



**“Women Building Peace Through Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration”
Beijing + 10 Review Conference
9 March 2005**

Chair: Jamal Benomar, BCPR

Panelists: Ms. Leymah Gbowee, WIPNET, Liberia
Ms. Rose Kabuye, Ndabaga, Rwanda
Ms. Achol Cyier Rehan, Sudan (SPLM)
Ms. Lubna Abdel Aziz, Sudan (GoS)
Dr. Vanessa Farr, UNIDIR

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The panel was an opportunity to hear the voices of women working in DDR process from four different sectors, namely the perspective of civil society (Liberia), former combatants (Rwanda), national institutions (Sudan) and the international framework (UNIDIR).
- The panel was atypical in that it was a conversation amongst the panelists as much as it was a conversation between the panel and the audience. The Liberian and Rwandese women outline the lessons learned from their experiences and offered guidance and mentorship to the Sudanese women who are at the very genesis of the process, especially through emphasizing the importance of women's organizing and self-reliance in the recovery process.
- Two earlier UNIFEM events on DDR (one organized for the 2004 CSW and one for the Fourth Anniversary of resolution 1325) focused largely on policy and UN doctrine. The event organized for the 2005 event was a rare opportunity for women actually engaging in the processes on the ground to share their priorities with members of the international community.
- UNIFEM's support to the NGOs working on the ground and its efforts in the international DDR debates were given high visibility and mentioned and appreciated by each panelist. UNIFEM's intervention into the DDR planning in Liberia was also mentioned by the WIPNET Representative.
- Several audience respondents brought up the importance of a stronger UNIFEM presence where peace operations are functioning.
- In response to a comment from the Minister of Women's Affairs in Liberia, the UNIDIR representative underscored the importance of increasing UNIFEM's capacity to respond quickly in post-conflict situations and also the importance of UNIFEM continuing to develop its expertise and capacity in the realm of security and peace-building in post-conflict.
- Amongst the more than 100 attendees were P4- to D1 – level representatives from DPKO, OCHA, UNDP/BCPR, DPI, DDA and UNFPA. Member States present included Liberia (Ministerial level), Philippines (Head of CSW delegation), UK, Sweden, Netherlands, Canada and Mexico.

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS:

The chair, **Jamal Benomar** (Special Assistant to the Assistant Administrator and Director, BCPR, UNDP), opened the panel highlighting the deficit on gender and DDR in practice and the need to increase the focus on this critical issue. He highlighted some of the key initiatives that are attempting to address this, including revision of training manuals by DPKO, involvement of UNDP on women and weapons collection, UNIFEM's work with Ndabaga in Rwanda and the development of policy guidelines in [Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration](#), and the development of the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) with a strong focus on gender and DDR.

Leymah Gbowee, a representative of the Women in Peacebuilding Programme (WIPNET) Liberia, spoke on the experiences of her organization in assisting the DDR process – particularly the challenges they faced in not being adequately consulted by the DDR programme. She highlighted the rejection of women's proposals in the early stages to be involved and consulted in the DDR process on the grounds that they were not considered "experts", and instead the programme brought in "experts" from other situations, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, but did not include Liberian women's voices in their planning.

The policy in Liberia on female combatants was linked with that of child combatants, and little mention was made of women's unique needs and contributions in the policy or programme. At the time of the policy development and DDR planning, there was no gender advisor stationed in UNMIL. The women who tried to get involved in the DDR process were told to "go home and take care of the children".

Ms Gbowee highlighted several key factors in the failure of the DDR process in Liberia. The lack of community involvement in the process, particularly of women's involvement, was critical. She also stressed that the planning and coordination of the process were inadequate. The best practices that were imported to Liberia from Sierra Leone were not always relevant to the Liberian context, a fact that was overlooked as a result of the lack of community involvement and consultation.

Finally, there was a lack of clarity on DDR steps and processes, leading to high – unmanageable – expectations on the part of combatants. This led to the violent incidents in the cantonment areas for which the Liberian DDR experience has become well known. As they worked to control the situation, UNMIL turned to women within civil society – WIPNET in particular – to come in and assist in resolving the conflict in the cantonment area. UNMIL agreed to pay for 20 women to come in to assist, and with this, 55 women came, sharing the funds between them. Other women remained in the WIPNET offices to lend support and monitor the progress of the work in the cantonment area. This work led to the beginning of collaboration between UNMIL and WIPNET on information dissemination. Women would travel with members of the UN Mission to communities to contribute to information dissemination. Only two women were allowed to come at a time, and they were given only 5 minutes to speak. The women felt that this was inadequate, and leveraged their own funding to carry out parallel sensitization processes. Ms Gbowee highlighted that within this, one of the greatest challenges was dealing with patriarchal structures in which there was a pervasive belief that women should not be involved in DDR.

Therefore, she raised the question – how do we ensure that women's specific talents are recognized and women are included in DDR processes? She urged also that Liberian experiences be utilized to inform the process in the Sudan – with the collaboration of women to ensure it is relevant for the local context – and finally that communities and involved and listened to throughout DDR.

Rose Kayumba spoke as a female former combatant and a technical adviser to the Ndabaga Association for female ex-combatants in Rwanda. She stressed the importance of an association such as Ndabaga, the only of its kind, which presently counts 443 members from all different fighting forces. She highlighted the varied roles that women played during the conflict beyond the front lines, mobilizing funds for the military, encouraging men to fight, working in

the military administration. She emphasized that there need to be practical measures in place to involve women in DDR, beyond words about their involvement to prove the commitment of actors to this issue.

Ms Kayumba highlighted some key challenges to the involvement of women former combatants and of their association during DDR. The lack of employment opportunities specifically targeted to women involved in supporting former combatants associations was raised as a key challenge – the women working with Ndabaga do so voluntarily, thus constraining the amount they are able to do and placing further burdens on them to cope with providing this supporting and continuing to care for their families and so forth. This was also connected with the lack of funding for support for female former combatants, which limits the level of support the association provide. The final aspect she raised is the lack of adequate training for those involved in the association.

Ms Kayumba went on to make some recommendations for the way forward on involving women former combatants more successfully in DDR. She stressed the need for associations like Ndabaga, and recommended that such associations be set up as soon as possible – i.e. not waiting for the formal DDR process. She also emphasized the importance of associations like this working closely with civil society. Finally she recommended that such associations should work to share experiences and support throughout the African region.

Achol Cyier Rehan is the SPLM DDR Interim Authority's Gender and HIV AIDS Coordinator in southern Sudan. Ms Rehan spoke about the inordinate impact of the conflict on women, highlighting that 60% of the general population in the south are women, 30% of that are widows, and 15% are underage girls. She stressed the high level of trauma of women as a result of the conflict, as well as the high levels of disability, further straining the coping capacity of women in communities, and will place further stress on these women during reintegration activities if they are not well supported. The low levels of development in communities as a result of the war was another factor Ms. Rehan discussed as presenting a challenge to DDR processes, and a contributing factor to insecurity in the country.

She highlighted the need for a DDR process in the country as a key aspect of building peace, and that this process must be a community based one and one that involves women for it to succeed – particularly because of their unique experiences during the war. Managing the expectations of communities around the process was another key aspect she highlighted, and stressed the importance of women's roles in achieving this.

Ms. Rehan also highlighted the importance of the support of women globally in promoting gender aware DDR processes in the Sudan, with particular reference to the important experiences of the other panelists. Finally, she thanked UNIFEM for their facilitation of this panel.

Lubna Abdel Aziz is the GoS DDR Interim Authority's Gender and HIV AIDS Coordinator in northern Sudan. Ms Abdel Aziz added to the remarks made by her southern counterpart Ms. Rehan, and began by stressing the importance of the collaboration between the north and the south in developing a DDR programme for the Sudan. She highlighted other challenges for gender inclusive DDR, including traditions and customs in the country, and the view of women as only civilians and having no real part in "military" matters, though this is not the case.

She highlighted the involvement of women in the DDR planning process in the GoS from the very early stages beginning in October 2004. She discussed the preparatory phase of the DDR process, which is currently ongoing, and that implementation of the DDR programme will not begin until June 2005, highlighting ongoing discussions about numbers for the demobilization process as a delaying issue.

Ms. Abdel Aziz stressed the need for capacity building among key target groups – not only the national authorities on DDR but other key partners for the process, as well as the need for broader community sensitization on gender and DDR. In particular, she discussed the importance of building coalitions with NGOs that will be in the forefront of the implementation of reintegration activities, and the need for these groups to be sensitive to gender specific needs and priorities as they carry out their work.

She also mentioned the work that both she and Ms. Rehan are undertaking on small arms issues and their impact on women, that women have played both positive and negative roles around the acquisition and use of small arms in the Sudan, and the need to reinforce positive actions for women to help control small arms in their communities. Finally she stressed the need to allocate funding for reintegration activities early, and not allocate all funds to disarmament and demobilization alone.

Vanessa Farr of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) began by highlighting the gains that have been achieved over the past six years since gender concerns within DDR processes began to garner international attention. Dr. Farr noted that despite women's invisibility during international planning and implementation of DDR, they are very visible in their own communities as peace-builders, agents of reconciliation, former combatants and care givers. Dr. Farr emphasized the fact that with so little female participation in peacekeeping operations and the relatively low status of gender-related posts, it is difficult to operationalize many of the commitments the UN has made to women in conflict zones. Dr. Farr mentioned the Integrated DDR Standards, which UNIFEM has been a team leader in developing, are a positive step towards codifying the UN's approach to gendering DDR and thereby its accountability. While Dr. Farr noted what an important step the IDDRS is, she also emphasized that the initiative must not fall victim to the tokenism that has characterized so many UN attempts to better include women and gender in planning and implementation.

Discussion:

The chair then opened the floor for questions and comment.

The profile and involvement of UNIFEM was a subject of much discussion, highlighting the importance of an institutional presence devoted to these issues in promoting gender inclusive DDR processes.

Right to peace and assurance of peace as a prerequisite to the realization of human rights – particularly the rights of women.

Need for an African solution to African problems within peace and conflict and particularly the context of DDR.

The need for reintegration processes to be put into place prior to disarmament and demobilization to facilitate a more truly voluntary process – when combatants feel that they have something to return to and a greater stake in a non military community, voluntary disarmament and demobilization will be easier to achieve and will lead to more sustainable processes.

How do we get men involved as agents for change, supporting women's roles in DDR? How do we address the particular challenges of heavily militarized men in these situations, and a generally militarized approach that has traditionally characterized DDR programmes?

Implementation of 1325

Responses:

Panelists then briefly responded to the comments and questions raised.

Ms. Gbowee highlighted the key issue in the DDR process in Liberia of how combatants can return to their communities after the brutality of war and the vital importance of reconciliation processes (especially prior to disarmament) to be put into place to support reintegration, and therefore the sustainability of DDR generally. Regarding the involvement of men, she stated that since women had been visible during the conflict, they therefore had greater credibility among men when discussing DDR issues. In terms of the implementation of SCR 1325, though she acknowledged its importance, she stressed that working with communities is absolutely key.

Ms. Kayumba reiterated this point by stating that no one will tackle your problems except you – though UNIFEM is important, and 1325 is important, you cannot rely on them, you must act yourselves. She also discussed the use of Ngando – camps where both sides remained together as part of the demobilization process in Rwanda, where reconciliation was promoted through dialogue.

Ms. Rehan also addressed the issue of getting men involved in promoting women's involvement in DDR, and said that the way that the institutions were going to be structured in the Sudan context would be able to go a long way to addressing this issue.