

Challenge Paper

Disarmament, Development, Gender, and Violence Prevention



Background

More than half a million people are killed violently each year.¹ In 2016, roughly 210,000 of those subject to lethal violence were killed by a firearm.² This means that, on average, “every 15 minutes, the use of a firearm results in a violent death somewhere around the world.”³

In addition to the human lives lost, violence associated with small arms and light weapons (SALW) has a significant negative impact on interpersonal relations, community cohesion, and development. Through the articulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community acknowledged that understanding violence through mortality rates alone is insufficient. Beyond violent death lies a “wide spectrum of negative behavioral, cognitive, mental health, sexual and reproductive health problems, chronic diseases and social effects that arise from exposure to violence.”⁴ This spectrum varies in its manifestations across particular groups, including between men and women.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.1 makes a commitment to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.” That violence is an impediment to all aspects of development is increasingly recognized. The Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament states that, “Beyond addressing illicit arms flows, there remains a vast potential to operationally link the implementation of disarmament objectives with many other Sustainable Development Goals, in order to bring the historical relationship between disarmament and development back to the forefront of international consciousness.”⁵

However, although progress has been made in some parts of the world on reducing violence, indications are that we are not on track to achieve the ambition of significantly decreasing all forms of violence. According to data released by the Small Arms Survey, 2017 had the highest absolute number of violent deaths in the 2004-2017 period, and current trends project further increases in annual violent deaths in the coming years if no new action is taken to enhance prevention.⁶

To reset global trends on a trajectory of decreasing violent death rates, greater action is needed across the variety of factors that facilitate violence, including weapons control. Bringing together stakeholders who have hitherto worked in isolation and involving new actors in discussions will be crucial to developing a more holistic approach to violence prevention – one which draws on multiple perspectives on and experiences of violence to draw up a comprehensive response that meets the needs of all those affected. As we argue in this challenge paper, enhancing the role of women in such discussions is particularly important.

The paper highlights the centrality of disarmament within the broader context of violence prevention, and challenges the international community to advance the role of women in pursuing more effective prevention of violence via arms control. It also proposes next steps to help advance cooperation and thinking.*

* The paper focuses on small arms and light weapons, and in particular on the control of firearms at a micro level. It does not address the control of weapons such as landmines, grenade launchers, and other light weapons, which are not included in firearms policies and statistics.

SALW, Gender, and Development

Worldwide, SALW play a major role in deaths and injuries caused by violence. In 2016, 38 percent of lethal incidents involved a firearm.⁷ In the countries with the highest homicide rates, which are primarily concentrated in Latin America and the Caribbean, the level of SALW usage is higher than in countries with lower homicide rates. According to the Small Arms Survey, there are an estimated one billion SALW in circulation around the world, 85 percent of which are in civilian hands.⁸

The vast majority of those killed violently are men and boys – 84 percent in 2016.⁹ The presence of SALW, however, has significant impacts on women’s and girl’s ability to live free from fear of violence or intimidation. Often, arms are intentionally used as a means through which to assert power and control. In this way, they can reinforce socially constructed gender stereotypes that project dominant masculinity.¹⁰

One-third of all femicides (the intentional killing of women) are caused by a firearm. Although the countries with the highest rates of femicide are not conflict contexts, more than half of killings in these countries are perpetrated with small arms.¹¹ In most instances, the perpetrators are male and are known to the victim, either as an intimate partner, a family member or a friend. The effect of the use of violence by those one is meant to trust cannot be underestimated. As the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs has argued:

“Women...are more frequently the victims of gender-based violence facilitated by small arms, including domestic violence and sexual violence. Women can also bear indirect impacts of armed violence, including psychological and economic burdens. In many situations, when men are killed or injured, women must take on new or additional roles as income providers, often leading to impoverishment, exploitation and discrimination.”¹²

The use of weapons to impose fear on individuals, communities, and societies has a broad range of impacts on women and men. Fear impedes all aspects of people’s lives. Significant presence of SALW impacts development broadly, including through undermining health and education services, prompting displacement, feeding criminal violence, reducing economic output, increasing the cost of security, damaging social cohesion, and impairing effective development investment.¹³ In Africa, for example, armed conflict has led to a substantial and long lasting increase in infant mortality. Between three and four young children are estimated to have lost their lives for every direct death from conflict.¹⁴ This is not just a factor in conflict zones. Exposure to violence across many societies, including the US, has been linked to chronic and mental health challenges, lower quality of life and an increased risk of perpetrating future violence.¹⁵ Where traditional gender norms subordinate women, meanwhile, the presence of arms intensifies unequal relationships. While balancing gender norms will take time, immediate efforts to reduce the circulation of arms can help to reduce intimidation and threat, thereby fostering a stronger environment in which this balancing can take place.

While the links between the presence of SALW and developmental deficits are known, the transfer of SALW is increasing.¹⁶ Much of this increase is due to flows to the Middle East, but while in Africa the flow of small arms is reportedly on the decline, the circulation of arms and the transfer of arms from the licit to the illicit markets remain a significant problem. The illicit trade of small arms tends to be concentrated in the areas afflicted by armed conflict, violence, and organized crime.¹⁷ These are also typically areas with the weakest systems of governance and least ability to effectively counter illicit flows. They are also the areas that face the greatest challenges to overall development.

Strengthening Engagement to Reduce Violence

Ending the disconnection between different groups working to reduce violence, and involving new actors in policymaking, is vital if the world is to achieve its violence reduction objectives.

Those working to promote disarmament have tended to be heavily focused on technical aspects of arms control, including ammunition stockpiling management, embargoes, weapons collection drives, and addressing dual purpose conversion. While these aspects are important and require significant technical expertise, they tend to focus on the supply side of SALW rather than the demand side. They emphasize the material and market conditions for arms control rather than the social and cultural factors that influence disarmament.

For their part, violence prevention actors have tended to focus on the root causes of violence. While violence prevention actors readily acknowledge how significantly SALW contribute to facilitating violence, they often lack regular engagement with those in the arms control community or know how best to leverage existing protocols, agreements or information to aid their cause. The result of the separation of these two groups is a missed opportunity to advance key priorities for peace by bringing these complementary elements together into a more holistic collective capacity for disarmament. A meaningful shift in this status quo would enable a stronger connection between those working to address the demand for SALW with those who have expertise in addressing the supply of SALW.

Equally important is to involve so far excluded stakeholders in discussions and decision making around disarmament. The most glaring exclusion has been that of women. Just as use of SALW is dominated by men, so have discussions about disarmament been a predominantly male preserve. Heads of delegations to non-proliferation and disarmament forums, for example, are disproportionately male, with women under-represented both as delegates and in leadership positions.¹⁸

Excluding women from discussions and decision making weakens the quality and impact of disarmament policies.¹⁹ Making policies that can effectively address the different ways that SALW impact women and men requires the participation of both women and men who understand those impacts. Women's equal participation in disarmament policymaking and practice is also essential in addressing the unequal power relationships on which gendered impacts of violence are based. Creating more opportunities for women to lead on agenda setting, organizational decision making, and resource distribution could accelerate action towards more gender responsive disarmament policy.

In many regions of the world, there are ongoing efforts to reduce the presence of SALW, and in some cases to address the gender dimension. The African Union's "Silencing the Guns" initiative acknowledges how the proliferation of SALW on the continent negatively impacts security and development. In addition, there are many regional initiatives (Bamako Declaration, Nairobi Declaration, SADC Protocol, etc.) to support greater arms control regulation in the interest of violence reduction.

In May 2019, a group of six female experts representing six countries in Africa came together to discuss how to harness women's leadership for arms control to support violence prevention and advance development.²⁰

The meeting was convened in Addis among leading women experts in small arms control from across Sub-Saharan Africa as this region has been so extensively affected by uncontrolled arms flows, yet is also a site of some of the most innovative examples of women's leadership to address the gender dimensions of these challenges.

Over the course of a day and a half, this group challenged predominant narratives on the role of women in arms control.²¹ The group exchanged examples of success, ranging from policy to practice. For example, in

Sierra Leone, civil society has been able to strengthen inroads with local gun makers by connecting with women in villages. Because the presence of guns in the home presents a particular safety risk to women, they have formed natural allies in supporting efforts to improve regulatory control.

The group was clear about the challenges. Although women are increasingly involved in arms control conversations, they remain disproportionately under-represented at leadership levels and in positions of decision making. Further, even after the articulation of the Women, Peace and Security resolution in 2000, the number of peace agreements that reference gender has remained stubbornly low. In 2014, 58 percent of peace agreements – which generally contain stipulations for arms control – referenced gender considerations, but most years fewer than 30 percent feature gender; and none of the peace agreements signed in 2016-2017 mentioned gender.

The predominant narrative concerning women, weapons, and war remains stubbornly focused on the impact of violence on women as victims. A nuanced understanding of women's differential involvement – as perpetrators and survivors of violence, as influencers imbued with power to further calls for violence or calls for peace, and as keen observers of all forms of violence, including that which takes place behind closed doors – leaves a depth of knowledge untapped. Calls for women to be at the table in discussions often limit women to speaking only about “women's issues”, even while men's contributions are not limited to men's issues.

Participants at the Addis Ababa meeting recognized that a reduction in the quantity of weapons in circulation will lower levels of armed violence and create room for development. This can also help to break cycles of violence that persist over time, which often help to reinforce the negative gender norms that undermine equality. Where the presence of weapons undermines women's rights, the group argued, our collective values promoting the fundamental rights of all people must prevail.

The Addis Ababa group made recommendations for enhancing the role of women in discussions around disarmament. The recommendations covered three key areas of policy and practice:

Training and hiring

- Provide training for women in civil society to help them integrate arms control into their work.
- Provide more and better training for security sector personnel on issues of sexual violence, victimization, and re-traumatization.
- Integrate more women into security forces, including through recruitment and taking steps to make sure the workplace provides a safe and productive environment for women.
- Mentor young colleagues to become experts in arms control. Many women enter this field but then go on to other work. Mentoring and support can help with retention of expertise.

Networking

- Create a sub-group within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) community focused on disarmament and arms control. As a first point of action, this group could create guidance on how to implement the WPS Agenda with a focus on SALW.
- Create and protect advocacy space for women's rights groups to engage national commissions responsible for implementing arms control protocols.
- Foster more meaningful engagement between civil society, including groups working on gender issues, and government through capacity building to help draft and implement legislation.

Regional cooperation on arms control

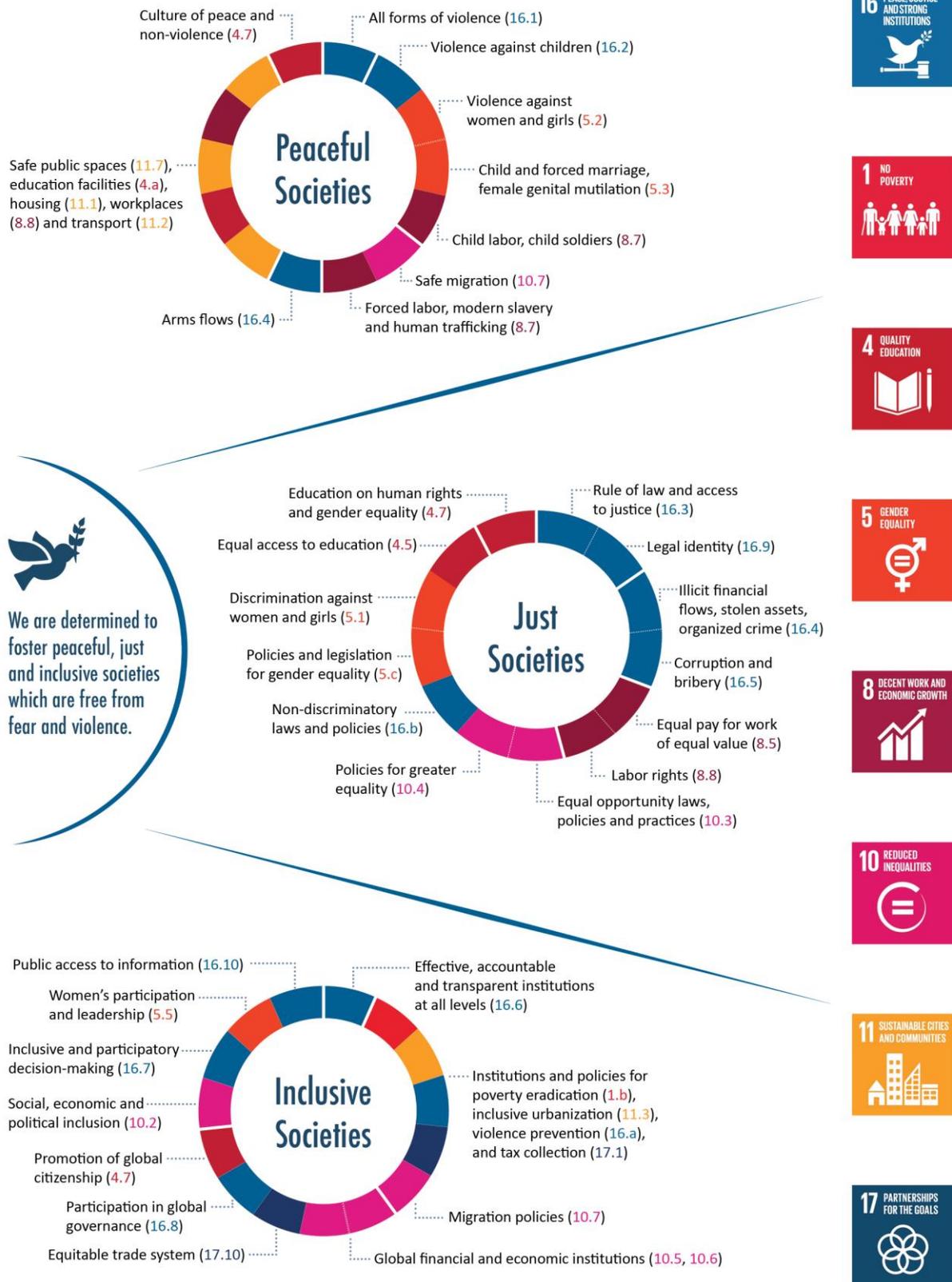
- Women often have significant untapped knowledge regarding weapons flows, particularly in border areas. Accessing this knowledge presents real security risks to women and should not be undertaken without significant risk analysis. However, with precautions in place, harnessing this knowledge can help to address illicit flows and reduce the presence of arms in communities.
- While weapons in the home present particularly high risks to women, there is often no safe reporting mechanism for women to engage authorities in. Through careful civil society engagement, greater learning in how to provide protective factors that can increase reporting should be an area for further research.
- In a similar way, further knowledge about community reporting should be shared, including the concept of witness protection.²²

Conclusion

The Addis Ababa group concluded that all arms control programming should include effective gender analysis. It should also involve women in its development. United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, whose twentieth anniversary is in 2020, calls for equal participation by women and men in peace talks. SDG5 calls for gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls in all areas.

As has been shown in several instances in Africa, women are ready to lead efforts to assess how the drivers of violence interact with the tools that enable such violence, including SALW, and to develop responses that use disarmament to reduce violence. Specific and concrete tools, platforms and opportunities exist to enable such work, yet they remain under-funded, under-utilized and de-prioritized. If the world is to achieve the goal it set itself of significantly reducing violence by 2030, reversing the historic exclusion of women from arms control discussions is essential.

Annex 1: SDG16+ Targets



Endnotes

¹ Claire McEvoy and Gergely Hideg, *Global Violent Deaths 2017 - Time to Decide*. (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2017); accessed October 18, 2019, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-Report-GVD2017.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. (New York: Office of Disarmament Affairs, 2018), p40

⁴ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report On Violence Prevention 2014*. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2014); accessed October 18, 2019, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/145086/1/9789241564793_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1

⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. (New York: Office of Disarmament Affairs, 2018), p7

⁶ Gergely Hideg and Anna Alvazzi del Frate, *Darkening Horizons - Global Violent Deaths Scenarios, 2018–30*. (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2019); accessed October 18, 2019, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-Violent-Deaths-Scenarios.pdf>.

⁷ Claire McEvoy and Gergely Hideg, *Global Violent Deaths 2017 - Time to Decide*. (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2017); accessed October 18, 2019, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-Report-GVD2017.pdf>

⁸ Small Arms Survey, “Global Firearm Holdings,” accessed October 18, 2019, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html>

⁹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. (New York: Office of Disarmament Affairs, 2018), p39

¹⁰ See, for example: UN Coordinating Action on Small Arms, “International Small Arms Control Standard: Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons,” ISACS 06.10, October 2017; accessed October 18, 2019, <http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0610-en.pdf>

¹¹ International Gender Arms Champions Disarmament and Control Arms “Gender in the Arms Trade Treaty,” Fact Sheet, 2018; accessed October 18, 2019, https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/igc-production/pJkGV9e72rfkMY6BAr5_caGOedLINqTR.pdf

¹² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. (New York: Office of Disarmament Affairs, 2018), p39

¹³ Robert Muggah and Peter Batchelor, “*Development Held Hostage*”: *Assessing the Effects of Small Arms on Human Development*. (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2002); accessed October 18, 2019, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/10246/doc_10276_290_en.pdf.

¹⁴ Zachary Wagner, Sam Heft-Neal, Zulfiqar Bhutta, Robert E Black, Marshall Burke, and Eran Bendavid, “Armed conflict and child mortality in Africa: a geospatial analysis,” *The Lancet*, Volume 392, Issue 10150, September 8, 2018: 857-865; accessed October 18, 2019, [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)31437-5.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(18)31437-5.pdf)

¹⁵ Cure Violence, “All 50 States Talking About Violence as a Health Issue,” accessed October 18, 2019, <https://cvg.org/all-50-states-talking-about-violence-as-a-health-issue/>

¹⁶ Pieter D. Wezeman, Dr Aude Fleurant, Alexandra Kuimova, Dr Nan Tian and Siemon T. Wezeman, “Trends in international arms transfers, 2018,” SIPRI Fact Sheet; accessed October 18, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2018>

¹⁷ Small Arms Survey, “Illicit Tracking,” accessed October 18, 2019, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/transfers/illicit-trafficking.html>

¹⁸ Renata Hessmann Dalaqua, Kjølsv Egeland, and Torbjørn Graff Hugo, *Still Behind the Curve: Gender Balance in Arms Control, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy*. (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2019); accessed October 18, 2019, <https://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/still-behind-the-curve-en-770.pdf>.

¹⁹ International Gender Arms Champions Disarmament and Control Arms “Gender in the Arms Trade Treaty,” Fact Sheet, 2018; accessed October 18, 2019, https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/igc-production/pJkGV9e72rfkMY6BAr5_caGOedLINqTR.pdf

²⁰ The Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies based at the Center on International Cooperation at NYU convened the discussion with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office. The Government of Namibia co-

sponsored the convening, which was hosted by the African Union. Representatives from the AU's Peace and Security Directorate (AU PSD), the UN Office to the African (UNOAU) Union and Small Arms Survey (SAS) also joined.

²¹ A summary of discussions can be found here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/etbbr9dgv5x8vob/Summary%20Addis%20Consultations_18June2019_Final.docx?dl=0

²² For example, see Small Arms Survey work on Libya.