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Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration:
The co-evolution of concepts, practices, and understanding

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Programs for the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants have become more common as an element in the peacebuilder's toolkit. They have evolved over the last 15 years, and can interact positively with an ongoing peace process. The literature assessing DDR is reviewed in this paper. Results have not always been positive, however. Despite recognition of the need for a more holistic, integrated approach, there are real challenges in implementing such a complex program in a post-conflict environment. Qualitative studies have highlighted these difficulties, and the few quantitative assessments of the outcomes are mixed. However, understanding of DDR is being advanced by a rich policy literature, together with specific "best practice" studies. Recognition of the importance of a participatory approach, and ownership of the process by the beneficiaries, has added to this understanding. The paper concludes that DDR is set to remain an important tool, and that it is most effective when used flexibly, appropriately, and with the genuine participation of those it is supposed to benefit.

"Ultimately, DDR is the first step in construction of the new order, rather than the last step of something that has ceased to be." (Gamba 2006,74).

The conceptualization and practice of peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery since the early 1990s have continued to evolve and become more sophisticated. In parallel with that has come the development of a set of interventions for dealing with ex-combatants and others associated with fighting forces, in the context of a peace process, known as Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). They are significant stakeholders in the process, with the potential to contribute to recovery, or to act as spoilers and worsen insecurity. The general aim of DDR programs is the voluntary disarmament and discharge of combatants from armed groups, and to facilitate them in starting a new life, making a living for themselves, and finding a place in society.

Favorable treatment of this group in comparison with ordinary civilians raises many questions, but failing to deal with the reality that such an interest group exists can undermine the chances that a peace agreement can be implemented, and that return to war can be avoided. DDR's evolution over this period means it has become accepted as a standard element in the peacebuilder's toolbox. Guidelines have even been drawn up for mediators on the basics of DDR, so that it can be included in a comprehensive peace agreement (United Nations Department of Political Affairs 2006). While there may still be a lingering perception that it is a "cash for guns" deal, DDR has become a complex and multi-faceted operation, often involving a dozen or more agencies. Like many aspects of peacebuilding, the fact that it is a long term process which attempts to bridge security and development is its great strength, as well as being a significant challenge when it comes to implementation. It is described in the principal United Nations document on the process as often being "at the nexus of peacekeeping, post-conflict peacebuilding and development" (UN Secretary General 2006, 8).

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The report provides what has become the accepted definition of DDR within the UN system:

> **Disarmament** is the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes.
>
> **Demobilization** is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose.
>
> **Reintegration** is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.
>
> UN Secretary General (2006, 8)

Of all of these, reintegration remains the biggest challenge, the most expensive and labor intensive one, and is yet crucial to any sustainable outcome. Economic reintegration may be taking place in a war-ravaged economy which has been distorted by the conflict, and in an environment where rule of law is only gradually being established. With few economic opportunities available, interventions such as vocational training to help ex-combatants find an alternative livelihood may still leave many of them unemployed and disillusioned.[2]

The UNDP *Practice Note* on DDR (2005,5) describes it as "a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian and socioeconomic dimensions." It says that while much of it focuses on ex-combatants, "the main beneficiaries of the programme should ultimately be the wider community" (2005, 11). DDR must therefore be "conceptualized, designed, planned and implemented within a wider recovery and development framework." (2005, 6).

The growth of DDR in post-conflict situations
An annual review of current DDR processes has been produced since 2006 by the Escola de Cultura de Pau at Barcelona Autonomous University (Caramés, Fisas and Luz 2006; Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2007 and 2008). These provide comprehensive comparative analyses of DDR programs. A total of 19 programs were underway in 2007, based on a very broad definition of DDR which includes schemes which are not generally active (such as Chad or Côte d'Ivoire), or which deal with just one participant in the conflict (such as the AUC militia in Colombia). In 13 of these countries, DDR is specifically envisaged in the peace agreement. Of the 19 cases, three were in Asia (Nepal, Indonesia and Afghanistan); two in the Americas (Colombia and Haiti); and the rest in Africa. The review estimates that these programs involved 1.1 million ex-combatants at some stage in the processes, although not all in that particular year. The total cost of these programs over their lifetimes is estimated at US$1.599 billion.

The position of DDR in a peace process

DDR is best viewed as an integrated *set* of processes, which are themselves a part of the wider peace process. It arises from the peace process, and has the capacity to provide positive or negative feedback into it. The possible feedback arises from confidence building between parties, opening lines of communication, addressing interests, and providing incentives at a number of levels. It can also bring tensions to the surface, especially when resources or jobs are to be divided up, or where local commanders' interests diverge from those of the overall leadership, or of the combatants. Clearly, the relationship between ex-combatants and the communities where they settle can sometimes be a difficult one.

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[2] The term "ex-combatant" is used here for convenience, to cover all of those associated with armed groups, some of whom may have had a non-combatant role such as cook, porter, or bush wife.

Berdal describes "an interplay, a subtle interaction, between the dynamics of a peace process" and how DDR is implemented (1996, 73). DDR cannot bring political agreement on its own, and a peace process which collapses will leave a DDR program in an untenable position, as seen in the failure of the first DDR attempt in Angola (Gomes Porto and Parsons 2003).

Colletta et al (1996,18) say:

> Successful long-term reintegration can make a major contribution to national conflict resolution and to restoration of social capital. Conversely, failure to achieve reintegration can lead to considerable insecurity at the societal and individual levels, including rent-seeking behaviour through the barrel of a gun.

Kingma (1997) says that DDR can contribute to peacebuilding and human security – and indeed had been "critical in making the peace hold" in Mozambique (2000, 241). He is among several authors to emphasize that demobilization on its own cannot guarantee the success of a peace process. It is a political enterprise, and ultimately depends on the political will to reach and implement a settlement.

Successes and failures attributed to DDR

DDR is generally credited with positive interactions with the peace process, and possible handling of potential spoilers and interest groups. It is seen as a way of building confidence, when it runs well. On the question of reducing the number of guns in circulation, there is no assumption that all the weapons used in a conflict can be gathered in a DDR process. However, tens of thousands of weapons are typically taken in and an apparent reduction in weapons circulating has been noted, for example, in Sierra Leone (Berman and Labonte 2006).

On the other hand, a number of recurrent shortcomings have been identified. These problems include the exclusion and marginalization of women and of girls, who have had different experiences than male fighters, generally suffer more abuse, and who can face greater stigma and other problems when it comes to reintegrating. In Sierra Leone – one of the countries which is often cited as a more successful DDR program – women were under-represented among those demobilizing. There are several reasons for this, including stigma and fear of being identified as an ex-combatant; being excluded from the program by commanders who wanted others to benefit instead from registering as an ex-combatant; and not qualifying for the program, as they did not have a weapon to hand in. There can be real difficulties in setting the "entry price" to a DDR program – the amount of hardware to be handed in. Setting it too low (as happened in Liberia) means the system has to cater for many who were not in fact ex-combatants, while setting the type or amount of arms at too high a level excludes those who did not have access to these at the time of disarmament.

The problems caused by funding delays and gaps in implementing the program can undermine the whole process (Spear 2006). This became a serious situation in, for example, Angola (Gomes Porto and Parsons 2003) and Liberia (Nichols 2005).

The real challenge, as mentioned already, remains the problem of economic reintegration, in a situation where the labor market offers few opportunities for those who have been trained as part of DDR. Many ex-combatants will judge the entire program on the basis of whether they can find a livelihood after they have handed in their guns, or end up without work and living in desperate poverty.

The emergence of DDR literatures

As the practice of DDR has developed in the field, so too has the policy literature which reflects and facilitates this process of exploration. This literature has grown considerably and matured (for example, *Small Arms Survey* 2004 and 2005; Florquin and Berman 2005). Although policy recommendations were identified early on – most of which are still relevant today – the development of more specific documents on best practice has been seen since 2000 (such as the *Integrated DDR Standards*, discussed below). More recently, academic writers, some of them relying on quantitative empirical data, have begun to pay significant attention to DDR (Kingma 1997; Spear 2002; Batchelor and Kingma 2004; Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; Muggah 2005; Knight and Özerdem 2004).

Berdal (1996) was among the early writers on DDR, drawing on the small number of cases underway at the time. He comes to definite conclusions about the best way to approach DDR: that it should be agreed during the main peace talks; that an integrated, holistic approach to the various elements of DDR is needed; that local capacity and credibility must be built; and that reintegration is linked with the development of the local economy and capacities. It is interesting to note how early on in the experience of DDR the need for a holistic approach to DDR was recognized; the reality is that while it has often been advocated, putting it into practice involves considerable challenges. The difficulties include the short time frames demanded for starting DDR when an agreement is imminent; the large number of actors involved, often with different organizational cultures and agendas; and the fact that funding is more likely to be available for dealing with the hardware (disarmament), rather than for the longer term work of reintegration. Colletta et al (1996) also drew on the earlier experiences of the World Bank in supporting DDR programs, and Ball (1997) made specific policy recommendations, on the basis of these early programs.

Batchelor and Kingma's edited three-volume study (2004) looks at demobilization and peacebuilding in Southern Africa, during the significant reduction in conflict which followed the end of the Cold War and of the apartheid regime. The four-year study is significant in both its timing, and the range of researchers and practitioners contributing to it. Kingma says that by subjecting ex-combatants to confusing delaying tactics over reintegration, problems are created for the future. The issue he highlights is one which has dogged a number of programs, where there may be pressure to start DDR before funding or detailed planning is in place:

> In order to respond to the real needs of the ex-combatants, reintegration assistance programmes might best be designed (and if need be, amended) through a process of continuing dialogue with the ex-combatants and their communities – particularly women. 'Top down' assistance does not nurture self-reliance and initiative.
>
> (Kingma 2004,156)

A specific literature has also emerged on the question of child soldiers, or what are more properly called Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF). An understanding of their experiences, motivations, and needs is important when it comes to designing the distinct process of demobilization and rehabilitation which should be made available (McConnan and Uppard 2001; Verhey 2001; Brett and Specht 2004). For example, the normal practice is that they would be separated from adult combatants on arrival at the demobilization camp, and moved shortly after to a specialized center catering for their needs.

Best practice

A growing body of guides, manuals, and best practice on DDR has been developed in recent years, which attempt to set out the "lessons learned." These include the UNDP's *Practice Note* (2005). Another project which brought together a wide range of practitioners, donors, and researchers to review best practice was the Stockholm Initiative on DDR (SIDDR). Among the many recommendations in its *Final Report* (2006) are several specific ones on funding, since financial shortfalls can lead to incomplete processes and a potentially dangerous loss of credibility among ex-combatants. It says that multi-donor trust funds the key funding mechanism, with support for both ex-combatants and affected communities.

An even more comprehensive guide and field manual is the UN's *Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS)* (2006). It amounts to a significant initiative to promote an integrated approach between UN agencies and other actors in the DDR process. It was drawn up by the UN's Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, which brings together 15 different UN entities. In more than 700 pages, it covers 24 separate areas, including personnel and finance for the mission; social and economic integration of ex-combatants; the specific needs of women and children; HIV and health; and public information strategies in support of DDR. It provides guidance for an integrated approach, for those planning, managing and implementing DDR processes. The involvement of ex-combatants, communities, and other stakeholders in DDR is implicit in the guiding principles of the IDDRS: its associated *Operational Guide* (2006, 26) says that the process should be:

- People-centered;
- Flexible, transparent and accountable;

- Nationally-owned;
- Integrated; and
- Well planned.

The empirical approaches to assessing DDR

Most of the reviews of DDR programs have been largely qualitative in nature, in the attempt to tease out causal mechanisms and assess the impact of programs. A more explicitly quantitative approach has also emerged, mainly using two large datasets. These relate to Sierra Leone, where more than 70,000 ex-combatants eventually went through DDR up to 2004, and for neighboring Liberia, whose main DDR program started in 2003. Humphreys and Weinstein (2005, 2007 and 2009) based their work on a sample of 1,043 ex-combatants conducted in 2003, shortly after Sierra Leone's 11-year war had ended, while reintegration was still underway. In a finding they describe as surprising, there was no evidence in the regression analysis that ex-combatants who took part in DDR fared any better, compared to those who did not go through the program. They note that these results should be treated with caution and acknowledge that the long longer-term effects of DDR are not explored in the study.

It is also important to note that even though 87 per cent of the respondents had entered the DDR program, less than half of the total sample (46 per cent) had actually completed it at the time the survey was carried out (2009, 57). A comparison however between those who did not take part in DDR at all, and those entered *and* completed the program, does not show any significant difference, on the basis of the measures of "reintegration" which they have come up with (2009).

Molloy (unpublished), who was involved in implementing the program and assisted in the logistical arrangements for the data-gathering field work for the study in 2003, suggests that those ex-combatants who did not go through DDR may have had additional coping mechanisms or support, which the others did not, and that this may be why no effect is detected. He suggests that despite the considerable rigor with which the survey was devised, error may have arisen from the way in which measures of complex variables such as reintegration were operationalized in the study.[3] Humphreys and Weinstein return to these questions of possible selection effect and sample bias (2009), but say the effect could go in either direction – to underestimate the impact of DDR, or indeed to overstate it.

In Liberia, Pugel (2007) carried out a complementary large-N survey in 2006, using randomized sampling methods. In contrast to the Sierra Leone study, he found that those who went through the full DDR program were significantly better off in terms of their economic and social situation, compared with those who did not enter DDR:

> In almost every sub-facet of the dimensions of reintegration (social, economic, and political), the DDRR program completers were decisively more advanced in their efforts to reintegrate than those combatants that chose self-reintegration or any other category, for that matter.

(Pugel 2007, 64)

Further work is required to develop accurate measures of reintegration, so that the impact of DDR can be quantified (Pugel 2009).

Hill, Taylor, and Temin confirmed the importance of economic marginalization in undermining a peace process, in their survey of ex-combatants in Lofa County in Liberia (2008). It found that the most commonly cited reasons for considering a return to combat included poverty and economic disadvantage, followed by a lack of jobs, benefits, or training.

Similarly, the re-recruitment of former child soldiers from Sierra Leone and Liberia following a failure to complete DDR has been highlighted by Human Rights Watch (2005). The vast majority of the 60 interviewees

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[3] The variable of successful reintegration was estimated using a combination of four "yes or no" binary measures. These aimed to assess (1) continuing links with ex-combatants, (2) employment status, (3) belief in democracy, and (4) acceptance by society.

who ended up fighting in neighboring countries had been eligible for the DDR programs in Sierra Leone or Liberia, yet they "found themselves in a grim world of deprivation boredom and poverty," and came "to see war as the most promising economic opportunity on offer" (2005, 63). In many cases, they had not received benefits or services they were entitled to, or were even denied entry to the program. The report describes the "inextricable link between the level of economic deprivation and the continuing cycle of war crimes" in West Africa (2005, 5).

Participation and ownership

Since DDR ultimately merges with reconstruction and development, and takes place within communities rather than in the offices of international agencies, the question arises of how the relevant stakeholders are actually involved in the process. Has there been consultation, could they make an input into planning the process, and do they have any sense of ownership over it? To use the language of development, to what extent is a "participatory approach" taken in planning and implementing DDR? (Dzinesa 2006; Kilroy 2008; Özerdem 2009). The issue is of course complicated by the fact that the range of stakeholders is diverse, from ex-combatants and commanders, to communities where they are going to settle, as well as local and national authorities.

The term participation is explained by Chambers (1997) and Pretty (1995), and is promoted by agencies committed to a partnership approach to development work through nationally-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This requires, among other things, that the beneficiaries and implementers of a development program are genuinely involved in, consulted on, and make input to its planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The objective is not only that a better and more relevant program is developed; it also aims to engender a higher level of ownership of it by the community, building of capacity among actors in the country, and greater sustainability of the program's outputs. A badly conceived or poorly managed process, whose shortcomings are compounded by inadequate participation, can lead to resentment, unfulfilled expectations, and a perception of unfair rewards for militia members. All these factors can in turn affect the outcome negatively.

The potential benefits of a more participatory approach to DDR could include:

- Building long term national capacity for reintegration and therefore development;

- Dealing with perceptions that those with guns are being rewarded, and the poor example which that sets in terms of governance and accountability in the post-conflict era;

- Enhancing the sense of ownership at national and community level, rather than dependency;

- More appropriate services for marginalized groups such as children, women, and the disabled;

- Promoting reconciliation and acceptance of ex-combatants, where the whole community can see that it benefits from the process in its entirety.

A shift in focus is therefore required from the immediately tangible measures, to the process itself:

> Maintaining a focus on participatory process and recognising that the 'how' is often more important than the 'what' – Participatory processes can render civilian and co-operative life within communities a more attractive option than engaging in war and violence.

> (Bell and Watson 2006, 5)

There are many reasons why a more participatory approach can be difficult. These include the problem of engagement at an early stage with individual militia members, at a time of possible uncertainty and insecurity. Yet this is the point at which expectations about what is on offer are formed, and these can be a significant factor in later disillusionment with the program. Engagement with commanders may be necessary but is problematic, as they may have their own interests and agendas. There can also be a serious lack of capacity in

the post-war environment, in terms of structures for consultation, community-based organizations, and possible implementing partners.

The short time frame given for starting the implementation of DDR programs can also undermine attempts at a participatory approach, which can be inherently more time-consuming. There can be real pressures to start programs early and show immediate results, in order to prevent spoilers emerging from the armed groups and threatening the peace process. Finally, DDR involves a wide range of actors, sometimes with radically different organizational cultures, capacities, and perspectives, each of which brings their own interests and requirements for accountability.

Conclusions

An understanding of DDR continues to develop in several areas, including best practice and policy literature, within the emerging academic literature, through further empirical data, and through further consideration within the theoretical framework of peacebuilding. Work in the related areas of security sector reform, transitional justice, and civil-military cooperation will throw up new questions. All of these are evolving at the same time, with the interesting possibility of valuable insights being shared across these sometimes unconnected fields. A key task is to deepen these connections. There is also a need to ensure that policy recommendations are based on a sound understanding of the realities faced by those implementing a program in a post-conflict environment; Miller et al (2006) make a powerful case for such an engagement.

There are potentially useful opportunities to develop the way in which empirical data of both a quantitative and a qualitative nature are gathered. Operationalizing how multifaceted concepts such social and economic reintegration are measured remains a challenge. As DDR progresses or gets underway in Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is the possibility of conducting specific baseline surveys and longitudinal studies, in order to understand better the impact of these programs. In pursuing this research agenda, it is important to seek out the voices of all stakeholders, including those who are often marginalized or ignored, if a deeper understanding is to be gained of this potentially important process. DDR looks set to remain an important part of the peacebuilder's toolkit, and like most such methods, is most effective when it is used flexibly, appropriately, and with the participation and ownership of those it is supposed to benefit.

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