guidance on resources – materials and websites – which could be used to increase understanding of gender perspectives on disarmament.

A panel was held in March 2001 to launch the gender and disarmament briefing notes and to discuss further gender and disarmament. Tomorrow at a panel to commemorate the first anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325, the Under-Secretary-General will discuss the ways in which the Department for Disarmament Affairs will work to ensure that the full implementation of the recommendations on disarmament in Security Council resolution 1325. This includes active participation in the

¹ Prepared in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser for Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Mine Action Service of the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

preparation of a Secretary-General's study and report on women, peace and security requested by the Security Council. The Department will also organize training in gender mainstreaming for its staff. In addition, the Department will encourage Member States to nominate female candidates for experts groups, for disarmament fellowship programmes and other meetings and events organized by the department.

Although giving attention to gender perspectives will differ in the various types of activities carried out by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, there are some generic actions which can be taken in all areas. These include:

- Carrying out *analysis* of the existing situation of women and men and the potential impacts of disarmament activities – in order to both benefit from the contributions of women as well as men and to ensure that both women and men can benefit from the activities.
- Ensuring *equal representation* of women and men on all bodies dealing with disarmament, either as experts or as representatives of civil society;
- Recognizing and supporting the work of *women's groups and networks* organizing around disarmament, including research groups;
- Recognizing women as an important *key target group in mobilizing public support* for disarmament;
- Promoting greater research on gender perspectives of disarmament;
- Improving the understanding of the *role of masculinity* in the culture of weapons.

In addition, some specific actions can be taken in the areas of disarmament discussed earlier, for example:

- Breaking-down *statistics on casualties* from small arms and landmines by sex and age and analyzing and addressing the causal factors behind the statistics;
- *Identifying and consulting all ex-combatants* - both women and men - to understand the needs and priorities which should be addressed in DDR programmes;
- *Involving women's groups and networks* in 'disarmament for development' programmes – both make collection of weapons more effective and to ensure that women and men can draw benefits from the programmes.

In conclusion, I would like to re-emphasize that gender mainstreaming in disarmament affairs should be promoted not only because it is a matter of equality and human rights but also because it is an important means of ensuring that the goals of disarmament programmes are achieved. Leaving out 50% of the population – ignoring their contributions and neglecting their needs - can never be considered a strategy for effective development in any area.