

Gender mainstreaming in disarmament
Presentation by
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Introduction

I am very appreciative of the opportunity to present some reflections on gender mainstreaming in the area of disarmament.

The 189 countries attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 endorsed gender mainstreaming as a key strategy for promoting equality between women and men. The United Nations and other international organizations were called upon to implement the strategy in their own work and support the efforts of Member Countries. In 1997 the Economic and Social Council provided concrete guidelines on how the United Nations should work to incorporate gender perspectives in its work programmes (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2). The importance of the gender mainstreaming strategy was reinforced in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly to follow-up the implementation of the Platform for Action (June 2000). Other intergovernmental bodies and events have also provided important mandates for gender mainstreaming in specific areas of work of the United Nations.

Specific mandates on women/gender and disarmament can be found dating back to the establishment of the goals of equality, development and peace in the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985). A major breakthrough on gender mainstreaming in the area of peace and security was achieved with the Security Council resolution 1325 (October 2000) which clearly states that there is an "urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations". The focus on disarmament is not as strong as might be desired, but the references to mine clearance, the calls for greater representation of women in decision-making levels (paras 1 and 2) and for the adoption of a gender perspective in repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction (para 8a), as well as the particular reference to DDR (para 13), are all important for promoting gender mainstreaming in disarmament activities.

Efforts to implement gender mainstreaming in the United Nations

Gender mainstreaming is not an end in itself. It is a strategy to achieve the overall goal of equality between women and men. Gender mainstreaming does, however, also

bring added-value in terms of supporting the achievement of other development goals - not least because gender mainstreaming ensures that the perspectives of all actors, stakeholders and potential change-agents are brought into the picture. As the term implies, gender mainstreaming involves bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention in mainstream work - in research, analysis, data collection, legislative change, development of policies and strategies and the planning, implementation and monitoring of activities on the ground, including training. Gender perspectives should be given attention before goals are set, policies developed, strategies and activities decided upon and resources allocated. Gender analysis should be utilized to ensure that the situation of women and men is understood - their contributions, priorities and needs - and that the potential impact of the planned activities on women, respective men, is assessed.

Bringing greater attention to gender perspectives should mean that there are significant changes in the way "business" is done. It should not be possible to simply "add" something on women/ gender and continue as usual. The ultimate aim of the gender mainstreaming strategy is to secure the substantial changes in goals, policies, strategies and activities required for the achievement of gender equality. Experience has shown, however, that gender mainstreaming involves a slow process of change, particularly where awareness has to be developed and where considerable changes in attitudes and patterns of behaviour are required.

Within the United Nations serious attempts are being made to implement the gender mainstreaming strategy and some substantial progress has been made. Despite these efforts, there is still a long way to go before gender perspectives are routinely incorporated into all areas of development. A number of critical challenges have been identified. One is the lack of understanding of the *basic concepts* of gender, gender equality, and gender mainstreaming, in particular the tendency to equate gender mainstreaming with equal opportunities in the United Nations and to see progress as measured simply by increases in numbers of women. Another is the lack of understanding among many professional staff of *why and how gender would be relevant* to their areas of work. Developing greater understanding of the linkages between gender perspectives and all areas of work of the United Nations is therefore critical. And a third challenge is that - having recognized that there are relevant gender perspectives in the sectors/issues they are dealing with - many staff also lack the *capacity* to incorporate these gender perspectives into their work.

Gender mainstreaming in the area of disarmament in the United Nations

In initial discussions on gender mainstreaming with the Department for Disarmament Affairs it became quickly clear that there was inadequate understanding of the linkages between gender and different areas of the work of the department. It was decided therefore that a series of short briefing notes would be prepared to guide the gender mainstreaming work of the department. Six notes were prepared - on the gender perspectives in relation to small arms, land mines, weapons of mass destruction, DDR and disarmament for development initiatives, as well as one on women's advocacy roles in disarmament.

The briefing notes are four pages long and contain three sections. The first section introduces the linkages between gender perspectives and the issue being discussed; the second section provides some ideas on what might need to be done differently as a result of understanding these linkages; and the third section provides a resource listing with good references, websites, etc., to assist in developing a deeper understanding of how to bring gender perspectives to the centre of attention in relation to the issue under discussion.

The briefing notes were deliberately made short and concise. The four-page model is used because non-specialists with little prior exposure to gender perspectives need to be introduced to the issue with tools which are accessible, manageable and not overwhelming. This type of short briefing note can be an ideal means of reaching busy professionals who are not yet convinced of the relevance of gender equality issues for their work but would be willing to read something short. The notes should be seen as a "starter" or stimulus to try to get professional staff interested in the gender perspectives in their work. They are not intended to provide all the answers on gender perspectives in the different areas of disarmament.

The process of developing the briefing notes was considered as important as the end product. The notes were therefore developed in a collaborative manner. The process began with consultation with managers and inputs were required from staff in terms of providing examples and reviewing drafts. Consultant inputs were involved and NGOs active in different areas of disarmament were also actively involved in reviewing, commenting on and providing examples for the notes. The Mine Action Service in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was involved in the development of the note on landmines. This involvement has led to concrete plans to carry out a study to better understand the gender implications in the activities of the Mine Action Service and to develop strategies to address these.

The Under Secretary-General in the Department for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, launched the briefing notes at a panel in conjunction with the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women earlier this month. The department plans to disseminate them broadly. The notes have already been utilized in the annual fellowship programme with good results. The notes will also be useful in the proposed competence development on gender mainstreaming for the department.

Gender perspectives on small arms

I will not try to describe what is in the briefing notes as I hope you will have the opportunity to read all six of them. I would like, however, to say a few words on the gender perspectives on small arms. While there are a number of gender perspectives which apply to all areas of disarmament, there are some very specific aspects which need to be considered in relation to small arms because of the unique features of the small arms problem. Small arms are, for example, a problem in both conflict zones and non-conflict areas. Both legal and illegal weapons are part of the problem and a particularly

challenging factor is that there are more small arms in the hands of civilians than in the possession of the state.

Integrating gender perspectives in the area of small arms should include analysis of who owns guns and controls supply; who uses guns and for what purposes; and 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. This is an important gender perspective on small arms that has to be addressed. There is need for a better understanding of why men own and use guns more than women in different contexts. Women are, however, 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.

Issues of equitable representation are also critical in discussions of small arms. Men tend to dominate not only as the owners and distributors of small arms and in many lobby groups to retain the possibility to own firearms, but also in bodies working to restrict their availability. Professor Wendy Cukierⁱ has pointed out that the political processes at both national and international levels are dominated by men who bring certain perspectives to the work on small arms. She elaborates further that the way in which expertise is defined clearly shapes the ways in which the issue of small arms is addressed, for example when technical knowledge of the weapons themselves is valued more than knowledge of violence or conflict prevention. Women experts and women's groups and networks need to brought more fully into decision-making fora, in all bodies and at all levels.

It is clear that the presence of small arms contributes to the establishment of cultures of violence which can have important gender implications. The issue of small arms raises some very interesting issues around masculinity - perceptions of manliness and links to gun cultures - which need to be investigated further and addressed. To date, most of the attention to issues of masculinity has been at a rather theoretical level. Clearer elaboration of the policy and practical implications is needed. Bringing attention to gender perspectives on small arms raises issues around the perceptions of sport and recreation, where these are the main legal uses of small arms in non-conflict zones. Gender-related questions need to be raised. Are these areas of sport and recreation dominated by men in most countries? Can this contribute to the explanation of why boys predominate in the acts of gun violence by youth in these countries?

Perceptions of human security certainly come to the fore in working with small arms. There are clear gender perspectives to be taken into account in terms of identifying the different situations in which women or men or girls or boys feel secure or threatened, in both conflict and non-conflict areas. For many women in contexts where guns are freely available, the greatest threat to their security and safety may well be within the home itself, because of the increased risk of domestic violence with fatal outcomes.

Conclusions

Implementing the mainstreaming strategy within the United Nations system itself, and supporting the implementation of the strategy by Member States, is one of the most important means for the United Nations to further the advancement of women and promote gender equality throughout the world. As pointed out earlier, the briefing notes presented here can only start a process of reflection among professional staff in the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Mine Action Service in the Department for Peacekeeping Operations about the gender perspectives in their work. Efforts must be made to deepen the knowledge on gender perspectives in relation to all areas of disarmament and to elaborate the policy and practical implications of this knowledge. More in-depth studies need to be carried out and good practice examples documented. The knowledge and experience of the NGOs and groups and networks in civil society will be critical for moving forward. Bringing gender perspectives to the centre of attention in disarmament affairs is not only important for securing gender equality but is also critical for the achievement of the goals of disarmament.

I recommend the briefing notes to you and hope that you find them interesting and useful. Any feedback would be appreciated by the Department for Disarmament Affairs as well as the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues. I look forward to continued collaboration in the future.

Thank you.

ⁱ Cukier, Wendy (2001) *Gender and small arms*. Paper presented at the panel on Gender Perspectives on Disarmament organized by the Department of Disarmament Affairs and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women at the United Nations in conjunction with the 45th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 14 March 2001.