

INTERNATIONAL ALERT

Protection of Civilians: Gender Considerations for Disarmament, Conflict Transformation and the Establishment of Human Security

1. Introduction

The proliferation of 'portable weapons'¹ in any society is a key source of the spread of violence, which impacts on the protection of civilians. Disarmament is therefore central to the protection of civilians. 'Human security'² needs to be at the heart of any approach to disarmament. The possession of arms as a means of security, defence, brokering power and survival must be replaced by viable and sustainable alternatives. Hence there is the necessity to always consider disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, transformation and development as linked and interdependent.

The experiences of conflict can in many instances be gender specific. For example, men and boys are the usual 'carriers' and 'users' of portable weapons and women and girls are often the 'carers' for those wounded by these weapons. For the sustainability of disarmament and conflict transformation processes, gender roles need to be considered, both in terms of impact and agency. This requires gender and diversity analysis of the conflict dynamics at a household and community level as well as a macro and national level. Central to this process is establishing an understanding of the answers to questions such as:

- ✍ How does the proliferation of portable weapons impact differently on women, men, boys and girls?
- ✍ What are the gender specific roles in each conflict context, which need to be considered when identifying stakeholders and strategies for disarmament and conflict transformation?
Eg. Who has access to the portable weapons? What are the perceptions of women/men/boys/girls on the use of these weapons
- ✍ What are the gender dynamics and gender specific interests that need to be understood and built into any strategy?
Eg. How do men/women/boys/girls perceive 'security'?

Women and men are not homogenous groups and there are age and individual status or alliance variables (eg. Ethnicity, caste, political affiliation), which need to be considered. It is necessary to analyse these dynamics for the development of an effective disarmament and reintegration strategy, that is owned and driven by the local stakeholders. This involves identifying shared values and incentives for disarmament and ensuring that these are considered in a gender

¹ On the basis of consultations with women from conflict zones who consider the term small arms to under estimate the harm and fatalities caused by these weapons, the term 'portable weapons' has been chosen for use in this document to describe what is formally known as Small Arms & Light Weapons. The Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms (UN Doc A/52/298, 27 Aug 1997) defines Small Arms as revolvers, pistols, rifles, carbines, assault rifles and sub-machine guns, light weapons include: machine guns, grenade launchers and anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles.

² Human Security is defined as: An approach that recognizes that lasting stability cannot be achieved until people are protected from violent threats to their rights, safety or lives (source: the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade)

equitable manner.

2. Gender Impacts of the Proliferation of Portable Weapons

Women, men, boys and girls have different roles in society, which need to be considered in the development of any disarmament initiative.

Table 1: Examples of Traditional Gender specific impacts and agency roles relating to the proliferation of portable weapons

Women	Men
Health providers & 'Carers' dealing with victims of armed conflict; 'peacemakers'	'Defenders' & 'Protectors', but also 'aggressors'
Preserving the social order at community level in absence of men; Daily household survival strategies	Killed & wounded in fighting
Combatants/'Combatant wives'/'sex slaves'	Combatants
Targets of rape and sexual violence/killed	Subject to mass arrest/ murder, deportation
Intelligence of whereabouts of portable weapons, sometimes carriers	Carriers and users of portable weapons
Victims of domestic violence as well as more public gun crime	Victims & Agents of gun crime
Manufacturing production line of weapons	Manufacturing and sale of weapons

Impact & Agency

Table 1 depicts some generalisations, which may vary from community to community.

Nevertheless, in terms of impact, the majority of those killed in violent conflict are young men. The majority of those raped at gun point or through sexualised violence are young women. There is clear evidence from recent and current conflicts, for example in Bosnia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, that rape by combatants is now used as a systematic weapon of war. In terms of agency, the majority of those in possession of weapons are young men and the majority of those holding communities together in times of crisis are women.

3. a) Strategic Gender Considerations for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Conflict Transformation Initiatives

Addressing negative gender specific stereotypes

Violence is often linked to masculine identity. Weapons are part of the dominant masculine code in many countries. Men are seen as the 'protectors' and 'defenders' and often maintain this role through the possession of weapons. In understanding the gender dynamics and reinforcement of these stereotypes, it is also important to consider the role of women as 'motivators' or 'encouragers' of both peacebuilding, but in some cases also of conflict. For example, in the context of Burundi the role of women in encouraging their men to arms as 'protectors' and 'defenders' of the community was seen as key in the escalation of violence. Hence, stereotypes of what constitutes 'manliness' and 'womanliness' can often fuel conflict.

Masculinity & Peer Group strategies

One strategy used to address disarmament and redress violence involves breaking down negative stereotypes and the male power associations with weapons. For example, young men, as peacebuilders, can approach their peers, who are combatants or involved in gang fighting, and persuade them of alternative practices, which disconnect the link between power and weapons. Peer group strategies and an understanding of gender dynamics are critical when supporting such initiatives.

Using women's intelligence information for disarmament initiatives

Women are often used as carriers or smugglers of illicit weapons and they are an important information source in terms of knowledge of location and possession of weapons at least at a community level. With the incentive of 'peace' and development support this knowledge or intelligence information has been put to positive effect in disarmament projects (some examples are outlined below). However, it is important to recognise the risks and dangers to women of providing this information. It is crucial with such initiatives that any material incentives provided in exchange for weapons do not further support gender inequality in the community or endanger those involved. The fact that it is men in possession of weapons should not mean that they are the sole beneficiaries in weapon exchange programmes. In El Salvador, for example, civilian disarmament projects provided household goods for arms through a voucher system, which was accessible to men & women. In disarmament initiatives, there is a need for a gender sensitive household and community focus rather than a combatant focus. This should apply to any material or capacity building and training incentives relating to demobilisation and reintegration.

Special needs of women combatants and the families of combatants

The gender specific needs of women or girl combatants or those associated with combatants are often neglected in the demobilisation process. Ironically, as combatants, women may be treated as equals in the sense that they do all the same frontline fighting activities as men, however post conflict they are usually expected to resume their traditional role in the household. Hence, their 'equality' is a temporary status rather than an end. Women combatants have often suffered rape and sexual abuse and have specific needs in terms of integration when returning to their households and communities of origin to counter stigma and receive individual counselling support and capacity building through retraining and confidence building. In the address of both strategic and practical needs there is a need to tackle widespread HIV/Aids infection in terms of access to appropriate drugs and care for both women and men. HIV positive women may also require gender specific care and additional support for children, who may also be HIV positive.

3. b) Practical & Structural Gender Considerations for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Conflict Transformation Initiatives

In general, civilian driven disarmament, demobilisation and conflict transformation initiatives are more sustainable than military initiatives if they are successful in taking an inclusive approach to ensure the participation of both women and men. Such approaches may initially be more time consuming in terms of the focus on inclusion and process, gender-aware civilian driven initiatives often generate a greater sense of ownership from those involved and consider the contextual needs of the community.

In terms of gender equity it is necessary to address the pervasive economic gendered power dynamic that portable weapons have become 'collateral' and that this collateral is usually only owned by men, who generally handle, trade and, in disarmament and demobilisation initiatives, exchange weapons for other benefits. This reinforces the inequalities between

women and men and the male-biased economic and decision-making power dynamic over women and girls.

In terms of gender-aware strategies it is important to consider:

1. Who benefits from the initiative?
2. How sustainable is the benefit to these actors?
3. What motivates their involvement?
4. What are the gender specific strategic and practical needs of combatants?
5. Specific strategic and practical needs of the households and communities in which combatants are located?
6. Specific strategic and practical needs of children associated with armed groups?
7. Specific strategic and practical needs of women associated with armed groups including widows?
8. Supporting household level conflict transformation and survival strategies.
9. Contextual understanding of the multiple roles of women and men.
10. Integration of flexibility for a diversification of responses according to context.
11. Supporting and encouraging women's leadership
12. Involving all stakeholders in the planning of initiatives to encourage a community approach and civil society initiatives.
13. Understanding the symbolism of and supporting positive cultural healing and cleansing practices encouraging reintegration.
14. Who has access to knowledge about portable weapon sources, locations and flows?
15. What are the gender specific costs and risks for sharing information on portable weapons?

Structural considerations need to tackle systemic controls such as:

1. The enforcement of controls on trafficking and the production of weapons and ammunition, coupled with job creation for the men and women involved in this production and illicit trading process eg. Women in Eastern Europe are the primary labour force on portable weapon assembly lines.
2. The decoupling of aid from weapon trade
3. Redress of impunity for human rights violations, including rape.
4. Conflict transformation awareness raising, through the media, education and local structures - transformation from a 'culture of violence' to a 'culture of peace'

4.a) Case studies of Gender-sensitive Disarmament Initiatives

UNAMSIL - Sierra Leone

In the disarmament initiative in Sierra Leone the ex-combatants did not trust the government, therefore NGOs took on the role of engaging ex-combatants, civil society groups and liaising with the UN operation, UNAMSIL. Ex-combatants became interested in the programme as they realised their peers were gaining from their engagement and giving up their weapons. Many confidence-building strategies to reintegrate the ex-combatants were adopted by NGOs. For example ex-combatants were involved in the rebuilding of houses, which had been destroyed during fighting. Ex-combatants were also encouraged to attend training courses to develop new knowledge and skills for acquiring jobs. Specific programmes were set up to support victims of the conflict and the wives of ex-combatants. These included initiatives such as micro-credit projects. NGOs are also focussing on addressing domestic violence and child support, to the extent of following through prosecutions and providing protection and support. Awareness-raising projects are widespread in the media to generate a sense of reconciliation and peacebuilding. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission has also been established and a number of perpetrators have already reported themselves to this Commission.

InterBand, Japan: Demobilisation and Reintegration of ex-combatants in Cambodia

The Cambodian government launched demobilisation program called CVAP (Cambodian Veterans' Assistance Program), aims to demobilise 31,500 out of 140 000 soldiers in national force between 2000-2003. InterBand runs a project to support reintegration of demobilised soldiers to supplement the DDR projects run by the government. They are aiming to create social safety nets, especially for those poorest of the poor with physical and mental disability by war, in order to eliminate social instability and, at the same time, to accelerate development of rural areas.

The support provided by InterBand has several dimensions. First, support is provided in starting small-scale business for job creation through joint workshops with demobilized soldiers and their families. Links are also made to help the ex-soldiers and their families reach various markets for these new businesses, e.g. in Japan. Secondly, as medical treatment is a big issue for ex-soldiers, they issue tokens to enable the purchase of medicine. Thirdly, InterBand emphasise gender perspectives by also supporting demobilized soldiers' female family members, such as wives, daughters, sisters etc. After demobilization, there sometimes appears a gap within families when the husband, or father, lose their confidence and hope. This leaves wives and daughters to carry the emotional and economic burden of supporting the family. InterBand offers ideas and holds workshops towards reconstruction of the ex-soldiers lives, putting emphasis on small-scale business in which women can also actively participate. The women are offered opportunities to come to terms with the trauma their male family members experience, but are also taught income-generating skills, such as weaving and dressmaking. Since the impact of war affects not only individuals but also the community and whole society, the measures to respond should also approach both individuals and society.

4. a) Case studies of Women's Involvement in Disarmament Initiatives

Women small arms advocates

Viva Rio in Brazil has launched a successful disarmament campaign - '**No Weapons – it's them or me!**' - led by women whose children have died from portable weapon violence, it aims to sensitise and mobilise women against small arms and to provoke discussion around the impact of small arms on women, children and the communities they live in. The approach is an advocacy campaign that aims to counteract the prevailing view that guns prove 'real' masculinity. The campaign message, aimed to sensitise Brazilian youths, especially in shanty towns, where fire arms have come to symbolise power, masculinity and status, pushes the idea that guns do not make the man. The objective is to increase popular pressure on government for disarmament, expanding the movement to other states in the country and to other South American countries.

The **Liberian Women's Initiative** (LWI) was formed in 1994 in response to the lack of progress and the silence of women's voices in the peace talks. The group, open to all women, regardless of ethnic, social, religious or political background, chose "**disarmament before elections**" as the their primary advocacy hook. They targeted all parties involved in the peace talks and started a programme to assist in the collection of small arms. Although they were never official participants in the peace talks, they proved to be influential consultants during the process and also acted as effective monitors of the process.

Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Kenya's largest women's organisation with over one million members, lobbies at the international and national level calling for tighter regulations to address the proliferation and misuse of small arms that are fuelling cross-border cattle raids and increased violence in urban areas in Kenya.

Founded in 1999, the **Million Mom March** is a national U.S. grassroots, organisation dedicated to preventing gun death and injury and supporting victims and survivors of gun violence. The Million Mom March focuses on education and advocacy through grassroots activity across the country and seeks responsible limits on gun access and use. On Mother's Day 2000, more than

750,000 people marched to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and tens of thousands of others marched in towns across America, to demonstrate their support for common sense gun laws and safe communities. Today they have over 240 chapters in 46 states.

The ***Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*** (WILPF) was a primary founder of the Geneva Action Network on Small Arms (GANSA) and of the New York Action Network on Small Arms (NYANSA). WILPF also work at the community level in the Balkans through advocating for disarmament and promoting the role of women as peace educators.

In March 2000, 1,000 women from all walks of life marched to parliament in South Africa to say “**no to gun violence**” and to call for the implementation of the Firearms Control Act.

Women decision-makers and implementers

The ***Weapons in Exchange for Development*** programme in Gramsch marked the first successful weapons collection programme in Albania where women played a major role, an element that was of key importance to its success. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs (UNDDA) developed the project based on five key elements: symbolism to enhance community-police relations; advocacy to promote the understanding of the relations between weapons and violence and to develop norms against such use; community involvement and reward (including women); voluntary surrender of weapons, and public destruction of weapons collected. The motto of the initiative was “One Less Weapon, One More Life”. Some 6,000 weapons and 137 tons of ammunition were handed over in exchange for community based development and public works projects.

In cooperation with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the programme addressed the specific challenges and concerns that the presence of weapons posed to women. Public awareness events were organised including capacity-building workshops, local conferences and rallies for women's NGOs and other women's community organisations. Meetings were set up in schools, market places, workplaces and in their villages by women's NGOs and women's community groups to raise awareness of the dangers of weapons and ammunition in homes and about the urgent need to hand them in. The women's groups also approached local authorities to lobby as women appeared to have greater accessibility to these actors as they were more receptive to women, than to men.

Due to the success of the programme, to which women's involvement was a significant contributor, these initiatives were replicated in the districts of Elbasan and Diber. By May 2001, 12,000 weapons and 200 tons of ammunition had been voluntarily surrendered and destroyed in the project areas, representing 30 per cent of civilian possession nation-wide (BICC, 2001).

The ***National Women's Movement for the Maintenance of Peace and National Unity*** work on reducing the production and distribution of small arms in Mali. They are involved in the demobilisation of combatants and co-ordinate successful lobbying activities, such as Peace Marches, resulting in the governments recent initiatives to destroy arms.

The ***Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace***, established by women from southern Sudan, have been influential in integrating women's perspectives in governance, emphasising the need for women's leadership and representation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This work includes highlighting, negotiating and challenging the gendered impact of small arms.

The ***Pastoralist, Peace and Development Initiative*** (PPDI), lead by a Mrs Rujia Subow, has successfully fought to raise public and political awareness of the proliferation and misuse of small arms in the Garissa District of Kenya.

Note: *This is a working paper and the International Alert Gender and Peacebuilding Programme are keen to have inputs from readers and those who would like to add best practice and ideas. Please send any comments or inputs you would like to make to njohnston@international-alert.org*