Disarmament, development and the Programme of Action: experiences and challenges on the ground

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The international community has become increasingly aware of links between disarmament and development. Since the early 1990s, the "security-first" concept has shown the international community that development cannot happen without building security in affected societies.[1] More recently, the United Nations Secretary-General has stated that "the accumulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons continues to be a serious threat to peace, stability and sustainable development".[2] At the Second Biennial Meeting of States (BMS) to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (hereafter the Programme of Action), the assistance community provided empirical evidence of the direct and indirect implications of small arms proliferation for human development.[3] Their detailed accounts showed how small arms hamper the international community's efforts toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[4]

Successful disarmament is a factor of development, but development is also key to successful disarmament. Having recognized this direct link to development, the international community has supported weapon collection projects that are tied to community-based development schemes.[5] The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) conducted studies of these increasingly popular schemes of weapons in exchange for development in three post-crisis societies, Albania, Cambodia and Mali, between 2002 and 2004. These assessments of past and ongoing weapon collection programmes illustrate how the development component contributes to achieving sustainable disarmament at the community level.

At the 2005 BMS, Member States' reports tended to concentrate on national governments' efforts on implementing technical aspects of the Programme of Action, such as marking, tracing and storage. But it is also useful to examine disarmament and development efforts, and how they are reinforcing one another to bring more sustainable human development. This article uses material from the UNIDIR assessments to supplement these technical reports with detailed accounts demonstrating the active interplay between development and disarmament at the community level, and the impacts of disarmament programmes on human development in affected societies.

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Development issues in the Programme of Action

The interdependence between development and disarmament has been well recognized at the policy level. The Programme of Action draws on an array of global, regional and national strategies to curb the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and focuses on the technical aspects such as marking, tracing, stockpile management, collection and destruction of weapons; but it also presents another dimension, that of achieving peace and human development by addressing weapons proliferation. Paragraph 2, in the preamble, expresses states' concern about "the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world, which have a wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences and pose a serious threat to peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable development at the individual, local, national, regional and international levels"; paragraph 3 expresses concern about "the implications that poverty and underdevelopment may have for the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects" and in section III, paragraph 17, states are encouraged to make "greater efforts to address problems related to human and sustainable development, taking into account existing and future social and development activities".

Although the Programme of Action's references to development issues are limited, development and humanitarian agencies are increasingly addressing the human development dimension of the small arms issue. Since the Small Arms Conference of 2001, the international community has accepted the norm that successful disarmament is a precondition for development. Consequently, assistance agencies and the donor community have engaged in bringing the two issues together. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee has approved the use of official development assistance for the control and prevention of, and reduction in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.[6] Awareness of the link between disarmament and development has grown since the first BMS in 2003. At the 2005 BMS, the UN Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA)[7] stated that small arms are a development issue and emphasized the crucial role of the development community.[8] Individual agencies also presented empirical examples of their engagement in addressing the development needs of affected communities through disarmament-related activities, including community policing in refugee camps and reintegration support for ex-combatants and their dependants.[9] The link between disarmament and development has thus not only been recognized at policy level, it has translated into a wide array of international development and humanitarian activities.

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Development experience on the ground

The link between disarmament and development is even more apparent among affected local communities. Indeed, for many it is obvious: development is security. The proliferation of weapons in society instils fear, thus cutting off access, in particular that of women and girls, to commercial trades and social welfare facilities such as schools and hospitals; abandoned ammunition contaminates the environment; all the impacts of small arms and light weapons—direct and indirect—impede affected states from attaining the MDGs. Having survived conflict, and enduring post-crisis conditions, the local population feels an urgent need to reduce weapons circulating in society in order to bring human development to their communities.[10] The people who participated in the UNIDIR assessments in Albania, Cambodia and Mali agreed that development itself means security for them, because they consider poverty a major cause of violence and, for some people, a driving factor in taking up weapons.[11]

The testimonials of participants in the countries studied also show that they recognize that the ultimate goal of weapon collection is peace-building, rather than a straightforward reduction in the number of weapons circulating.[12] Some critics suggest that local communities hand over weapons purely in return for incentives—the development projects. However, in most of the community-based voluntary weapon collection schemes studied, the initial and major motivation was to bring peace and security to the community.[13] Expectations of and prospects for a better future for the local people motivated the surrender and collection of weapons. Development projects are regarded by the local people as a way of preventing men from taking up their guns again, particularly as many believe that men take up arms in part because of a lack of job opportunities. This shows that development, especially its intangible, psychological aspect, is not only a result of successful disarmament, but, more importantly, it is crucial to the implementation of successful disarmament in post-crisis society.

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The significant role of development raises the question of whether post-crisis disarmament schemes do any good for local development on the ground. The answer is mixed. The overall reaction of interviewees to the development component of weapon collection is positive. First, they regard development projects provided in exchange for collection weapons as a catalyst for further investment and development. While they are aware that the provision of one, sole development project does not automatically improve livelihoods in their community, they perceive that this initial development project brought by the weapon collection scheme triggered other development agencies to bring further assistance and inspired the business sector to invest in their community.

Second, the development project can play a crucial role in transferring technical knowledge to local community members, mostly adult men, through labour (such as road and well construction). When comparing development projects that contracted external construction companies and those that contracted local communities for labour, the latter projects were more highly evaluated by locals, because those projects provided male community members with skills and knowledge that were useful for reconstructing the infrastructure of their community.[14]

The international community has often been critical of weapons in exchange for development schemes, because of their relatively high project budget and the lack of appropriate indicators to measure the cost-effectiveness of the projects.[15] However, it is just these intangible contributions that the local people acknowledge as the positive impacts of development projects, rather than quantitative results such as the number of weapons collected.

Participation as a key to effective weapon collection

Involving people is key to successfully moving on to peace- and confidence-building in post-crisis reconstruction. The UNIDIR assessments of weapon collection in exchange for development projects found the level of local people's satisfaction with project results to be in direct proportion to the degree of their participation. Naturally, people tend to evaluate positively the projects in which they took part as decision-maker, weapon collector or participant at public weapon destruction events. Yet the reason for this positive assessment is not simply the high degree of local participation. For community members, local participation has three practical functions: accurate needs assessment, verification of the weapon collection process and the assurance of transparency.

For many development projects, needs assessments are carried out in a short period of time without sufficient community consultation, due to financial and time constraints (see the following

section). As a result, projects often overlook the needs of social minorities such as women. In contrast, projects preceded by regular community meetings received more positive evaluation by community members. In a rural village in Cambodia, for example, community leaders, village chiefs and programme managers organized several community meetings and consulted community members when identifying the most vital development investments.[16] Even more important, after having decided to build water wells, they again went through consultation on the location of the wells. Location was significant: if the water wells were not distributed evenly over the community, they could provoke disputes among community members. Thorough consultation prevented potential conflict. This prevention of conflict is why local people appreciate participation in the early stage of weapon collection projects.

Local participation is equally crucial at the collection, storage, transfer and destruction phases because of its verification function. In societies in crisis, distrust of the state security sector often prevails. Local people prefer to store collected weapons in the vicinity of the community, such as in a community leader's storehouse, than in a remote police or military warehouse. Wary of a leak of collected weapons by criminals and state security officers, the local people prefer to keep records of the number of weapons with their chief. By doing so, they can double-check the number of weapons collected and the number transferred to a destruction site or the next storage site. Finally, the community prefers that public destruction events take place in their own community. The international community tends to attribute the strong support of local people for public destruction events to the symbolic meaning of such events. But in fact, for local people, witnessing the actual destruction of the weapons collected, ensuring that they are not leaked and will not be re-used by criminals and state security agencies, is just as important as the event's symbolism. Local participation is not simply to demonstrate people-centred disarmament. Their participation in post-crisis disarmament ensures and demonstrates the transparency of the disarmament process.

Challenges for the practice of disarmament and development

Disarmament and development, not disarmament or development

The success of these projects does not mean to say that disarmament and development projects do not face challenges on the ground. On the contrary, the disarmament and development communities both need to overcome several obstacles at the technical and policy levels. Managers of weapons for development programmes are well aware that longer-term commitment is necessary for success. Yet the donors' budgeting for weapon collection is often less flexible than it is for development assistance: projects are usually given 6–12 months for completion. This time schedule is unrealistic if programmes are to secure the confidence of the local population, generate participation, and accurately assess local needs and identify appropriate development projects. Under such circumstances, local authorities are forced to make decisions in haste without consulting community members. The lack of flexibility and time thus leads to the exclusion of local community members and opportunities are missed that would benefit them.

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Another frustration shared by disarmament programme managers is that although health and development agencies have been increasingly involved in small arms issues at the international policy level, this has not reached the country level. On the ground, development assistance agencies tend still not to be aware that disarmament is a development issue. As a result, coordination between

disarmament and development and health actors can be poor. There is a sense of competition rather than cooperation—of "disarmament or development", rather than "disarmament and development".

Disarmament activities discouraging women's empowerment

UNIDIR's empirical assessments suggest that gender issues are crucial, yet grossly neglected by the disarmament community. In recent years, there has been a growing literature on gender analysis of post-crisis disarmament, such as weapon collection and disarmament, and demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and their dependants[17]—although most of the literature is written by gender scholars, and it is hardly the case that gender issues have become mainstream in the disarmament community.[18] Needless to say, opportunities in disarmament implementation abound to treat this issue in a serious and practical way, rather than as a nod to political correctness. The biggest challenge is the exclusion of women from the weapon collection project process. Although gender issues involve not only women, the effects of the project process on women merit particular attention.

Studies on post-conflict societies have widely reported women's active roles in conflict resolution and peace-building.[19] The UNIDIR assessments in Albania, Cambodia and Mali found that women contribute hugely to the success of weapon collection.[20] For instance, in all three cases, it was women and mothers at home who became the major sensitization activists, persuading community members to give up their weapons long before the official weapon collection scheme was in place. This sensitization activity provided women with opportunities to present their ability to negotiate with male family members, neighbours and local authorities. Also, many women gained self-confidence as they organized community meetings on the danger of keeping weapons in the household (in Mali), coordinated with the local police on community policing (in Albania) and privately encouraged their male family members to go into the forest and collect hidden weapons (in Cambodia). By leading the initial stage of the disarmament process, women were empowered and were recognized as active in society by other social groups in their communities, especially young people.

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Once official weapon collection projects started, however, women were marginalized. First, women were barely involved in project design or planning of the weapon collection scheme. Although most assistance agencies do make efforts to involve community members, including women, by organizing community meetings, the actual turnout at meetings is mostly men, in particular, community leader figures. Moreover, there is sometimes a complete lack of gender awareness among project implementers. In a rural community of Cambodia, an international practitioner concluded that women in the community were not interested in disarmament because they did not participate in the community meetings organized by his agency.[21] Yet this observation overlooks the constraints on women in attending these meetings: their workload at home, and the lack of means and funds to travel to the meetings.

Second, even when the participation of women was high, actual decisions were often made according to the preferences of community leaders (all of them male in all the communities visited by UNIDIR). There is a gap between what men and women prioritize in terms of development projects. Men prefer the provision of cattle, seeds and other products that generate income. In contrast, women prefer provision of social service facilities, for example a health care centre. The incentive projects ultimately given to communities were most often those preferred by men. So although women felt that their community leaders represented their voices, the final decision made by the leaders often did not reflect women's interests.[22] In a post-crisis society, everything is a priority. Yet on this list of priorities, the males' demand often comes top.

Third, women's security concerns were not given priority. The security concerns of men and women differ, especially at the domestic level. Women and girls continue to feel insecure even after a large number of weapons have been collected. For them, reducing the number of weapons in circulation does not automatically lead to a decrease in insecurity, as until there is a law enforcement body capable of tackling domestic and sexually based violence they can remain threatened. Yet the building of law enforcement bodies (i.e. security sector reform) usually comes after weapon collection projects. One of the programme managers interviewed by UNIDIR admitted that the security needs of women are not best addressed by weapon collection schemes, but also pointed out that women's needs are not specifically included in programme mandates, and there is no provision in terms of resources.[23] This is an understandable practical constraint for the assistance community. Yet, in the meantime, women remain under threat until law enforcement bodies are reformed, which takes a painfully long time. As feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe points out, the attitude to women's security concerns tends to be one of "not now, later".[24] Ironically, the effort to bring about development has resulted in discouraging the empowerment of women, working *against* the Millennium Development Goal to "promote gender equality and empower women".

Conclusions

It is clear that disarmament and development are interconnected on the ground in at least three post-crisis countries, i.e. Albania, Cambodia and Mali. The relationship between disarmament programmes and development activities is a dynamic one, and ideally mutually beneficial. For instance, action on small arms contributes to the achievement of the MDGs. Community-based weapons for development projects trigger further development in a community. The field experience discussed in this article demonstrates concrete examples of the link between disarmament and development and illustrates the importance of strengthening this link to bring sustainable human development to post-crisis societies.

Policy makers from the disarmament and development communities have become increasingly aware of the link between the two issues. However, field experience also shows that linking disarmament and development policies does not automatically bring development on the ground. The link is not straightforward, and involves many nuances (for example, the gender aspects of security), which practitioners need to be aware of in order to reinforce disarmament and development efforts. While accepted at the policy level, this nuance is what the disarmament community is struggling to attune to on the ground. The challenges facing disarmament policy makers and practitioners are not new for those in the development community: it is familiar with problems like a lack of interagency coordination at the country level, and weak gender sensitivity in project implementation. In this sense, the disarmament community has many lessons to learn from the community of development.

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Where do we go from here? How can the 2006 Review Conference of the Programme of Action help practitioners? Given the interconnection between the disarmament and development issues, as well as the growing awareness of this linkage at the international policy level, what seems necessary for the international community is not norm-setting, but rather information gathering. A bottom-up approach is necessary to change people's minds on weapons, and to achieve sustainable human development. Poor and violence-prone communities already know the ingredients for peace and development in their own society—the international community does not have to reinvent the wheel. By learning from what communities and aid agencies have been doing in the field, at the local level, donors and governments can supplement and improve existing practice.

Notes

1. R. Poulton, and I. ag Youssouf, 1998, *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*, Geneva, UNIDIR.
2. United Nations Secretary-General, 2005, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Security, Development and Human Rights for All: Report of the Secretary-General*, New York, United Nations, UN document A/59/2005, paragraph 120, at <www.un.org/largerfreedom>.
3. Peter Batchelor, Statement on Development Cooperation and Implementation, and Hazel de Wet, Statement on the Human Impact of SALW, to the Second Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, New York, 12 July 2005, at <www.un.org/events/smallarms2005/statements-reg-intlorgs.html>.
4. The MDGs are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development.
5. Different actors use different terms for such programmes involving weapon collection and the provision of development projects, such as “weapons for development”, “weapons in exchange for development”, and “weapons for peace”. For the purposes of this article, these terms are interchangeable.
6. OECD, 2005, *Conflict Prevention and Peace Building: What Counts As ODA?* 3 March, at <www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/32/34535173.pdf>.
7. CASA was established in 1998 and includes the following United Nations departments and agencies: DDA, OCHA, DESA, DPA, DPKO, DPI, UNICEF, UNDP, OSRSG-CAAC, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNIDIR, UNODC, UNIFEM, WHO, UNEP.
8. Peter Batchelor, op. cit.
9. Hazel De Wet, op. cit.
10. G. Mugumya, 2004, *Exchanging Weapons for Development in Mali: Weapon Collection Programmes Assessed by Local People*, Geneva, UNIDIR; G. Mugumya, 2005(a), *Exchanging Weapons for Development in Cambodia: An Assessment of Different Weapon Collection Strategies by Local People*, Geneva, UNIDIR; G. Mugumya, 2005(b), *From Exchanging Weapons for Development to Security Sector Reform in Albania: Gaps and Grey Areas in Weapon Collection Programmes Assessed by Local People*, Geneva, UNIDIR.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. It should be noted that women and young men do not have such opportunities to learn skills and knowledge from development projects.
15. For more detailed discussion on the indicators to measure weapon collection programmes, see S. Koyama, 2006, *Comparative Analysis of Evaluation Methodologies in Weapon Collection Programmes*, Geneva, UNIDIR.
16. G. Mugumya, 2005(a), op. cit.
17. V. Farr et al, 2002, *Gender Perspectives on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional and International Concerns*, Brief 24, Bonn International Conversion Center, at <www.bicc.de/publications/briefs/brief24/content.html>; E. Rehn and E. Johnson Sirleaf, 2002, *Women, War, and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building*, UNIFEM, October, at <www.unifem.undp.org/resources/assessment/index.html>; V. Farr and A. Schnabel (eds), forthcoming, *Gender Perspectives on Small Arms and Light Weapons;* and “Women, men, peace and security”, *Disarmament Forum,* no. 4, 2003.
18. Security Council resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000, UN document S/RES/1325, at <www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf> and the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan, at <disarmament.un.org/gender.htm>. It should be noted, however, that these documents mainly concern mainstreaming “women”, rather than the issue of “gender”.
19. For example, see C. Moser and F. Clark (eds), 2001, *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence,* London, Zed Books; United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security*, UN document S/2002/1154, 16 October 2002.
20. For more detailed accounts on women's roles in weapon collection, see S. Koyama, 2005, “The relevance of women's role in micro disarmament: the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) case study in Mali”, in M. Vlachovà and L. Biason (eds), *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women—Facts, Figures and Analysis*, Geneva, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF); S. Koyama, forthcoming, “Just a matter of practicality: women's relevance in weapons collection programmes” in V. Farr and A. Schnabel (eds), op. cit.
21. Interviews, Cambodia, April 2004.

22. G. Mugumya, 2004, 2005(a), 2005(b), op. cit.
23. Interviews, Albania, October 2003.
24. C. Enloe, 2001, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, pp. 62–64.