

The Gender Action Plan of the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs

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All departments of the United Nations have been mandated to make every effort to integrate gender perspectives into all of their policies and programmes. In carrying out these mandates, the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) has a double challenge, which is really a single goal: facilitating progress on disarmament through the incorporation of a gender perspective in all of its substantive tasks. This article discusses one of the measures the department has undertaken to meet this challenge.

With its re-establishment as a department in 1998, DDA began the process of incorporating a gender perspective in all of its substantive areas of work. The first steps to that end were taken when the department invited the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women and her colleagues to brief the DDA staff on all aspects of the question and, in particular, to explain the meaning of the term 'gender mainstreaming' within the context of disarmament.

The collaboration between the Office of the Special Adviser and DDA led to the preparation and publication of *Gender Perspectives on Disarmament: Briefing Notes* in 2001.¹ These were six short, thematic briefing papers, covering such topics as gender perspectives on weapons of mass destruction, small arms, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). The *Briefing Notes* described the important connections between gender and disarmament in an accessible way and presented a non-conventional perspective on the complex and politically sensitive fields of security, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. While the disarmament issues remained the same, looking at their gender dimensions cast them in a new light and, the department felt, could help to suggest effective and sustainable solutions to peace and security issues.

The DDA Gender Action Plan (hereafter Action Plan) is an outgrowth of the *Briefing Notes* and other DDA efforts to integrate gender perspectives in the global process of disarmament, as well as to integrate disarmament into contemporary efforts on behalf of gender equality. The Action Plan owes its existence to an extensive corpus of mandates, legislative and non-legislative, including internal United Nations policies. These include the 1999 DDA Vision Statement² that affirmed DDA's commitment to advance equal opportunities for men and women while promoting gender perspectives on disarmament, the recommendation of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services³ that the department should consider developing a forward-oriented plan of action on gender and disarmament, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security,⁴ and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.⁵

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The Gender Action Plan

The Action Plan is a concrete working tool, covering the period of April 2003 to December 2005, describing both DDA's vision concerning gender mainstreaming in the work of the department, as well as real steps to achieve that vision. Over a four-month period, two consultants facilitated the drafting of the plan,⁶ undertaking extensive consultations with DDA staff members to generate a common understanding of the plan's purpose and goals. As part of the competency development programme for DDA, the United Nations Office for Human Resources Management bore the cost of producing the Action Plan in order to promote an active and visible policy on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the work of the department.

Throughout the process of creating this unique strategy, the consultants explored with DDA staff how and why gender perspectives were relevant to their work. This resulted in the identification of practical steps to be taken relating both to the substantive areas of work (such as small arms or weapons

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of mass destruction) and to common methods of work (such as organizing panels or public outreach activities). The Action Plan sets out the next phase in DDA's activities to explore the overlap, relevance and potential synergy between efforts to promote disarmament and gender equality. The Gender Action

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While DDA readily acknowledges that much remains to be learned and numerous issues are yet unexplored, it hopes that this plan establishes a solid basis for future work by fostering a deeper understanding of the substantive issues and the creation and identification of additional practical opportunities for gender mainstreaming in disarmament.

Overview of the plan

Before tackling the practical steps the department should take in relation to gender mainstreaming, the consultants addressed how the inclusion of a gender perspective would improve the disarmament process. In their view, to understand better how the mainstreaming of gender perspectives could further disarmament goals, it was necessary to examine the social and political context in which disarmament is relevant, primarily in armed conflict (including the pre- and post-conflict phases) as well as in policy and decision-making about weapons development, production, deployment, use, limitation and elimination.

Gender analysis begins with people, their experiences and their lives, rather than with notions of state security. Perceptions of security and decisions about weapons—whether to develop, acquire, keep, turn in or destroy them—do not take place in a vacuum but in a multi-dimensional context with political, economic, social and human components.

Unsurprisingly, the decisions of men and women about weapons have gender dimensions. Better appreciation of how gender plays into notions of security and perceptions of weapons can help clarify the challenges to and opportunities for disarmament. Thus understanding the relationships between gender and security, and between gender and weapons, can assist in furthering the goals of disarmament.

The Action Plan begins with a presentation of its mandates, definitions of gender mainstreaming and gender balance for the purposes of the plan, and suggestions concerning mechanisms for reporting on and monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan.⁷

While the Action Plan does not set out authoritative definitions, the concepts of 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender balance' are discussed for clarification purposes. Although there are links between these two concepts, the plan's focus is on gender mainstreaming in the substantive areas of work of the department and not on gender balance, which would refer to the numbers of women and men in various positions throughout the department and the extent to which they have equal opportunities.

The overall goal of the Action Plan is to facilitate progress on disarmament. DDA could strengthen disarmament dialogue and action through the incorporation of a gender perspective in its day-to-day work. A primary assumption behind the plan is that disarmament—both generally and in specific initiatives—can be supported and reinforced through the integration of gender insights into disarmament debates, decision-making and actions, and through more equitable participation by women in decision-making. Thus a crucial element of DDA's work in this area would be to identify potential synergies and opportunities to support simultaneously effective disarmament and greater gender equality.

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The challenge, therefore, is to relate the broad objectives of gender mainstreaming to the specific work of DDA. To do so, the Action Plan identifies four sub-goals:

- Explore the linkages between the promotion of greater gender equality and disarmament;
- Strengthen DDA's internal capacity to ensure the ongoing incorporation of gender perspectives in its work;
- Undertake outreach and advocacy on the importance of including gender perspectives in disarmament discussions; and
- Support equitable participation in disarmament discussions, with an emphasis on bringing in new constituencies and involving gender equality advocates in disarmament discussions.

In order to provide a starting point for gender mainstreaming for each branch of DDA and its three regional centres, the consultants conducted two rounds of extensive discussions and interviews with all staff. This resulted in a branch-by-branch list of initiatives, divided into three categories:

- the *work to date* of each branch on gender equality issues;
- *themes* that each branch is currently working on where a gender perspective is particularly relevant; and
- *specific entry points or activities* that the branches and regional centres have identified as feasible and possible.

The resulting lists are the concrete gender mainstreaming activities the branches and regional centres have agreed to undertake. It is not a list of potential initiatives, but rather an outline of agreed commitments—it includes only activities that a branch or centre has identified as feasible, given its resources and work plan for the three years covered by the Action Plan. The number of entry points varies from branch to branch given their different mandates and potential to work with gender perspectives.

The branches' commitments and activities are clustered under the sub-goals described above. Examples of activities that can support the achievement of each are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of activities to support gender mainstreaming sub-goals

Overall goal	Facilitate progress on disarmament (through the incorporation of gender perspectives)
Sub-goals	Examples of activities that will support the achievement of the sub-goals
Explore the linkages between the promotion of greater gender equality and disarmament	Hold panels with an explicit focus on gender dimensions of weapons of mass destruction, small arms, etc. Engage in dialogue with researchers and gender equality advocates who are working on disarmament issues. Support discussion and research of gender–disarmament linkages.
Strengthen DDA's internal capacity to ensure the ongoing incorporation of gender perspectives in its work	Ensure regular reporting on progress, obstacles and lessons learned during the implementation of the Action Plan. Use and adapt the checklists provided in Chapter 4. Encourage staff attendance at panels and other discussions that offer opportunities to explore gender–disarmament linkages.
Undertake outreach and advocacy on the importance of including gender perspectives in disarmament discussions	Incorporate gender perspectives in regular briefings to Member States. Use DDA's web site to highlight gender–disarmament linkages and research on gender perspectives in disarmament. Raise gender perspectives in other UN disarmament forums (such as CASA).
Support equitable participation in disarmament discussions (with an emphasis on bringing in new constituencies and involving gender equality advocates in disarmament discussions)	Bring disarmament issues to gender equality advocates. Develop rosters of female experts. Provide media briefings to the 'women's press' on disarmament topics. Over the longer term, strengthen the capacity of women to participate in disarmament discussions.

The final section of the Action Plan presents checklists for the department's use as reminders of gender mainstreaming opportunities and rationales. The one-page checklists are organized by activity and would be used and possibly modified by each branch in its ongoing work. The lists were designed to prompt thinking on gender issues as the staff performs various tasks, such as organizing a panel (for example, is the panel a venue to distribute DDA publications on gender and disarmament?), conducting a fact-finding mission (does the mission's schedule include meetings with representatives of women's organizations?), hiring consultants (is there an overall gender balance among the consultants hired by the branch?), formulation of project proposals (has thought been given to how and why gender perspectives might be relevant to the intended results of the project?), etc. They are not exhaustive lists of issues to consider, rather they are meant to be used as tools to raise possibilities and generate ideas, thereby helping DDA staff to consider a full range of issues and actions that can support the mainstreaming of gender perspectives.

While the emphasis of the Action Plan is on pragmatic steps and concrete activities, the consultants noted that these would be more meaningful if those who carried them out had an appreciation of the underlying theory and logic. Two annexes were added to address this need. The first explores some of the crosscutting themes within gender and disarmament, in an attempt to identify how attention to gender roles and perspectives can further the goals of disarmament. The second annex assists in the process of identifying where, how and why gender perspectives are relevant in the current mandate and work of the department by highlighting several issues of convergence between disarmament and

gender perspectives. Similar to the 2001 *Briefing Notes*, it identifies key gender dimensions in areas of work in which the department is engaged, such as weapons of mass destruction, DDR, small arms and light weapons, landmines, outreach to civil society, disarmament and development, and disarmament education.

Conclusion

Vision without action achieves nothing.
Action without vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world.
Nelson Mandela

In launching the Action Plan at a panel discussion in April 2003 entitled 'Making Disarmament More Effective: Men and Women Working Together', then Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs Jayantha Dhanapala stressed that the Action Plan was 'intended to strengthen, consolidate, inform and guide the department's work on disarmament into the future.' The emphasis, he said, would be on the word 'action'. DDA staff members bear the responsibility for implementation of the Action Plan and for ensuring that they use it as a tool to assist them in incorporating a gender perspective in their daily activities.

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Furthermore, the implementation of the Action Plan is incorporated in individual staff members' annual work plans reviewed by supervisors and managers as part of the UN's Performance Appraisal System, as well as in the annual work plans of every branch and regional centre. Each branch and centre was also requested to report on gender mainstreaming issues in their monthly activity reports.

In addition, DDA is currently conducting an internal survey to evaluate both the substance of the action plan and the participatory process used to develop it. In 2004, DDA will carry out an overall assessment of the Action Plan with a view to revising and improving the next version of the plan, due in 2006. The assessment will study the results achieved, activities carried out, lessons learned, obstacles and potential future strategies.

The department released a public version containing excerpts from the Action Plan,⁸ not only because of the interest that was generated by the preparation of such a plan—the first of its kind in the United Nations Secretariat—but also because it welcomed the opportunity to share some of DDA's gender strategies and ideas, to provide material for reflection in the ongoing challenge to identify ways and means of working simultaneously for disarmament and gender equality. Although the Action Plan's primary audience is the DDA staff, the department hopes that the experience of creating such a plan and the lessons learned during its implementation will benefit other United Nations departments and agencies as they undertake their own gender mainstreaming activities.

Notes

1. Available on the page < <http://disarmament.un.org/gender.htm> > .
2. See < <http://disarmament.un.org/dda-vision.htm> > .

3. Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, *Inspection of programme management and administrative practices in the Department for Disarmament Affairs*, United Nations document A/56/817 of 12 February 2002, p. 17.
4. Security Council resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000, available at < http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf > .
5. See the complete text of the Platform for Action at < <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/e5dplw.htm#three> > .
6. The two consultants facilitating the drafting of the Action Plan were Merav Datan and Beth Woroniuk.
7. The plan contains four chapters and two annexes. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the underlying themes relating to gender and disarmament. Chapter 2 introduces and elaborates on the goals and sub-goals of the Action Plan. Chapter 3 provides the elements of the plan for each of the department's branches, including work to date, areas of work where a gender perspective is particularly relevant, and concrete entry points organized by the Action Plan's sub-goals. Chapter 4 presents checklists for the department's use as ongoing reminders of gender mainstreaming opportunities and rationales. Annex I explores gender and disarmament themes in greater depth, and Annex II looks at some of the concrete linkages between disarmament and gender.
8. See < <http://disarmament.un.org/gender/gmap.pdf> > .