

# Reconstructing Gender Identity for Child Combatants in Post-Conflict African Societies

*Laura Woodbury*

**D**isarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programming has become a popular tool for returning child combatants to post-conflict societies. These programs have not traditionally been sensitive to gender issues, and often apply a “one-size-fits all”<sup>1</sup> philosophy of programming to all combatants. This has resulted in programming that largely excludes females. Due to a lack of allowances for the special circumstances of many females, DDR programming has been ineffective at including and addressing female combatants. Consequently, DDR programs have focused on male populations by default. Despite this tendency, there have been very few concerted efforts or considerations taken to address male populations in a *gender-specific* manner or for the particular needs they may require when reintegrating into post-conflict society. Therefore the “one-size-fits-all” methodology fails both genders and creates homogenized programming that falls short through a failure to address any of former combatants’ gender-specific needs. In this paper I will discuss the construction of masculinity within the context of warfare and how it is associated with violence within combat. I will then argue that effective DDR programming should work to reconstruct masculine identities appropriate for post-conflict societies, in order to promote stability, and ultimately a flourishing community.

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Shepler, “Post-War Trajectories for Girls Associated with the Fighting Forces in Sierra Leone,” *Politique Africaine* 88 (2002): 49–62.

---

*Originally from rural North Carolina, Laura fostered an interest in International Development at an early age. At age 11, her first airplane flight was to visit relatives living in Kenya. Travel became an integral part of her life, pushing her to pursue an undergraduate degree in Non-Profit Administration, followed by her M.A. at American University in Ethics, Peace and Global Affairs. Laura’s experience in Africa and her interest in gender issues, led her to pursue studies in the effects of conflict on women and children. Her research has focused on the need for gender-specific approaches to post-conflict programming for children and youth.*

*DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMING*

While the experiences of combatants are highly diverse, generally many are exposed to, and often forced to commit, extraordinarily gruesome violence. Desensitization to violence is necessary to create effective combatants, and is often accomplished by subjecting combatants to a dehumanization of the enemy and recurring exposure to mutilation and murder.<sup>2</sup> Some combatants are even forced to brutally murder their own family. It is fairly common for combatants to use their relationships with fellow soldiers and commanders to attempt to reconstruct their familial structure and build bonds that are difficult to break post-conflict. Many times drugs are used to numb combatants' senses and increase stamina. Creating an addiction can also reinforce the combatants' loyalties to their commander or dealer.<sup>3</sup>

This brief review of the experiences of forced combatants is only the beginning of a larger and extremely complex issue, but it provides an informed basis for discussion. What happens to these soldiers after the fighting stops, or if they are removed from the armed forces? How can they be reintegrated into society after exposure to, and participation in, combat?

Ex-combatants often experience similar symptoms to what Western societies label Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This manifests itself in many ways: disassociation from feelings, avoidance of situations that provide reminders of traumatic events, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, nightmares and flashbacks, lethargy, confusion, fear, aggression, social isolation, and more.<sup>4</sup> The largest concern for those promoting peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts is the perpetuation of violence at the hands of combatants who have been made into effective soldiers.

Many international organizations have sought to address the issue of soldier reintegration and rehabilitation, particularly in the last 20 years. Although there is some consensus that many things – including many aspects of a healthy childhood – are permanently lost for these ex-combatants, programs seek to successfully reintegrate them into society, and in the most successful outcome, reunify them with the appropriate family members. Several strategies have been utilized to achieve this outcome. The most prominent, popular, and, arguably, effective method is Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs.

---

<sup>2</sup> P. Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> A. Honwana and E. C. Green, "Indigenous Healing of War-Affected Children in Africa," IK Note no. 10, World Bank (1999). Accessed Fall 2008 via Ebsco Online Research Database.

Disarmament is defined as:

The collection of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone. It frequently entails the assembly and cantonment of combatants and development of arms management programs, including their safe storage and sometimes, arms destruction.<sup>5</sup>

Demobilization is the “formal and controlled discharge of soldiers from the army or from an armed group.”<sup>6</sup> Disarmament puts a heavy focus on the removal of weapons while demobilization is the process designed to address the human element of militarization.

Finally, reintegration is the process that aims to help combatants resume life in the community they belonged to prior to combat. This process is vital to community healing and recovery. Often, this involves reunification with family or alternative care providers.<sup>7</sup>

DDR programs have been used in post-conflict reconstruction in locations ranging from Afghanistan to Haiti, but the majority of DDR programming has occurred in Africa. Since 1992, 24 different DDR programs have been implemented on the continent. Programming has continually developed in response to experience within practice, and has been refined through the last two decades, becoming increasingly effective at reintegrating its subjects into peaceful society.<sup>8</sup>

Recognition of the importance of DDR and similar community-focused post-war reconciliation programming has increased in recent years. DDR is designed to address many aspects of post-conflict societies, particularly security concerns. Dealing directly with combatants is a vital part of the reconstruction and rebuilding process. For long-lasting, holistic, and sustainable peace, community healing is vital and would be incomplete without addressing the proper reintegration of combatants.<sup>9</sup> International agencies have been redirecting some of their efforts toward programs that support community healing. Even so, most of these programs have targeted male populations by default – with what Shepler describes as a “one-size-fits-all” method. The World Bank agrees with this sentiment; it recently released a

---

<sup>5</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, “Research Guide for the Child Soldiers Global Report 2004,” 2003. London, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. Accessed 24 October 2009 <[www.child-soldiers.org/document/get?id=739](http://www.child-soldiers.org/document/get?id=739)>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> S. Hanson, “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) in Africa,” 16 February 2007. Accessed Fall 2009 at [www.cfr.org/publication/12650/](http://www.cfr.org/publication/12650/).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

report that identifies a “gender deficit” in DDR programming and encourages the inclusion of a “gender dimension” in all programming.<sup>10</sup>

DDR programming is structured to meet the needs of ex-combatants and their communities following the cessation of conflict. As Shepler and the World Bank suggest, the neglect of gender-specific programming raises serious concerns that need to be addressed. In the following two sections I will focus on the cultural construction of masculinity and discuss how it is manifested within conflict using the extensive research of Barker and Ricardo from their piece on the construction of masculinities for young men in sub-Saharan Africa. This will prepare us for a discussion about the needs of male ex-combatants and how a response to those needs can be integrated into existing DDR programming.

#### *TRADITIONAL MASCULINITIES*

Throughout African history, gender roles within many societies have been prominently defined and understood. Tasks and roles were clearly divided along gender lines, and although there are some exceptions to the rules, most Africans have understood those rules within their specific community context and begun to identify them as norms.<sup>11</sup> For males, this often means a strong focus on achieving status as an adult through the procurement of family and the process of providing for that family.

Although some generalities may be made, it should be clarified that gender is socially constructed and intricately tied to the culture it resides within. Barker and Ricardo emphasize this within their research as well, noting that “. . . specific versions of manhood are socially constructed, fluid over time and across settings, and plural. There is no typical young man in Sub-Saharan Africa and no single version of manhood.”<sup>12</sup> Although this holds true, some consistencies remain useful to explore, and within this paper I will highlight some of the more prominent ideas of masculinity that tend to exist across cultural boundaries in Africa.

#### *Rite of Passage*

For many communities within sub-Saharan Africa there is a specific ceremonial process that males undergo to symbolically make the transition into adulthood.

Many of these rituals include reference to abandoning boyhood in favor of manhood . . . some of the rites include a cathartic

---

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, “Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan,” 2006.

<sup>11</sup> D. J. Bwakili, “Gender Inequality in Africa,” *Contemporary Review* (2001): 270–272.

<sup>12</sup> G. Barker and C. Ricardo, “Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence,” *The Other Half of Gender* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006), 160.

moment of being out-of-control, drunk, or under the control of evil spirits before achieving a defined and mature adult identity.<sup>13</sup>

This ceremony would symbolize a rite of passage from boyhood to adulthood. Within some cultures it may emphasize a specific set of skills tied to the main source of livelihood within that culture. Some emphasized warrior skills, while others focused on agricultural or herding skills,<sup>14</sup> but all rites of passage seemed to focus on some method of provision. Scholars agree this is integral to the ideas of masculinity that exist within sub-Saharan African culture, as well as most cultures of the world.

The main social requirement for achieving manhood in Sub-Saharan Africa – for being a man – is attaining some level of financial independence, employment, or income, and subsequently starting a family. In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, bride price is commonplace, and thus marriage and family formation are directly tied to having income or property.<sup>15</sup>

Barker and Ricardo highlight one of the most consistent measures of manhood within Africa – self-sufficiency and ultimately, familial provision. They go on to discuss how a developing male’s failure to provide for his family can affect his self-perception as well as communal identity. “Men’s social recognition and their sense of manhood suffer when they lack work.”<sup>16</sup>

#### *“Big Man” Culture*

Due to the significant amount of time and effort required when constructing a sustainable livelihood, men in sub-Saharan Africa may not start their own families until they are in their forties.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, among others, power within the community tends to reside in older males. Manhood is often tied to the perceptions of the community, and almost “granted” by elders in the community.<sup>18</sup> Manhood is not only earned through the actions of the individual, but also requires the approval of the entire community. “A near-universal feature of manhood is that it must be achieved – it requires behaving and acting in specific ways before one’s social group.”<sup>19</sup> Barker and Ricardo argue that as much as transition to manhood is about achieving an

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>14</sup> Barker and Ricardo, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Barker and Ricardo 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 160.

economic goal, it also centers on social aspects like being perceived by peers as having achieved “malehood.”

For this reason, many observe an internal struggle between the youth and the elders in some communities.

The concentration of power in the hands of the generations of older men continues to affect people in Kenya and in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, leading to ongoing power struggles between older and younger men.<sup>20</sup>

Some research suggests the existence of what has been called “Big Man Culture,” an emphasis on the power of elders within a community.

. . . A remark that Sub-Saharan African “culture was strong on kinship ties” introduces a defense of “big man” culture, patronage, and the continuing (beneficial) persistence of ‘the relationship between elders and non-elders.’<sup>21</sup>

Masculinity in sub-Saharan Africa is certainly not monolithic, but cultural consistencies tell us that masculine identity is a significant part of many cultures, and that it is important for youth to transition into adulthood through the achievement of self-sufficiency. Additionally, we find that power is often held by the elders of a community and granted to the youth once self-sufficiency is achieved.

#### *THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY WITHIN CONFLICT*

Within the context of conflict, certain elements of traditional masculinities are emphasized or adjusted to support the machine of war. Often masculinities become tied to violence through various social constructs.

“Struggle masculinity,”<sup>22</sup> Barker and Ricardo say, is a phenomenon of conflict. Frequently within cultures that have political grievance, the idea of the male “struggling” against a political enemy is glorified. They describe how this idea of masculinity is commonly elevated above traditional ideas of manhood and maleness, and how the archetypal male is redefined to one involved in this kind of a political struggle. Within conflicts where political motivations are less obvious, Barker and Ricardo claim, masculine identity is revealed through another capacity – a struggle for power.

Some armed insurgencies may have clear ideological motives, but many are directly related to an attempt by young men to

---

<sup>20</sup> Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis 2006, 221.

<sup>21</sup> P. Richards, “Young Men and Gender in War and Postwar Reconstruction: Some Comparative Findings from Liberia and Sierra Leone,” in *The Other Half of Gender* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006), 195.

<sup>22</sup> Barker and Ricardo 2006, 165–166.

acquire power, question the power of groups of older men, and live up to a specific version of manhood.<sup>23</sup>

Barker and Ricardo go on to say this can often lead to the most brutal and violent conflicts. "The worst violence seems to happen when there is a political vacuum and violence becomes an end of itself, providing young men with power, sexual partners, and income."<sup>24</sup> Masculinity is being used to fuel conflict through the pursuit of power – either political or economic. Whether men are striving to meet community expectations of an engagement in "struggle" or to achieve another level of power and self-sufficiency through direct violence, they desire to transition into adulthood and achieve an ideal masculine identity within their culture and community.

Both methods demonstrate that many conflicts can be directly connected to the masculine identity. In fact, it can easily be shown that conflict and violence are consistently – almost exclusively – perpetrated by males. I believe this supports an assumption that conflict and violence are generally associated with masculinity. The very terminology is often directly associated to male-specific involvement. Sommers and Jacobsen both agree; within their research they found that males are, if not actually the primary, generally perceived as the primary initiators of warfare and violence across the continent.<sup>25</sup> Jacobsen's research found that "men commit acts of violence in far greater numbers than women."<sup>26</sup> Theidon, in her piece on masculinities in conflict, argues that the very term "combatant" has male connotations.

The figure of the "combatant" has been so over-determined that gender – whether male or female, or other – has simply been shoved into the background. To be a combatant was to be male, and thus "gender" was not an issue. The programs were designed around a generic figure.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, regardless of the realities of war, the term "combatant," and conflict in general, have male undertones.

As just established, masculinity can easily be tied to the initiation of conflict through the valuing of a "struggle" masculinity in a political sense, and through the male struggle for power. But what causes male populations to "struggle" for power? In situations where economic opportunities are scarce,

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>25</sup> M. Sommers, "Fearing Africa's Young Men: Male Youth, Conflict, Urbanization, and the Case of Rwanda," in *The Other Half of Gender* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006), 137-138.

<sup>26</sup> K. Jacobsen, "Men's Issues in Development," in *The Other Half of Gender* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006), 2.

<sup>27</sup> K. Theidon, "Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia," *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (2009): 30.

males can struggle to transition into adulthood through traditional processes. In these situations violence can be used either to assert power or for economic gain. Some researchers have pointed out how a disproportionate emphasis on females in development may have led to the marginalization of males, making it difficult for them to meet the traditional expectations of provision. "This marginalization has led to disempowerment. Men's efforts to reassert themselves include, in some cases, turning to violence to reassert their masculinity."<sup>28</sup> Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis argue that conflict can come from men trapped in a place of disempowerment as they seek to find alternate methods of achieving manhood within their communities. Barker and Ricardo agree that conflict can take the place of nonviolent methods of reaching self-sufficiency. "Some young men saw participating in insurgency as a viable economic activity in the face of rural poverty."<sup>29</sup>

This line of thought can also be found in discussions regarding education. Although males may be provided access to secondary education, if they are unable to find sufficient employment, there remain populations of educated youth who are frustrated by their inability to become self-sufficient despite the promise of employment often made to youth with an education.

There is no question that development work has focused heavily on "vulnerable" populations, particularly in the last few decades. This causes one to question whether this focus has had the undesired effect of marginalizing male populations, especially young males seeking self-sufficiency, and has effected the use of violence as an alternate method of achieving adulthood. This would be an interesting in-depth topic for further research.

Within the context of conflict there has been an attempt by key actors to connect concepts of traditional masculine identity to warfare. Most blatantly, this can be seen in the use of methods similar to the traditional rites of passage in the induction of combatants into military units.

Nearly all armed movements and wars involve some kind of initiation ritual, which can involve the use of violence against family members and threats of murder for noncompliance. Many insurgencies have tapped into traditional socialization of young men as warriors, using elements of these rites in their own, brutal indoctrinations.<sup>30</sup>

The symbolic nature of the traditional rite of passage is utilized in the context of conflict to empower males through the use of violence as a proxy for alternative methods of achieving manhood. Masculinity is reconstructed within warfare to include the use of violence as a means to achieve power.

---

<sup>28</sup> Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis 2006, 220.

<sup>29</sup> Barker and Ricardo 2006, 174.

<sup>30</sup> Barker and Ricardo 2006, 173.

At the most basic level, boys involved in brutal armed insurgencies become big men by being in control of a setting and being able to exert violence on those around them. In addition to survival, they achieve and wield power. Young men who become combatants are often bombarded with violent images of manhood, whether in the form of violent films, gangsta rap, or the idolization of big men such as Charles Taylor. Some observers of conflicts suggest that the violence feels like a performance by young men who are acting out a violent version of manhood and seeking to instill fear in a terrified audience. They are acting out a socially recognized role of manhood taken to its extreme.<sup>31</sup>

Conflict provides the opportunity for alternative interpretations of masculinity, particularly in situations where traditional ideas of masculinity and malehood are under threat from lack of economic opportunity. Frustrated populations seeking alternative methods of transitioning into adulthood can find options within the context of conflict, making them prime targets for militant leadership as well as viable candidates for initiating conflict themselves.

#### *RECONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY?*

For conflicts in which adulthood has been “achieved” through the assertion of violence and the forcible obtainment of “power,” masculinity is arguably redefined. Masculinity becomes intricately tied to violence and the use of force to achieve power and economic or political gain. Within conflict, especially intractable or particularly long wars, violence can become normalized within society and can become an acceptable way of achieving and maintaining a masculine identity. Barker and Ricardo point out that violence is a largely learned behavior. “This violent behavior is reinforced by social structures at the community level and sometimes at the family level, it is learned violence — learned by modeling, reinforcement, shame, overt threats, and coercion.”<sup>32</sup> Post-conflict societies seeking sustainable peace and community healing need to eradicate the normalized use of violence and disconnect the use of violence from masculinity. Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis argue that “the concept of masculinity should be reconstructed to fit new socioeconomic realities, taking into account women’s empowerment, migratory labor, HIV/AIDS, and

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Barker and Ricardo 2006, 175.

unemployment.”<sup>33</sup> These two take it a step further; not only should masculinity be redefined as nonviolent, but within a new context, accounting for shifts in the roles of women and considering the socioeconomic realities of the time and location.

This is especially true considering the threat of hyper-violent masculinity to women in post-conflict societies. Zuckerman and Greenberg argue that violence should not only be disassociated with masculinity for the sake of sustainable peace, but in order to pursue more gender-equitable and flourishing post-conflict states.

Post-conflict reconstruction often requires protection of these rights of women and girls, because male demobilized soldiers are accustomed to life in military sub-culture (often involving extreme forms of abuse of women, including rape, forced “marriages” and sexual slavery). Accustomed to the use of force, empowered by the possession and exercise of weapons, often searching for a role in the post-conflict economy, and prone to alcohol consumption that is linked to violence against women, ex-combatants are frequently brutal and unfamiliar with respectful, equitable gender relations.<sup>34</sup>

Hyper-violent masculinities are detrimental to post-conflict societies for a variety of reasons; therefore it is important to properly reconstruct masculinity in a post-conflict society. This effort may extend beyond DDR programming, but DDR is certainly a necessary first step. As the primary programming seeking to transition combatants from military to civilian, DDR programming should seek to adequately address violent behavior and eradicate its use as much as possible. Theidon, during her extensive research in Colombia with male combatants, sought “to understand how violent forms of masculinity are forged and sustained and how DDR programs might more effectively ‘disarm masculinity’ following armed conflict.” Theidon’s research, in combination with the efforts of Zuckerman and Greenberg to analyze gender dynamics in post-conflict reconstruction, is the basis of the next phase of our discussion.

#### *ADDRESSING GENDER IN DDR*

Addressing gender within disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programming is not an entirely new idea. With an increase in female

---

<sup>33</sup> M. Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and P. Francis, “Collapsing Livelihoods and the Crisis of Masculinity in Rural Kenya,” in *The Other Half of Gender* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006), 220.

<sup>34</sup> E. Zuckerman and M. Greenberg, “The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An Analytical Framework for Policymakers,” in *Gender and Development* 12, no. 3, Peacebuilding and Reconstruction (2004): 71-72.

combatants, there was a significant effort to develop ways to address females through DDR in gender-specific ways. It is only recently that there has been any significant discussion around methods of properly addressing males in the context of masculinity and gender, and disposing of the “gender-neutral” or “gender-deficient” approaches of the past.

The research completed around gender has produced lists of recommendations about integrating gender into programming. The Cape Town Principles and the Integrated DDR Standards produced by the UN have both emphasized the need to use a gendered approach to DDR, but for the most part this has targeted females. Theidon argues for a more holistic and comprehensive approach to gender that includes approaching both males and females with gender-specific programming that can address many of the needs of post-conflict societies.<sup>35</sup> Even though DDR sufficiently achieves its primary goals related to military and security objectives (e.g., the disarmament of combatants, their formal demobilization, and sometimes their effective reintegration), it has been arguably ineffective at social goals such as properly preparing combatants to reenter peaceful society. Some programs have included extensive rehabilitation efforts through short-term case management and counseling, but lack of resources and limited mandates limit many other programs. This has resulted in many combatants continuing to demonstrate violent tendencies and a continued struggle for power. Zuckerman and Greenberg agree:

DDR’s male focus perpetuates gender stereotypes, unfairly discriminates against women, ex-combatants and others who supported combat, and hampers women from contributing to economic growth. Instead DDR programs should support the demobilization of women and men with comparable levels of assistance, prepare men for respectful nonviolent household and community relations, and meet gender-specific needs with support; for example, counseling and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases in the case of rape survivors, as suggested in the next section. Finally, they should support families and communities to welcome and reintegrate returnees – a task that often requires contributions by women and attention to gender roles in households and communities.<sup>36</sup>

Zuckerman and Greenberg emphasize the importance of DDR programming in properly addressing and reconstructing masculine identities. As I stated, this is important not only for its security implications, but for community-level concerns and gender dynamics. Theidon believes gender

---

<sup>35</sup> Theidon 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Zuckerman and Greenberg 2004, 74.

redefinition and understanding should be heavily integrated into programming in such a way that men not only reconstruct their ideas about masculinity, but about female identity as well. "Adding gender to DDR programs should include examining the stereotypes that former combatants articulate and that DDR programs may unintentionally perpetuate about men and women, masculinity and femininity."<sup>37</sup>

Carefully addressing and reconstructing gender norms within programming is an intricate task. Even though much research and effort has been invested into determining how females should be addressed in DDR, few changes seem to have been put into practice, as the process to refine these ideas and implement them is complex and tedious. How should these gender identities be redefined? Who should redefine them? What is the ideal "masculinity" or "femininity"? How do we make allowances for cultural specificity?

The process of integrating gender into programming is highly complicated and has widespread implications that must be fully examined. DDR policies must be considerate of cultural ramifications, especially considering the Western-bias of many researchers and program planners. The cultural sensitivity of redefining gender is a worthy topic of further research, but is outside of the purview of this paper.

While it has been recognized that the bias of existing research does raise important questions that should be examined before taking action on these recommendations, I will explore some of the conclusions researchers have reached concerning the integration of gender-specific programming.

Within her research in Colombia, Theidon found one of the biggest deficits in masculinity post-conflict was in knowledge about how men should engage in their roles as husbands and fathers. Conflict clearly emphasizes an alternate set of skills and coping mechanisms than what might be needed within the home.

Most of these men were not taught to be loving partners or fathers. A number of them commented to me how difficult it was to suddenly find themselves living with crying babies and female partners who want more than the social [prostitute, partner] role. The idealized image of family may contrast sharply with the reality of living together, and the tensions this provokes frequently turn violent. As in most countries, gender-based violence existed prior to the armed conflict and may be exacerbated in certain spheres in the post-war period. These men and their families would benefit from family counseling that examines the violent patterns of interaction they have learned, situating that violent behavior within broader

---

<sup>37</sup> Theidon 2009, 29.

structures of inequality that include not only gender but also class, ethnicity, and race.<sup>38</sup>

Theidon's findings suggest that gender-sensitive DDR should include a reintroduction to the family and the roles and expectations of those relationships within the home and the community. She suggests family counseling may be helpful to transition males away from violent methods of conflict resolution and coping. It seems that males may benefit from a reconstruction of their roles as husbands and fathers, relearning how to relate to wives, partners, and children.

Although it is unclear whether the development bias to invest in women's economic capacities has a correlation to conflict, it would be necessary for DDR programming to continue to integrate skills-based education. This will lead to alternative livelihoods for participants and diminish the possibility of violence reoccurring. Both male and female combatants need to be provided with alternate methods of achieving self-sufficiency that adequately deter them from resorting to violence for economic gain. For this reason, DDR programming should continue to emphasize the development of skills that lead to employment or income-generation for both genders. It may also be important to orient males to the idea of women's involvement in generating income to limit the occurrence of home conflict related to this departure from traditional gender roles. This is true for female ex-combatants as well as women left at home to care for families during conflict. Many women are forced to generate income during conflict in order to sustain themselves and sometimes their children. These skills are often still viable in post-conflict economies and if women are to continue their economic involvement, men may need to be reoriented to a new reality of post-conflict society.

Although violence might need to be disassociated from masculinity, nonviolent involvement in politics and other forms of civic engagement should be emphasized.

Zuckerman and Greenberg found this to be true in their research.

Besides developing men's and women's vocational skills to increase opportunities to earn income, post-conflict reconstruction programs must also teach men and women social and civic skills and values that are essential for building a nonviolent society. This includes training women and men to work collaboratively and respectfully together.<sup>39</sup>

This may be yet another symbol of a new post-war reality, where women have become more politically engaged through their involvement in

---

<sup>38</sup> Theidon 2009, 31.

<sup>39</sup> Zuckerman and Greenberg 2004, 76.

combat. In some cases it may be necessary for men to normalize the idea of their involvement, where in other cases it might not differ from traditional ideas of gender. Regardless, both genders should be encouraged to redirect their political grievance to civic engagement within a post-conflict society in a nonviolent manner. This is essential not only for sustainable peace, but also for building a strong and flourishing society post-conflict.

Gender-specific programming needs to be planned and implemented in order to address gender concerns, and in keeping with the focus of this paper, it should also aim to reconstruct masculinity as something not reliant on the use of violence to achieve adulthood and to obtain power. Specifically, I have explored three ways in which gender-specific DDR programming could work to redefine gender roles and reconstruct masculinity: (1) through the re-education of males regarding the alternate masculine roles, such as “husband” and “father”; (2) through concerted efforts to assist in the building of income-generating skills in order for males and females to find alternate methods of making livelihoods, accompanied by efforts to re-educate males about the viability of female income generation; and (3) through an emphasis on nonviolent political and civic engagement for both males and females, and an effort to normalize female involvement in these activities among males.

Traditionally DDR programming has focused primarily on meeting security objectives, and although security concerns should remain a legitimate part of DDR programming’s endeavors, considering these concerns in isolation from other social and economic goals may ultimately be detrimental. As we have explored, masculinity is clearly tied to both security concerns as well as the social and economic needs of post-conflict society. For this reason it is necessary for DDR programming to not only consider the security needs of a post-conflict state but also to work in conjunction with other post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Successful reintegration requires not only fusing the process and goals of DDR programs with transitional justice measures, but also that both DDR and transition justice require a gendered analysis that includes an examination of the salient links between weapons, masculinities, and violence in specific historical contexts. Constructing certain forms of masculinity is not incidental to militarism; rather, it is essential to its maintenance. Militarism requires a sustaining gender ideology as much as it needs guns and bullets.<sup>40</sup>

The development of gender-specific DDR programming is integral to all aspects of post-conflict societies and should be emphasized and encouraged. And while this initiative is important and should be expedited, it is also

---

<sup>40</sup> Theidon 2009, 2.

important to fully explore the implications of “reconstructing” gender perceptions within societies. This task should not be taken lightly and should be vigorously examined and explored throughout the program-planning process. Culture-specific dynamics cannot be ignored; it is vital that each program takes the dynamics of the population into consideration and that program planning is done in close collaboration with local practitioners. Zuckerman and Greenberg emphasize the inclusion of community leaders in the process, not only for cultural considerations, but also for community buy-in. “Their challenge is to engage all stakeholders, including older male leaders and younger men to accept gender equality.”<sup>41</sup> As Zuckerman and Greenberg confirm, it is vital to consider the needs of the community through the engagement of community members in order to achieve the ultimate goal of creating a more stable and flourishing community for those who reside within it.

### *CONCLUSION*

Although there has been an immense amount of literature produced around the inclusion of females in DDR programming, it has only been recently that efforts have been made to consider the needs of males and how to address them more effectively. Clearly, males continue to play an important role in post-conflict societies and therefore male combatants continue to be an important element in DDR and other post-conflict programming. Specific efforts and programming considerations designed to reconstruct masculinities that are not tied to violence, but focused on more traditional ideas of males as providers of households and community leaders, has the potential to lay the foundation for more effective transitions to peaceful and flourishing post-conflict states. Let us very carefully move forward to create gender-sensitive and specific programming that works to address gender-specific issues, including the reconstruction of the masculine identity as it is often constructed within conflict.

---

<sup>41</sup> Zuckerman and Greenberg 2004, 3.