

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION OF
EX-COMBATANTS: UNDERSTANDING
AND ADDRESSING KEY CHALLENGES**

Reintegration Briefing Paper 1.2

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Socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants – Understanding and addressing key challenges

Reintegration Briefing Paper – 1.2

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Author's Profile

Charlotte Watson is a Senior Programme Officer for Alert's Peacebuilding Issues Programme. With a focus on security and justice, her work seeks to ensure that field level research, particularly related to security sector reform (SSR), public security and reintegration issues, is linked to policy debates at both national and international levels. She led Alert's work on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) for the expert seminar on 'The EU and DDR: Supporting Security and Development', held in Brussels in 2006, with the Finnish Presidency, and co-authored the briefing of the same name. Together with Alert's Peace and Economy team, Charlotte has developed a multi-country project aimed at strengthening knowledge and practice around the socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants. In addition she provides support and input to Alert's high level training course on Reintegration.

Prior to joining International Alert, Charlotte worked for the West Africa programme of Save the Children UK and for Edinburgh Global Partnerships in Uganda. Charlotte holds an MSc in Violence, Conflict and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and an MA in Politics from the University of Edinburgh.

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1. Introduction

International Alert is seeking to build on previous initiatives to inform and advance EU thinking on DDR.¹ This paper is the second of two briefing papers² produced as part of a year-long initiative aimed at reinvigorating the debate on the reintegration of ex-combatants, and in particular socio-economic considerations. The overall goal of the initiative has been to provide an exchange platform for the diverse range of stakeholders who need to work together effectively to tackle the complex challenge of reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life, and to catalyse further thinking and action in this area.

The aim of this paper, and of the earlier one, is to advance the debate on socio-economic reintegration. This brief is not intended to replace other documents that provide a detailed explanation of socio-economic reintegration. Instead it is designed to offer some key insights into issues affecting the Reintegration debate.

This paper is based on ongoing research by Alert, including background research in Burundi, Liberia and Nepal. It is the finalisation of a draft paper used to inform discussions at an Alert Roundtable of the same name, held in Brussels in November 2009.

The paper addresses the following issues:

- Why are lessons not being learnt?
- What does this mean? Key issues that need to be addressed
- Recommendations: Enhancing the role of the European Union

1 These include co-hosting an experts seminar on 'The EU and DDR: Supporting Security and Development', in Brussels on 13 July 2006 together with the Finnish Presidency and a briefing of the same name, available at http://www.international-alert.org/pdf/EU_DDR_Aug_2006.pdf.

2 The first paper, 'Socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants: What Role for the European Union?', is available on International Alert's website at <http://www.international-alert.org/publications/>

2. Why are lessons not being learnt?

The socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants is a complex and often costly process. It involves helping ex-combatants to move away from the roles and positions that defined them during the conflict to identifying themselves as citizens and members of local communities. While this process is complicated by many factors, including how ex-combatants came to fight in the first place, one of the key elements in determining whether they are willing to put down their guns and return to a civilian way of life is whether or not there are appropriate economic and livelihood opportunities open to them.

Over the last decade there has been considerable thinking and research into DDR processes more generally and into socio-economic reintegration specifically, resulting in improved programmes and initiatives.³ However, despite numerous attempts to develop best practice guidelines and ‘lessons learnt’ processes and the availability of extensive material and research, the same problems continue to arise. That such problems persist despite fairly broad awareness of them raises the difficult question, ‘why aren’t lessons learnt?’

If this question continues to be overlooked there is a risk that resources will be wasted and peace processes will be compromised. Many problems derive from the inherently insecure environments in which Reintegration programmes are implemented but there are some issues that can be addressed. These include the following:

- Standards have been developed (such as the UN Integrated DDR Standards) but not everyone involved in implementing or running DDR programmes has agreed to them or adheres to them. For example, the World Bank and the UN, which are often the main funders and/or coordinators of socio-economic reintegration activities, have very different views on what these activities could or should look like.
- Fundamentally different beliefs exist about what DDR should be about and whether it is driven by politics, a development agenda or a technical approach and whether reintegration, which is a long-term process, actually fits/should fit within a DDR programme.
- The structures of political accountability applied to reintegration projects might be relevant in the donor country but often don’t work/apply in target countries. However, those who are implementing projects report to their home government or agency. As a result they are held accountable for whether the money has been spent, which in turn is often used as an indicator that the project was ‘successful’.
- There is a fear of politics as well as of political accountability that manifests itself in a desire not to get involved. However, it is impossible to get involved in issues and programming related to peace and conflict without becoming involved in politics. For example, ‘gender sensitivity’ inherently implies a political stance, which may be directly challenging to national or cultural norms.

³ See for example The UN Integrated Standards on DDR and the UN DDR Resource Centre, available at <http://www.unddr.org/>; The International DDR Congress (CIDDR in Spanish), held in Cartagena de Indias in May 2009, available at <http://ciddr.org/areas-ciddr/que/>; The Stockholm Initiative on DDR (SIDDR) – a year- long process convened by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November 2004, available at <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/4890>

There is a need to create the space for an honest conversation about why things go wrong which allows for admissions of mistakes that were made, problems that were encountered and things that didn't go as planned and/or anticipated. Currently, project evaluations are often conducted purely because they are required and therefore they may gloss over failings and mistakes.

In the final analysis it seems that many of the problems encountered, and the difficulty in learning lessons from them, do not stem, from the actions of those entrusted with implementing DDR programmes and Reintegration activities. Instead, the institutional setting within which they work appears to be more at fault.

It would appear that the key to better practice lies in the reform of the international institutions such as the World Bank and UNDP that support and carry out DDR. Or, at a minimum, this is an area that falls within the scope of donors, implementers and institutional actors to address. Following from this it is also important for donors themselves to adopt a critical view of how their own actions and agendas contribute to the failings of the international institutions that manage large-scale reintegration activities. It is they, ultimately, who make up these institutions and they who have significant leverage -- should they exercise the political will -- to influence the direction of policy and practice. However, past experiences, including the case of the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP)⁴ in the Great Lakes region, suggest that donors are most likely to contribute funding to a multi-donor trust fund and then relinquish a large share of responsibility for how this is then managed and spent.

⁴ The Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) was a multi-agency effort undertaken from 2002 to 2009 to support the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in the greater Great Lakes region of Central Africa. It operated in seven countries: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. See www.mdrp.org for more. MDRP's regional approach was initially seen as a step forward. However the program ran into numerous problems, one of the major ones its lack of focus on disarmament, due to the World Bank's policy not to provide direct support to disarming ex-combatants. Bilateral donors and other UN agencies were therefore left to finance and tackle this aspect by integrating projects into national DDR plans. Such a situation tended to compromise the regional approach and meant that disarmament was not adequately handled. Furthermore MDRP was plagued by delays, bureaucracy and political difficulties.

3. What does this mean? Key issues that need to be addressed

- *How to narrow the gap between what is agreed upon and what is actually done.* There will always be gaps between policy and practice. However, the fact that it is possible to identify many of the gaps yet be seemingly unable to address them suggests there are questions about institutions and how they work, the kind of standards that are adhered to, the levels and lines of accountability, and monitoring and evaluation processes. For example, donors who support a DDR process by channelling money through a multi-donor trust fund are making a trade-off. By providing support to a trust fund, donors are essentially abdicating responsibility and accountability for how their funding is spent in return for the convenience of another institution managing the money and coordinating activities. While coordination of activities is, of course, essential, there needs to be a balance between this and the provision of flexible support for initiatives based on the evolving situation, for which donors are directly accountable. When a DDR programme fails or does not go in the direction that donors hoped, it is too late for them to lament the approach they took.
- *Thinking through what ‘no one-size-fits-all’ actually means and taking a tailor-made approach seriously.* References to DDR programmes are commonly accompanied by the adage that ‘no-one-size-fits-all. However, too often this is not actually taken through to its logical conclusion. Far more time needs to be spent understanding the specific country context that a programme is being designed for and implemented in. In addition it calls for:
 - Nuancing the division of roles and responsibilities and especially the question of who ‘owns’ DDR according to the context, the nature of the conflict and the timing of the programme. Sometimes it is logical for the government to be in charge but if the government is non-functional the international institutions will need to be more present and more visible;
 - Tailoring to meet different needs in different parts of the country, among different groups whether their differences are defined by their relationship to the conflict (ex-fighters, returning IDPs, those who were not displaced) or by other dividing lines such as ethnicity, gender, age and urban/rural;
- *Seeking to balance targeted vs. enlarged approaches.* It seems obvious that a socio-economic reintegration process is flawed if it fails to look at community and wider stakeholder groups and their needs. However, what does this actually mean on the ground? How can this be done without making DDR limitless, hence resulting in ‘mission creep’ and an overstretched budget because the target group has at least doubled in size? DDR, and particularly reintegration, needs to be understood within the broader peacebuilding context and must work without colonizing the whole process. It should act as a bridge between immediate and future problems but it is only one part of that bridge.
- *Timeframes and planning.* Substantial time is needed to do the groundwork required for Reintegration programming and also to ensure that initiatives are followed up. This is the case at both the local and national levels. However, while this is widely acknowledged, in practice a balancing act occurs between the reality on the ground and what is practical vs. the political reality of the donor government under pressure to show the taxpayer tangible results. This may be one of the reasons why it is easier to fund the disarmament and demobilisation aspects of DDR: they are quantifiable and it is possible to say ‘we collected x number of guns and demobilised x number of people’ whereas reintegration is a complex social and economic process that takes time and is not easy to measure.

- ***Regional and International context.*** DDR does not take place in a vacuum. In reality it involves a national government or body which has relations with neighbouring governments, regional bodies, donors, international NGOs and civil society actors amongst others. Each of these will have their own agenda, ideas and entry points to the discussion. If these relationships, pressures and interests are not acknowledged then the resulting programme will be fatally flawed. In some cases these dynamics are more evident than in others and therefore one logically would assume they would be acknowledged. This is particularly true when a conflict has had regional dimensions such as in the Mano River region of West Africa. However, the DDR programmes implemented in Sierra Leone, Liberia and (ongoing) in Côte d'Ivoire were not well connected, offered different incentives and gave birth to the phrase 'DDR tourism'.

4. Recommendations: Enhancing the role of the EU and others

The EU is able to bring together a bandwidth of capacities to conduct a full range of actions needed to support DDR, ranging from crisis management and peace building to support to democratic governance processes, the rule of law and human rights, and long-term development. Efforts should be made to mainstream DDR into the various EU activities in a partner country.⁵

As a major actor in the security sphere,⁶ the EU has competencies and funding instruments which can be used to implement security, development, governance and justice activities. Combined effectively together, and reinforced through political dialogue, these can play a fundamental role in driving and sustaining the kind of support that is necessary to ensure long-term reintegration and contribute to improving human security more broadly.

In addition, as a political actor, the EU should take responsibility for these issues and for reaching out to establish links with actors such as the World Bank and the UN. However, there is also a need to be realistic about what can actually be achieved given constraints on human resources and funding amongst other things.

The EU, member states and others involved in planning and implementing Reintegration activities need to:

- Be honest about where their priorities lie and what they are seeking to achieve by supporting and/or funding Reintegration activities.
- Explore the possibility of seconding suitably qualified staff to Trust Funds in order to support the implementation and monitoring and evaluation of initiatives.
- Explore how to work towards an approach that benefits a wider stakeholder group and is more likely to ensure buy-in from communities rather than purely targeting ex-combatants, keeping in mind that a broader approach has significant programming and budget implications.
- Develop a process by which technical planning can take place before a peace agreement and that allows for significant information to be gathered in the early stages. This might involve engaging with other actors, such as NGOs already working on the ground with established relationships and a good grasp of the situation at the local, as well as national, levels.
- Pay greater attention to EU and member states' role in peace agreement negotiations, which is the place where DDR processes are agreed upon. Solutions cannot be imposed but information can be provided and facilitation offered.

5 The EU concept for support to DDR, approved by the European Commission on 14 December 2006 and by the Council of the European Union on 11 December 2006. See http://www.eplo.org/documents/EU_Joint_concept_DDR.pdf

6 To date, there have been 17 ESDP missions (some ongoing and some completed) around the world. These missions cover a broad spectrum including military operations (e.g. EUFOR Althea), security sector reform (e.g. EUSEC DR Congo), institution-building (e.g. EUJUST Lex Iraq) as well as police and rule of law missions.

- Be prepared to support the creation of employment opportunities for ex-combatants immediately when they come out of cantonment sites. Infrastructure projects and similar initiatives can be a good way of providing ex-combatants with cash-for-work opportunities rather than just offering them cash, which is generally considered to be an undesirable practice.

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