

## Gender and arms and ammunition management and control in mission areas

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The connection between gender and arms and ammunition management and control is seldom made or appreciated, although studies have shown that men, women, boys, and girls are differently affected by and involved with small arms. In short, the use, misuse, and effects of small arms are heavily gendered and have different impacts on women and men.

There is no doubt that men make up an overwhelming majority of firearm owners, since they dominate:

- professions with easy access to firearms (such as the police, military, and private security companies); and
- firearm-related activities, such as hunting.

Men also constitute a majority of both perpetrators and victims of firearm-related incidents (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008; Pavesi and Widmer, 2016).

Women, in contrast, are more often victims than perpetrators and are more likely to see the presence of a firearm as a threat to their own and their families' security. The uncontrolled proliferation of small arms increases the threat of intimidation and abuse of women and increases the lethality of violence against them. During armed conflict women may also choose or be forced to perform certain roles for combatants or to act as so-called 'wives' (often forced), porters, cooks, spies, or messengers. In this context women are often also subjected to sexual violence. Of course, sexual and gender-based violence is also often committed against men and boys, but this issue has been severely under-reported and under-researched to date.

Women can also play roles that are conducive to small arms proliferation. They may play a role in weapons smuggling, they may arm themselves, and they may serve as combatants in civil conflict. In some situations women are instrumental in encouraging men in their communities to arm themselves; they may also play a key role in encouraging small arms violence, including by supporting and promoting cycles of revenge.

Despite the fact that the poor management of arms and ammunition affects and impacts women, they remain under-represented in small arms control policy-making and interventions. This hinders the articulation of diverse perspectives and affects policy outcomes. Therefore, a gender perspective in arms and ammunition management is crucial. In recognition of this, UNSC Resolution 65/69 (2010) acknowledged

the contributions of women to disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control, and encouraged women's participation in all related decision-making processes.

Although the engagement of women as agents of change in disarmament and arms control processes has been advanced by involving women directly affected by armed violence, as well as initiating women-led policy initiatives, integrating the gender perspective into small arms management needs to become more consistent. Furthermore, peacekeeping missions need to collect and use sex-disaggregated data to recognize and respond to the gender-specific risks that both men and women face with respect to small arms.

UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian responses, and post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. It urges actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all UN peacekeeping and security efforts. It further calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.

This resolution is also relevant to the process of engendering small arms management in peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers have a responsibility to assist in building the capacity of host governments to implement commitments to address the illicit trafficking of small arms through weapons collection and DDR programmes, and by enhancing stockpile-management practices.

A study carried out in 2010 in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) estimated that civilians held at least 300,00 firearms (both licit and illicit) in the areas of Kivu, Ituri, Maniema, and Tanganyika (GRIP/BICC, 2010), all of which have experienced an unprecedented scale of human rights violations and rapes of civilians. It is worth noting that since its inception the UN mission in the DRC has worked with the government to enhance stockpile security, accountability, and the management of arms and ammunition, as well as to implement a national weapons-marking programme. This is significant, because it goes hand in hand with addressing sexual violence and violations committed by government forces and armed groups, the use of children in armed conflict, and the illegal exploitation and smuggling of natural resources.

## Women and peace support operations

Women can contribute to improving the control of arms and ammunition in peace operations in several different ways:

- **Interactions with host populations.** The deployment of female peacekeepers to help develop a relationship with host populations, including to make contact with families—through routine patrols, clearing operations, and security checks—and to engage key leaders can provide an entry point into communities. Female peacekeepers may have easier access to women in local communities than their male counterparts, for example, especially in cultures where the two sexes are not allowed to mix.
- **Awareness raising.** Through their interactions with local women, female peacekeepers can raise awareness on issues related to small arms, safety, and peace processes. They are also well placed to educate local women on the role they can play in small arms management and control measures. Given that local women have a direct stake in interventions that reduce the prevalence of firearms, they can be encouraged to play this important role in their communities.
- **Intelligence gathering.** Trust and credibility are priceless in information-gathering activities. When women are included in tactical security and policing operations there is a greater opportunity to mitigate violence and build trust with affected populations. Women’s groups can be a great source of information for the intelligence- and information-gathering branches of peacekeeping operations, including in terms of preventing the diversion of materiel and attacks on peacekeepers and understanding how to safely engage in information collection. Generally speaking, intelligence gathering is more successful where there is consistent access to populations; female teams have been successful in gaining such contact in camps for internally displaced persons in Darfur and South Sudan. They interact daily with women and children and quickly create bonds that allow the close observation of unfolding events.
- **Reintegration of ex-combatants.** Female peacekeepers play a crucial role in providing support to disarmament programmes, including the disarmament of female ex-combatants as part of DDR programmes. Similarly, women in host populations—whom female peacekeepers can assist—play essential roles in determining the success or failure of reintegration programmes, because they are more often than not the recipients of (male and female) returnees and can be helped to facilitate training, education (including on small arms), and family support for them.

If deployed strategically, female peacekeepers can, therefore, be an extremely useful resource in peace operations generally, and more specifically in programmes related to small arms and ammunition management.

## References

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