

Mainstreaming gender in the UN PoA

A gender-sensitive approach is not exclusively about women, but about analysing gender more broadly. This approach factors the special needs and capacities of men and women, and boys and girls, in the formulation of appropriate responses to issues of gender and SALW.

For example, global research has shown young men suffer disproportionately from the direct impacts of SALW use (90% of gun homicide victims are men), while women tend to be victims of the indirect, longer-term consequences.

However, it is inaccurate to identify women solely as victims of violence perpetrated by men with small arms. Such an approach not only neglects the active role that women play globally, regionally and locally in civil society-driven as well as government-led disarmament initiatives as peacebuilders, politicians, community organisers and activists, but also ignores the role that women and girls increasingly play as users of guns, as combatants or traffickers. In this regard, UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 represents an important tool to empower women.

"It is not about feminism, it is about business. Member states give us money to implement projects, and if I implement a project that only affects 50% of the population, that is bad business."

Agnès Marcaillou, Former Chief of the Regional Disarmament Branch, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

Mandates for Gender in the PoA

The UN has endorsed the strategies of gender mainstreaming and gender balance in its pursuit of gender equality through the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, implementation of UN SCR 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security, the Beijing Platform for Action, ECOSOC-agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming and various other policy and practice initiatives. A Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan launched by UNODA in April 2003 also underscores the commitment and importance it attaches to addressing the impact of all categories of weapons, including SALW, on both men and women.

UN SCR 1325 recognises the active role that women can play in peace processes and as advocates, and it binds Member States to ensure women's full participation accordingly. It has also proven to be a decisive mandate for the field of small arms control policy and practice, to include women in decision-making and take gender issues into account.

Guidelines for gender mainstreaming for effective implementation of the PoA (A/CONF.192/2006/RC/CRP.3)



The Gender Guidelines promote understanding of the importance of gender perspectives, as well as to provide practical gender guidelines and concrete examples designed to assist UN policy makers and field personnel in incorporating gender perspectives in all relevant initiatives and operations in the process of implementation of the PoA. The Guidelines:

1. illustrate the relevance of gender considerations for the PoA; and
2. provide guidance to policymakers and practitioners on how to integrate such considerations into their implementation of the PoA.

Gender objectives for combating the illicit trade and trafficking of SALW

Addressing the gender, poverty and development dynamic behind illicit trade and trafficking including sexual exploitation and human trafficking in national, regional and international collaboration with development partners will enhance the effectiveness of PoA implementation by:

- strengthening control of the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects;
- eliminating opportunities for traffickers to exploit the vulnerability of the poor and other marginalised populations;
- addressing the human rights and security and livelihoods needs of women and girls drawn into trafficking networks and offer livelihoods alternatives to men who rely on trafficking to make a living;
- increasing the engagement of social and economic development actors in SALW control.
- improving knowledge of criminal network mechanisms in order to better address the problem of trafficking;
- encouraging and supporting participatory enabling mechanisms and the concomitant capacity to identify and respond to potential conflict situations;
- combating the drivers of illicit trade in SALW.

Integrating gender perspectives is critical to the successful implementation of the PoA in 4 key areas:

1. Illicit trade in SALW, and the linkages between different forms of trafficking;
2. DDR programmes;
3. National and regional focal points: defining specific regional and national approaches; and
4. Civil society integration and public awareness initiatives.

Review Conference of the Programme of Action on small arms: 27 August – 7 September 2012

(This paper is extracted from the Guidelines for gender mainstreaming for the effective implementation of the UN PoA (2010) by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs/Regional Disarmament Branch and IANSA)

The relevance of gendered approaches

Developing effective interventions against those involved in the illicit trade of SALW is impossible in the absence of controls to prevent illicit brokering – controls which facilitate the monitoring of every stage of the SALW transfer/transaction chain. This in turn entails identifying the people carrying out the illegal activities at every stage. Men constitute a large majority of those involved in illicit brokering and trafficking, exploiting the vulnerability of others for profit. However, women are also active participants in the illicit arms trade.

Widows and dependents form a high proportion of the civilian population in conflict environments. This demographic change places a heavy economic burden on women. Threats to security posed by the easy accessibility and proliferation of SALW further undermine the potential for traditional economic activity, and restrict the mobility of civilians. In this context, many women have little choice but to become active players in the illicit SALW trade, which may represent their only means of income-generation.

In some countries, women participate in the smuggling and hiding of illegal arms, whether through coercion, for money or other rewards, or as part of their activities as supporters of a given side in a conflict.

Criminal and terror networks have discovered that women and girls are often not regarded as threats by border guards, and consequently they are often used as couriers to smuggle SALW and ammunition across borders. Such a phenomenon cannot be addressed without a gender-responsive policy.

India's Northeast, especially Meghalaya State, has become a supply zone for the traffickers of women and girls who have been lured by promises of employment or abducted by armed men. India's Northeast is a transit point on the route for trafficking in women and SALW. The traffickers use extortion and intimidate people with guns. They also provide armed security as some people pay for informal armed protection during their illegal migration from one country to another. The international border is extremely porous and transnational criminal networks flourish.

There is evidence that both guns and women are being traded across the frontiers including cases where trafficked Burmese girls were caught carrying guns in the Indian State of Mizoram. Many of the routes where women are trafficked are the same routes where SALW and drugs flow.¹

¹ 'Trafficking women and guns in India's Northeast' in Women at Work: Preventing Gun Violence, IANSA Women's Network Bulletin No. 17, January 2009

At the buyer and user end of the chain, women often support men who are arms bearers because of their own protection needs and sense of vulnerability in an insecure environment where crime arising from poverty is a problem. Women may also feel that their personal security increases through association with men with guns, particularly when the state security infrastructure is incapable of protecting them from criminal or paramilitary violence. The combination of poverty and the prevalence of guns is also linked to violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation. There are also instances where single women living alone or heading households feel safer having a gun in the house. However, most women often view a gun in the home as a risk, rather than a form of protection, an outlook more common among men.²

How to integrate gender into the PoA

International implementation of the PoA has come a long way in terms of building norms and standards to combat and prevent the proliferation of SALW.

The Gender Guidelines advocate a systemic gender-inclusive approach in the implementation of the PoA. An inclusive approach will help in full ownership of all efforts to eradicate illicit small arms and light weapons trade. It is a fact that gender-oriented policy, continuously and rigorously implemented, will maximize all efforts.

To ensure sustainability of progress to date and to make sure that the PoA responds adequately and more meaningfully to peace challenges on the ground, it is critical that the gender implications of SALW form an integral component of national and regional strategy development.

Download the Guidelines for gender mainstreaming for the effective implementation of the UN PoA

<http://www.iansa-women.org/node/454>

The IANSA Women's Network



² Pampell Conaway, C. (2004) 'Small Arms, Light Weapons and Landmines' in Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action, International Alert and Women Waging Peace

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