

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

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When violent conflict erupts, the availability and use of arms and weapons surges. Often, particularly in civil wars and internal conflicts, both combatants and civilians own and utilise weapons. Their presence in society makes peacebuilding a very difficult task, increasing the potential for a return to conflict and a high incidence of violent crime.

The question of how to disarm factions is a key consideration in official peace negotiations, along with the related issue of how to demobilise fighting units, aiding their transition to civilian life. International actors have termed the phase of the peace process that addresses these issues as **disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)**.

In theory, these processes can be described in a rather straightforward way. In reality, the situation is much more complex, as each conflict and peace process holds distinct challenges and opportunities. This chapter attempts to define these terms and processes according to international norms, while demonstrating that women are affected differently than men and offer unique perspectives that can contribute to more successful peacebuilding.

1. WHAT IS DDR?

International policy-makers consider formal DDR to be one of the most important steps in the peace process. The World Bank has defined a successful DDR program as “the key to an effective transition from war to peace.”¹ Donors recognise that an unsuccessful DDR process can threaten the stability of a peace agreement and long-term sustainable peace.

The break up of fighting units, the disarmament and discharge of former combatants, their return to their families and reintegration into their communities is time-consuming, expensive and difficult. For purposes of explanation, the DDR process can be broken down into three separate but enormous components defined below. It is important to note, however, that DDR phases overlap and are interdependent.

Disarmament is defined by the United Nations (UN), as “...the collection of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone.”² In general, physical disarmament occurs in assembly areas predetermined during the peace negotiations, where

fighters are gathered together in camp-like settings, weapons are confiscated, safely stored and eventually destroyed.

“**Demobilisation** is the formal disbanding of military formations and, at the individual level, is the process of releasing combatants from a mobilised state.”³ Discharge of ex-combatants often occurs over a period of time, during which they are usually transported to their homes or new districts and granted small initial reinsertion packages.

Reintegration itself has two phases—initial **reinsertion** and long-term **reintegration**. Reinsertion refers to the short-term arrival period of an ex-combatant into his/her former home or a new community. Reintegration is a much longer-term process with the goal of ensuring permanent disarmament and sustainable peace. It includes assisting the community and the ex-combatant during the difficult transition to civilian life. In this phase, former fighters may enter job placement services, participate in skills training, credit schemes, scholarships or rehabilitation programmes.

In some cases, the international community may refer to a fourth “R” in DDR (i.e. DDRR) representing **rehabilitation**, which encompasses difficult issues such as the need to address the psychological and emotional aspects of returning home, as well as problems that arise in relation to the wider community. Nearly all DDR programmes address rehabilitation in some form, but the most often used acronym for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration is DDR.

2. WHO DESIGNS AND IMPLEMENTS DDR?

A DDR program is generally negotiated as part of the peace accord. National governments are usually directly involved in planning and implementing DDR programmes in partnership with international organisations and donor countries.

The UN, as a third-party intermediary, frequently oversees DDR processes. The UN has conducted programmes for DDR in countries as diverse as Bosnia, Cambodia, El Salvador and Mozambique.

In some cases, a special peacekeeping mission of the UN is responsible for disarmament and demobilisation as one of its tasks (see chapter on peace support operations). In addition, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) takes part in these initial phases, but is primarily responsible for the reintegration phase, assisting in the design of programmes and coordinating and implementing them as well.

Although the design of DDR programmes is often decided during peace negotiations and written into peace agreements, a variety of actors may provide advice during that process and can be involved with implementation. In addition to the UN, a primary actor is the World Bank, which funds and assists in the operation and evaluation of DDR programmes. Its primary tasks, as denoted by the World Bank itself, are to: (a) give policy advice, (b) lead donor coordination if requested, (c) “sensitise” stakeholders, (d) provide technical assistance and (e) mobilise and manage funds.⁴

Other donors and actors, including foreign governments, provide financial and technical

assistance, particularly with regard to DDR design and implementation. In **El Salvador**, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) was a primary actor; in that case and others, USAID may contract with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including for-profit contractors, to do much of the work in the field. For example, in El Salvador, one of those organisations was Creative Associates, which maintains a presence in San Salvador even today.

International NGOs, including humanitarian groups, are also involved as donors and providers of relief aid, as are various arms of the UN, including the Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The roles of actors vary according to the needs and circumstances present in each conflict situation.

In increasing numbers, local NGOs are being consulted by international actors. Oftentimes, local, community-based NGOs may receive funding to conduct reintegration assistance and provide social services, such as skills trainings and trauma counselling. In terms of its partners, the **World Bank** notes that, “civilian-led institutions should be neutral, specialised and administratively competent.”⁵

3. HOW IS DDR CONDUCTED?

In general, the plan and design for DDR is first discussed in the actual peace accord as a product of negotiations between the disputing parties. Timelines and locations for assembly are usually laid out at that time. There must be a willingness to disarm on the part of all parties to the conflict in order for a DDR process to begin.

Assembly is the first step in the DDR process; this phase is also known as **cantonment**. Typically, in these camp areas, former fighters, or **ex-combatants** are given food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, basic education and orientation programmes. As troops begin to assemble in the designated areas, UNDP and other international actors such as the World Bank and USAID, begin

1. conducting voluntary censuses that will provide information on the former fighters for a registration database;

2. needs assessments to determine the ex-combatants' physical requirements and expectations and plans for their post war life; and
3. issuing documentation to ex-combatants that will serve as their identity papers, proof of demobilisation and eligibility for reinsertion benefits packages.

The primary objective of the assembly phase is to collect weapons and demobilise combatants to their former communities or to new areas. Thus, the above activities are often undertaken as part of physical disarmament and collection of weapons. The stockpiled weapons are generally marked, removed and destroyed. In some cases, however, this last step is not completed and problems arise as a result. In **Sierra Leone**, rebel groups repossessed weapons leftover from earlier conflicts as they renewed war in the spring of 2000.⁶

Research has found that ex-combatants are often restless during the assembly phase and, in fact, may not wish to surrender all of their weapons. In 2003 in **Burundi**, the World Bank noted: "The longer combatants stay in a cantonment site, the more likely it is that problems will arise, both in terms of the provision of assistance and security and the morale of those cantoned."⁷ Thus, an effort is made to minimise combatants' time in the camps and accomplish the above activities as quickly and thoroughly as possible. However, rushing the DDR process may have long-term consequences. If weapons are not effectively collected, a rise in small arms violence and crime can follow the war.

Demobilisation of former fighters and exit from the assembly areas often occur over a long period of time. Ex-combatants are usually transported to their home districts or to new communities. In some cases, former fighters are anxious to return to their homes, or they may fear disapproval or rejection and thus attempt to stall the process. In **Uganda** in the early 1990s, to ease this process, ex-combatants and their dependents were briefed before receiving a "settling-in-kit" of shelter, food, transport, clothing and medical care for a transition period of six months.⁸ Reinsertion assistance such as this is generally provided to former fighters in the form of cash

during the demobilisation phase—either in a "lump sum" distribution or in installments over time. In addition, basic materials are generally provided, such as agricultural supplies, food supplements, or stipends for education. In **El Salvador**, kitchen goods and materials were included in this reinsertion package.

Reintegration refers to the long-term process of re-entry into the community, building livelihoods and returning to a peacetime lifestyle. In general, modest packages of benefits are given to ex-combatants with demobilisation papers. The components of these packages may include vocational training, credit, scholarships, land distribution and employment with a new police or security force. In **Nicaragua**, reintegration programmes also included micro-enterprise management training, health exams and psychological counselling.

International actors work with NGOs to establish workshops and other skills training programmes. Credit programmes are often channelled through banks and local authorities. Scholarships are often few and are usually designated for leaders of armed movements. Land distribution is generally performed in conjunction with government offices and an overall national reconstruction plan. A new police force and a redesigned military are generally open for employment of former fighters from all sides of the conflict.

The entire environment surrounding DDR is political and fragile. There are critical periods between demobilisation and the receipt of reintegration benefits when the situation remains unstable. In addition, the reintegration stage is very sensitive and often is not completed due to problems in funding and other obstacles to implementation. Depending on the nature of the war, communities can vehemently oppose the return of fighters. It may be years before some combatants return home, as in **Rwanda**, where dramatic legal and political changes occurred while fighters were in neighbouring states. Former combatants may find their DDR packages insufficient for their living expenses, thus motivating them to join gangs and commit crimes. In sum, even when the international community deems a DDR programme "successful," the post war reality may be far less than that.

One major side effect of war that occurs in nearly every post conflict state is that of a surge in crime and other forms of violence. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) contribute to instability in the post conflict environment and are often attributed to an incomplete DDR program. In the 2004 DDR process in Liberia, 16,000 ex-combatants entered the program, but only 10,000 weapons—many in disrepair—were collected.⁹ Thus longer-term micro-disarmament projects may be needed even after the completion of formal DDR (see chapter on SALW).

Because women are disproportionately affected by violence in their homes and communities, they have mobilised in countries around the world to rid their societies of small arms. As a World Bank study reports, “poverty, coupled with the erosion of authority of traditional institutions, leads to crime and delinquency. Unemployed, demobilised young men, socialised to violence and brutality during war, are more likely to form gangs... and can pose a constant threat to the security of women and children.”¹⁰

In addition to these challenges, former combatants often pass HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases to wives and families, and the care giving required for those combatants suffering from disabilities, psychological trauma and disease also falls to women (see chapter on HIV/AIDS).

4. WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF DDR ON WOMEN?

In general, international implementing organisations have not planned for the inclusion of women’s needs and concerns in DDR programmes. In fact, the impact of returning male fighters on women and even the existence and needs of female fighters have historically been overlooked. This neglect of the many and complex roles that women play during war and peace leads to a less effective, less informed DDR that does not fully extend to the community level and may not lead to long-term or sustainable peace.

WOMEN AS FIGHTERS

Women fighters have made up a substantial number of combatants in recent years in such countries as Eritrea, El Salvador, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe and have participated in many other conflicts as well.

Women ex-combatants often face gender-specific obstacles in the aftermath of war.

In some cases, such as in Sierra Leone, women have not been officially defined as fighters and therefore immediately lose access to DDR programmes, including eligibility for reinsertion benefits. In other cases, such as El Salvador, women combatants were included in the original lists of troops entering the UNDP programmes for DDR, but faced discrimination at other stages, such as access to land and credit at the local level. Yet even in that case, where women were included in the official process, the needs of women in the camps, such as the provision of basic health or sanitary facilities, were not considered. In Mozambique, where some women fighters participated in official DDR programmes, they were offered training only in traditional women’s activities, such as sewing and secretarial work. In Rwanda, the national government funded three years of vocational training for members of the first association of ex-combatant women in the Great Lakes region. The association is composed of representatives from all 12 provinces across Rwanda and all parties to the conflict.¹¹

Interestingly, in Sri Lanka there are reports that women are sometimes more respected fighters than men and enjoy a strong position as combatants. Thus, women are particularly concerned about their potentially subservient roles when the conflict ends. An important step in moving towards a peace settlement, therefore, may be that the needs and concerns of women fighters are addressed. Overall, however, there remains a lack of recognition of the particular concerns of female fighters in DDR and other post conflict plans and programs.

WOMEN AND GIRLS AS ABDUCTEES

In some cases, women, and particularly girls, are forced to become combatants. Abduction or gang pressing¹² for the purposes of enlistment in combat is practiced worldwide, but is most widespread in Africa. Often, these women and girls may be called “wives,” but in fact, they are not formally married and in many cases are abused.

Although this, too, is changing, children are seldom recognised in DDR programs, and girls are marginalised even within that category (see chapter

on children's security). Despite the fact that humanitarian aid organisations work with girl abductees, DDR programs implemented by governments and international organisations have not officially recognised these women and girls so that they might receive benefits. In **Angola**, for example, the DDR program limits assistance to the insurgent National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and government soldiers at the exclusion of women and girls in their camps.

It is often left to initiatives by international organisations and local NGOs to care for women and child ex-combatants. For example, in **Sudan**, UNICEF ran a program to disarm young children—many of whom had been abducted—and reintegrated them into schools. There is increasing recognition of the need to target all children with reintegration assistance. Programmes that benefit the youth in a community as a whole help reduce tensions that may arise between young civilians and their ex-combatant counterparts.

WOMEN AS SUPPORTERS

Women often play supporting roles during war, and thus they, like combatants, must return to their homes and rebuild their lives. Women and girls who have been part of armed movements, serving as cooks, radio operators, messengers, transporters of ammunitions, medical caregivers and logistical supporters are often sidelined in the post war period. The new skills and knowledge of such women are typically lost, as many return to traditional, pre-conflict roles—often referred to as a “loss of social capital.” In **El Salvador**, women represented 30 percent of all combatants in the opposition movement and participated in equal numbers in DDR.¹³ But in most cases, women returned to the traditional role of mother and wife in the home, despite acquiring new skills.

WOMEN AS FAMILY OF COMBATANTS

In many cases, women and families of fighters may have been uprooted to follow their male relatives during war. In cases where the war has been particularly lengthy and fought across a region, male fighters are often found to have two or even three wives and families. In general, as noted above, many DDR programs do not recognise the importance of including the legal or customary wives of fighters in the planning process. A World Bank report notes,

“Demobilisation and reintegration programs often treat the ex-combatant as the sole beneficiary instead of seeing the ex-combatant and his family as a beneficiary unit. Thus, the needs of families are often neglected.”¹⁴ In some cases, such as in **Burundi**, wives of government soldiers receive assistance, but wives of opposition fighters do not. In general, as benefits packages are only distributed to the individual combatant, families do not receive needed support. There is increasing dialogue in the international policy community regarding the idea of community-based DDR in which benefits are not focused solely on the combatant.

WOMEN IN COMMUNITIES

Following a return home from years of war, women and men in communities face a multitude of challenges. The tensions between families and returning ex-combatants can be extreme, and domestic violence is reported to increase in the aftermath of war. In **Rwanda**, laws regarding inheritance and other advances for women's rights have been passed while former fighters remained in neighbouring countries, creating tension in the home when a husband returns. In other instances, war changes the roles of men and women within the home and community. If women have been part of the war effort, they may face a disapproving family upon their return home, as reported in **El Salvador** and **Eritrea**, or may be less likely to accept traditional domestic roles. Women who were not participants in the war but provided for their families, as in **Guatemalan** refugee camps, have also taken on new tasks and decision-making roles—another potential source of post war tension.

Finally, there may be resentment toward male and female ex-combatants returning home with DDR benefits, while the communities—the non-combatants—receive nothing. In **Mozambique**, USAID was concerned that providing assistance to 90,000 former fighters and not to refugees and internally displaced persons would prove an obstacle to sustainable peace.¹⁵

5. HOW DO WOMEN CONTRIBUTE TO DDR?

Traditionally, women are not involved in decision-making surrounding security issues or in the design

or implementation of DDR programming. It is important for women's voices to be raised, as actions and decisions on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration have a direct impact on their lives and on the possibilities for achieving a sustainable peace.

Women's organisations throughout the world have begun to take action at various phases of the disarmament and reintegration process, as they have seen a need for their work. The peace process itself is one of the most important points to design a strategy for disarmament and long-term peace. One of the most effective, yet difficult, means to ensure that the needs, concerns and ideas of women—combatants and non-combatants alike—are included in a DDR process is to have women included, and a gender perspective incorporated, in peace negotiations.

Even when women do not explicitly advance a gender perspective in negotiations, their mere presence can mean the difference between women's inclusion and consultation in the DDR process and complete exclusion, as shown in two contrasting cases: In **El Salvador**, women headed armed groups and participated in negotiations. In **Sierra Leone**, women fought alongside men, but were not leaders in the forces. In **El Salvador**, 30 percent of combatants disarmed were women, and most received land and other benefits.¹⁶ In **Sierra Leone**, of an estimated 12,000 girl fighters, only 500 were disarmed or had any access to reintegration benefits.¹⁷ As a result of their exclusion and with no alternative for survival, young girls—many with babies—led riots in Freetown in 2002 and are reported to have joined guerrilla fighters in Liberia.

When women are not at the peace table, they often organise and begin campaigns during the peace process and once disarmament has begun. Women often begin to raise awareness of the importance of effective disarmament for their communities through public announcements and campaigns. In **Albania**, for example, women's groups raised such awareness through local conferences and rallies. There is also a need to inform the population that, in cases where weapons collection has not been thorough, violence has recurred and crime has surged. It is particularly important for women to be involved in these programs, as they may have knowledge of arms routes and caches and may be willing to convince

their family members to turn in their weapons or participate in formal DDR (see chapter on SALW). The Mano River women, for example, exchanged information on guerrilla movements, including arms transfers, within and across borders in **Sierra Leone**, **Liberia** and **Guinea**. Their knowledge allowed them to act as facilitators of negotiations, encouraging individuals and groups to lay down their arms.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO DISARMAMENT

Women's organisations have taken a variety of approaches to enhance practical disarmament.

In **Liberia** in the late 1990s, women pressed for disarmament as a precursor to elections. They advertised for women to join the movement across the country and stationed women at every arms collection point. The women encouraged fighters to hand in their weapons and offered them water and sandwiches. Estimates indicate that some 80 percent of weapons were collected in 1996 prior to the election.¹⁸ Although Liberia returned to war and another peace agreement is currently in place, women remain active on issues of DDR, pressuring Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Jacques Paul Klein, to address women's needs and concerns in the program.

In **Albania**, local women's groups worked with UNDP and UNIFEM on disarmament. First, they organised public awareness events and capacity-building workshops for women's organisations to address the specific challenges and concerns that the presence of weapons pose to women. Subsequently, through local conferences and rallies, they appealed to the public to "Stop Guns" and sponsored tapestry design competitions under the slogan "Life is better without guns."¹⁹ In towns where the project was implemented, around 6,000 weapons and 150 tons of ammunition were collected in exchange for community-based development and public works projects.²⁰ Due to the success of the program, similar projects were launched in two other Albanian districts, leading to a total of 12,000 weapons and 200 tons of ammunition destroyed.²¹

In other parts of the world, women have been active in disarmament as well. In **Bougainville**, women's organisations trained women to walk alone in the

jungle to seek out and persuade fighters to disarm. In **Mali**, women were credited with organizing the first public “burning of arms” to launch a successful weapons collection program.

WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO REINTEGRATION

Women are particularly important during the reintegration phase. As combatants return home—both men and women—the troubles truly begin. After years of combat and trauma, it is difficult for ex-combatants to return to a “normal” lifestyle, and it is equally complicated for the receiving communities to accept the returned combatants. Women’s organisations have actively assisted men and women to make the transition from war to peace. Without an **exit strategy**—a term used in the international community to mean a plan for withdrawal from a conflict zone—women have a particularly important interest in facilitating the transition to peace.

Because women’s organisations are generally active at the community level, they are particularly aware of the needs of the community and the former fighters and have developed programs to address them. These non-governmental projects have included counselling to address trauma and psychological issues, health and medical assistance and education and skills trainings. In **Mozambique**, demobilised women and men, former soldiers and disabled veterans worked together to form ProPaz, which provides peace education in the community, conducts interventions in violent outbreaks at the local level, and promotes the reintegration of women combatants locally and nationally.²²

Some programs, such as ProPaz, may service all members of the population, but in certain cases, women have also focused on particularly vulnerable groups who have less access to benefits. In **Sierra Leone**, women worked specifically with child soldiers as a group in need of assistance and developed various projects to work with children in their post war adjustment. In **Nicaragua**, women’s organisations reached out specifically to women ex-combatants, providing them with “a safe place to exchange views, to dream, to get organised and to build confidence.”²³

6. WHAT INTERNATIONAL POLICIES EXIST?

The UN and other international organisations have begun to take steps to include women in DDR program design and implementation.

In October 2000, the UN Security Council passed **Resolution 1325** to address the issue of women, peace and security broadly and focus on DDR in particular. The resolution “encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants.”²⁴ It also calls upon organisations to adopt “measures that support local women’s peace initiatives... and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreement.”²⁵ Women worldwide are encouraged to call upon organisations and agencies designing and implementing DDR programs in their countries to adhere to this international mandate to recognise and include women.

Building upon Resolution 1325, the UN **Department for Disarmament Affairs** released several briefing papers in 2001 on the importance of adopting a gender perspective when working on disarmament issues, including DDR programming. In particular, the Department notes the gender-specific impact of conflict on women, the nuances of women’s roles in war and peace and the need for a holistic approach to DDR that addresses not only combatants but also families and the community. With regard to girl combatants in particular, **UNICEF** now works with other UN agencies and NGOs to address the needs of children and young women in their DDR planning. Additionally, **UNIFEM** has launched a web portal to compile information and lessons learned with regard to women and DDR.

Traditionally, women have been considered a “special group” or “vulnerable population.” As a result of Resolution 1325 and increasing visibility of women’s peace-building activities, however, there is increasing acknowledgment that women can be a critical component of successful DDR.

The **G-8 Foreign Ministers** issued a statement on DDR at their 2002 meeting in Canada, noting,

“There is a particular need to recognise the special requirements of women and child combatants.”²⁶ And in 2002 the UN released a study by a **Group of Governmental Experts** that noted, “The successful implementation of peace agreements, including their disarmament and demobilisation provisions, requires targeting disarmament and non-proliferation education and training to the specific needs of diverse target groups...,” including civilian women and children.²⁷

Finally, the **World Bank** has conducted several recent studies that recognise that women must be consulted and involved in the DDR process as former combatants and supporters. They also note the strong capacity of women as facilitators for a peaceful transition.²⁸

While the rhetoric is strong and more research is being done to highlight women’s experiences, there are still very few examples of the successful implementation of these new recommendations.

7. TAKING STRATEGIC ACTION: WHAT CAN WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS DO?

1. Coordinate with international organisations and, when possible, with the gender advisor in the United Nations mission to ensure inclusion of women and girls in the official DDR.
2. Monitor demobilisation centres and facilities to ensure that women and girl combatants are in protected areas and that they have access to basic medical and sanitary facilities and materials.
3. Begin campaigns to:
 - raise public awareness of the importance of disarmament and reintegration;
 - prepare communities for the return of fighters; and
 - conduct a survey in the community to assess the needs of former fighters and civilians.
4. Represent the needs of the community to the local and national authorities and to the international agencies financing and implementing humanitarian and reintegration programs.
5. Reach out to all fighters:
 - informing them of the potential changes in their community;
 - addressing their expectations; and
 - noting potential difficulties they might encounter upon their return home.
6. Reach out to women fighters to:
 - raise their awareness about the needs of women in the communities as well as their own role in the peace process; and
 - encourage them to join women’s organisations and help to bridge the divide between the fighters and the community.
7. Design projects and programs for former fighters to:
 - provide community incentives to disarm; and
 - provide skills trainings, income generation, psychosocial counselling, reconciliation programmes or educational sessions.
8. Create community-based networks or centres to help family members of returning ex-combatants cope with the changes.
9. Document your reintegration programs and disseminate the information widely so that international donors are made aware of them.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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ACRONYMS

DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

ENDNOTES

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- ⁴ The World Bank. *Demobilisation and Reintegration Programming in The World Bank*. Washington, DC: Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, The World Bank, 2003.
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