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## United Nations Development Fund for Women

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# United Nations Development Fund for Women

by Shruti Chaganti [ Mine Action Information Center ]

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has taken several measures to promote gender equality in all areas of life. These include not only several operational programs around the world but also a number of important areas of information collection and dissemination through various publications. These areas of work have been invaluable for organizations attempting to further gender equality in mine action. They have provided a starting line of information on how women are disproportionately affected by armed conflict and ERW as well as how women can be better integrated into solving the problems following a mine- accident.

UNIFEM was developed to “provide financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality.”<sup>1</sup> The mission of UNIFEM is framed by the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*<sup>2</sup> and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.<sup>3</sup> Guided by these documents, UNIFEM strives to create a collaborative effort between men and women to “work towards a common goal of gender equality around the world.”<sup>2</sup> Under this framework, there are four components to UNIFEM action: reducing feminized poverty, ending violence against women, reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls and achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.<sup>1</sup>

## Millennium Development Goals

At the 2000 Millennium Summit, the international community came together to adopt eight Millennium Development Goals on poverty, education, gender, child mortality, maternal health, epidemic diseases, environmental sustainability and development financing. Since each of these goals is connected to important aspects of women's well-being, UNIFEM works closely with other international actors to ensure that these goals become a reality. In that process, UNIFEM is involved in four "critical entry points:"<sup>4</sup>

1. **Monitoring progress:** UNIFEM helps women evaluate whether countries are on track to meet the MDGs through the use of sex-disaggregated data. This type of data helps identify gender gaps in funding or other areas of assistance.<sup>4</sup>
2. **Analysis:** In order to better and more efficiently achieve the MDGs, UNIFEM has employed over 300 scholars and gender experts from around the world to assist in understanding the interconnectedness of gender and the MDGs.<sup>4</sup>
3. **Advocacy:** UNIFEM, along with several women's organizations, attempts to "spread awareness, spark debate and encourage participation in MDG activities."<sup>4</sup> In addition, it attempts to involve countries in a gender-sensitive approach in implementing the MDGs.<sup>4</sup>
4. **Operational programs:** UNIFEM is involved in several programs that incorporate the MDGs into the four main topics of work. The organization has operations in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup>

## Women War Peace Portal

In its October 2000 resolution on Women, Peace and Security, the United Nations expressed a "need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls."<sup>5</sup> Toward that end, UNIFEM created the Women War Peace Portal. This portal is a centralized location where researchers, policymakers and other organizations can easily find information and work that has been done regarding gender and conflict. The portal also strives to provide several different perspectives on gender issues, especially in cases in which different sets of data disagree over the extent of gender gaps in areas of assistance.

One section of the portal is dedicated to the gendered effect of landmines. The main page provides information on which organizations are currently involved in the gendered aspect of mine action. To encourage gender mainstreaming in mine action, UNIFEM created a "Tools and Checklists" section that includes guidelines published by major organizations.

## Women War Peace Publication

In 2002, UNIFEM published the *Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building*.<sup>6</sup> Designed to document the disproportionate affect of war on women, the publication highlights narratives of women in embattled regions that exemplify the types of situations women face during and after times of armed conflict. The publication is divided into 10 chapters and focuses on two main aspects of gender and conflict: war-time abuses and post-war reconstruction.

"UNIFEM calls for measures that will severely punish sex traffickers, increase awareness among women about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and its transmission and guarantee equal socioeconomic rights to women during reconstruction periods."

The first four chapters focus on the impact of armed conflict on women. They investigate a range of experiences of women who survived abuses such as sexual and gender-based violence, particularly when used as a tactic of

warfare.<sup>6</sup> In addition, women's bodies and reproductive abilities are used by attackers as a means to cleanse ethnic populations. The chapters also focus on the particular vulnerabilities of women trapped in conflict-related poverty, including survival sex and other means of seeking economic security. These practices increase the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

However, even as the publication describes the terrible conditions that women face during times of war, it communicates the strength and unique perspective that women bring in post-war reconstruction. Women often provide a valuable perspective in reconstruction efforts that comes only through the unique experiences they have during and after an armed conflict. This is especially important because women are easily exploited even in the post-war world. In addition, organizations that attempt to reconstruct the area through business loans and other economic incentives look past women.<sup>6</sup> By bringing their perspective to the table, women can ensure that organizations take a gendered approach to reconstruction efforts.

The publication ends with a chapter on recommendations for future action. These recommendations are divided by subject headings of each of the previous 10 chapters so that they address very specific issues. Among these, UNIFEM calls for measures that will severely punish sex traffickers, increase awareness among women about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and its transmission and guarantee equal socioeconomic rights to women during reconstruction periods.

## Helping Create Equality

UNIFEM's commitment to create a common goal of gender equality is seen through its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and its work in countries around the world. In addition, it has helped to create centers of information that help any organization take part in a gendered approach to assessing and assisting in areas of armed conflict. This includes organizations that are looking to integrate women into mine action as well as organizations that are studying the varied effect that mine accidents have on women. ↕

## Biography



**Shruti Chaganti** joined the Mine Action Information Center in May 2008 as an Editorial and Research Assistant for the *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in political science and philosophy at James Madison University.

## Endnotes

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1. For more information, visit <http://womenwarpeace.org/node/9>.

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