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AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AI	Amnesty International
ARC	American Refugee Committee
ATU	Anti Terrorist Unit
CAFF	Children associated with the fighting forces
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEP	Community Empowerment Program
CHF International	Community Housing Foundation International
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CVT	Center for the Victims of Torture
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DDRR	Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration
GAFF	Girls Associated with the Fighting Forces
EU	European Union
FIND	Foundation for International Dignity
IDDRS	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
ILO	International Labour Organization

INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JIU	Joint Implementation Unit
LDF	Lofa Defence Force
LEAP	Learning for Equality Access and Peace Program
LPC	Liberian Peace Council
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development
MDRP	Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program
MILOB	UN Military Observer
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NCDDRR	National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
NEPI	National Excombatant Peace Initiative
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
PMU	Pentecostal Mission Unlimited Inter life
RVF	Recto-vaginal fistula

STI	Sexually transmitted infection
THINK	National NGO working with WAFF and GAFF
TSA	Transitional Adjustment Allowance
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women
UNMIL	UN Mission in Liberia
UN OSAA	UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa
UN SRSG	UN Special Representative of the Secretary- General
USAID	US Agency for International Development
VVF	Vesico-vaginal fistula
WAC	Women Action Centres
WAFF	Women associated with the fighting forces
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Programme

Liberia: A flawed process discriminates against women and girls

Introduction

Liberia experienced conflict between 1989 and 1997 and again between 1999 and 2003. Estimates of women associated with fighting forces (WAFF) and girls associated with the fighting forces (GAFF)¹ were in the range of 30-40 per cent of all fighting forces or approximately 25,000-30,000 of all the fighting forces. The majority of women were forced to participate although it is also estimated that significantly more women opted to participate in the second conflict than in the first. They chose to take up arms to protect themselves from sexual violence, to avenge the death of family members, because of peer pressure, for material gain, and for survival. Women played roles as commanders, porters, spies, sex slaves, cooks and mothers.

The consequences of the violence and human rights abuses perpetrated against women and girls during the conflict are devastating. Many continue to suffer both physically and mentally from the harsh and inhumane treatment they endured during the war. Few have access to appropriate medical care particularly where long-term care is required. WAFF and GAFF face significant discrimination and may also carry their own burden of shame for having played roles or carried out acts that are seen as unacceptable for women by their society.² Often widowed or abandoned, they are alone to shoulder overwhelming conditions and responsibilities, and with little help to

¹ According to the Operational Guide to policy guidelines on the UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDDRS) female combatants are women and girls who participated in armed conflicts as active combatants using arms. Female supporters/females associated with armed forces and groups are women and girls who participated in armed conflicts in supportive roles, whether coerced or voluntarily. These women and girls are economically and socially dependent on the armed force or group for their income and social support. Female dependents are those who remained within ex combatants households throughout the war. War affected women are any of those that do not fit into these categories that were impacted by the conflict.

² Irma Specht, *Red Shoes, Experiences of girl combatants in Liberia*, International Labour Organization (ILO), 2004. p. 34

ease the burden, they have full responsibility for their children, some having had children as the result of rape. Many are uneducated, jobless, with few skills and dependent on friends for accommodation. Girls, especially young mothers without any assistance, are particularly vulnerable.

A greater understanding of this context is needed to ensure that disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) and other post-conflict programmes in Liberia succeed in helping women and girls become productive members of their society.

In 2003, following the end of the conflict, a DDRR programme began. Officially, by the time the disarmament and demobilization phase had ended in late 2004, more than 103,000 ex-combatants, significantly more than the 38,000 originally planned for, had been disarmed and demobilized, of these approximately 22,000 were women and 2,740, girls. Although this number is high compared to other DDRR programmes, it is believed to represent only a fraction of the total number of women and girls that participated in the conflict.

In Liberia although the initial intention of the DDRR programme was to ensure women's participation and to focus on and address their special needs - by including references to women and children as a specialized group - the reality was that the programme largely failed to meet a large number of women and girls' needs compared to men and boys. Thousands of women and girls formally associated with the fighting forces did not participate in the DDRR for reasons such as misinformation about the process, manipulation by commanders, and choosing not to participate. Some of the women that did participate were harassed by UN designated officials during the disarmament phase and did not receive adequate medical assistance during the demobilization phase. In the rehabilitation and reintegration phase, many women also failed to fully benefit because the programmes largely failed to acknowledge that stigma may be a barrier to participation and try to address it so that more women would be encouraged to participate. Additionally programmes did not offer child care and

psychosocial counseling unformally other barriers to participation.

³ It was believed that children were actually better catered to than women were because of the specialized child focused programme set up by UNICEF and their implementing partners.

Furthermore, women and girls continue to be subject to human rights abuses and are at a great risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence including exploitation and abuse in their schools, in their homes, and in their communities. The Liberian government has yet to take effective steps to address these issues.

Although Liberia has been at war since 1989 this report focuses on what is considered to be the second war that started in 1999 and finally ended in 2003 with the signing of the Accra Peace Accord. The report primarily focuses on Lofa County where the overall economic situation is currently worse than in other regions of the country due to the significant amount of heavy fighting, destruction and huge population displacement that took place during the conflict.⁴

Amnesty International believes that its findings from Lofa County are likely similar to what is taking place in other parts of Liberia. The report focuses on women and girls' experiences with the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development (LURD) armed opposition group and government security forces that were present in various parts of Lofa County throughout the conflict. However within DDRR, women and children were dealt with through separate programmes and this report focuses primarily on adult DDRR.

³ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Getting it Right, Doing it right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)*, Case Study on Liberia, p.13

⁴ Lofa County has historically been volatile in part because it borders both Guinea and Sierra Leone, with fighters easily crossing the porous borders to join battles in all three countries. The armed opposition group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development (LURD) traces much of its heritage to this county and Lofa was on the frontlines of the civil war, especially during the second war. Many LURD recruits hailed from Lofa, as did recruits for the Government of Liberia (GoL) forces and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), along with recruits for several smaller rebel movements. Between 1999 and 2003 Amnesty International's research revealed widespread abuses against unarmed civilians including women and children, abductions, rape, torture, and killing carried out by the government Anti Terrorist Unit (ATU) and LURD.

In September 2007 Amnesty International researchers visited the capital Monrovia and three districts in Lofa County including Voinjama, Kolahun, and Foya to speak to women and girls associated with the fighting forces and some of whom had participated in formal DDR. Amnesty International also had meetings with United Nations (UN) representatives, donors, community leaders, women leaders, and staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Lofa County and Monrovia.

1. Background

Following the invasion of Liberia by an armed opposition group, namely the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor in 1989, and the subsequent overthrow of the Liberian Government led by Samuel Doe in 1990, Liberia descended into prolonged civil war, characterized by war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁵ All parties to the conflict committed widespread and systematic unlawful killings along ethnic lines, including rape, torture, ill-treatment, abduction, conscription, hostage-taking, killings of humanitarian workers and the enlistment and use, during hostilities, of child soldiers under the age of 15. The perpetrators included members of the Government army, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), and of armed opposition groups including the NPFL, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), and the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), and the Lofa Defence Force (LDF).⁶

Historically, the 1996 Abuja Supplement to the Abuja Peace Accords, signed by the above factions, had laid out a timetable for presidential elections in mid-1997. It called for a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme and brought temporary peace to Liberia.⁷ The DDR programme, however,

⁵ Samuel Doe, a master sergeant, took power in a coup in 1979.

⁶ ULIMO began as one faction comprised largely of members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups. In 1993 ULIMO split into two factions, one of which was led by Alhaji Kromah called ULIMO-K, composed largely of Mandingos, and ULIMO-J, and led by Roosevelt Johnson, mainly comprised of members of the Krahn ethnic group.

⁷ Amnesty International (AI), *Liberia: A New Peace Agreement – an opportunity to introduce human rights protection* (AI Index: AFR 34/005/1997).

experienced a multitude of problems not least among them inadequate funding and the resumption of fighting between ULIMO and NPFL factions in April 1996. The programme also failed to adequately address the underlining causes of the conflict, gave insufficient trauma assistance to ex-combatants, neglected to target women and children, and failed to restructure the Armed Forces of Liberia.⁸ By the end of the DDR programme in 1996, it had disarmed and demobilized nearly 24,000 out of an estimated 33,000 soldiers, including an estimated 4,036 children. However, only 250 adult women had been demobilized and reintegration overall was largely left unresolved.⁹ Many ex-combatants left Liberia to regroup in neighbouring Guinea and Sierra Leone.¹⁰

In 1997 Charles Taylor was elected President and conflict soon resumed. By 1999 there was active fighting between government troops, including the Anti Terrorist Unit (ATU), and armed opposition groups – LURD in the west and north of the country and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) in the east and the south with support from neighbouring Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire.

On 18 August 2003 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which provided for a DDRR process, was signed in Accra, Ghana. By October of that year, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) was in power, headed by businessman Gyude Bryant and comprised of members of the

⁸ UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA) and Government of Sierra Leone, Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) and Stability in Africa, Conference Report, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 21-23 June 2005 (New York: United Nations), (p.18), <http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/reports/DDR%20Sierra%20Leone%20March%202006.pdf>

⁹ UN OSAA and Government of Sierra Leone, Second International Conference on DDR and Stability in Africa, 12-14 June 2007, Kinshasa, DRC, Issue Paper “DRC and Transitional Justice” (New York: United Nations), 7. <http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/speeches/ddr%20and%20tj%20in%20africa%20-%20english.pdf>: NB: This was FN11 in the original text. Needs checking – not the correct ref?

¹⁰ UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA) and Government of Sierra Leone, Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) and Stability in Africa, Conference Report, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 21-23 June 2005 (New York: United Nations), <http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/reports/DDR%20Sierra%20Leone%20March%202006.pdf>

various warring factions and political parties. The UN Integrated Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) entered Liberia in October 2003 and by late 2004 its 15,000 troops were fully deployed throughout the country. The transitional government was in power for a little over two years, and this period was characterized by massive corruption within the government. Due largely to the transitional government's inertia, little was done to implement the peace agreement.

Following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1509 on 19 September 2003, the international community, through UNMIL, led efforts to create a task force to implement the DDRR. In October 2003, a task force comprising of bodies such as UNMIL, UN Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), US Agency for International Development (USAID), and World Vision completed an initial action plan.¹¹ After major problems with the initial disarmament and demobilization process that started in December 2003, the Joint Implementation Unit (JIU) was created to plan and implement the DDRR. The JIU was made up of UNMIL, UNDP, other partners, and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (NCDDRR). In general, however, UNMIL ran the disarmament and demobilization process and UNDP ran the rehabilitation and reintegration programs largely involved in options for education and skill training.

Following a countrywide campaign that began on 21 January 2004, to inform Liberians about the DDRR process, UNMIL restarted the disarmament and demobilization phase in April 2004. The disarmament and demobilization programme came to an end in December 2004. Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes began in June 2004 and are still ongoing.

Following general elections in late December 2005, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated as president in January 2006. Since she came to power some efforts have been made to end

¹¹ First Progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission in Liberia, 15 December 2003, UN Doc S/2003/1175, p.5, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/653/30/IMG/N0365330>.

discrimination and realize women's human rights. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission began public hearings in January 2008 and is planning to have a report completed by the end of 2008, or in early 2009. The Ministry of Gender is taking the lead in the development of a gender based violence action plan in consultation with key stakeholders. Liberia is due to present its first country report regarding its obligations relative to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Ministry of Education is in the process of developing an education policy that provides for greater access to education for girls. The poverty reduction strategy process is currently underway and efforts have been made to widely consult with women's organizations to ensure gender equity. The Ministry of Labour has a short and long-term plan for providing employment throughout the country.

However, ensuring that policy initiatives translate into real opportunities in post-conflict Liberia remains the true challenge and at the moment, the political, social, economic, and infrastructural challenges are enormous. Liberia's health and education system are among the weakest in Sub-Saharan [Africa](#). Most health facilities and schools were destroyed during the 14 year long war and recent reports estimate that more than half of Liberia's children are out of school with fewer girls attending primary school than boys. Health services are very poor in most parts of the country.¹²

2. Female combatants and women associated with fighting forces in Lofa County

Successful reintegration of women and girls depends not only on understanding why they were forced to, or chose to, participate in the fighting forces, and understanding their roles with these forces, but also understanding the consequences of their participation.

¹² UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre website, Liberia, <http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=52>

2.1 Reasons for joining and roles

Amnesty International's interviews with women and girls in Lofa County in September 2007 were consistent with global findings on the participation of women and girls in conflict and other research specific to Liberia. The interviews revealed the complex and multi-faceted nature of women's participation in fighting forces as well as the wide age range. Many girls as young as eight, and women as old as 60, were involved.

The majority of the women and girls that Amnesty International spoke to were abducted and forced to carry a gun or serve as porters, sex slaves or to marry commanders.¹³ Others joined fighting forces "voluntarily" for a variety of reasons including to avenge the killing of a relative, for survival, or for protection.¹⁴ Memories of the fear, violence and losses of the previous conflict were fresh in the minds of the majority of the women interviewed by Amnesty International and for many it had influenced their participation later on.

As in other conflicts, some served as combatants, in some cases in charge of female units of varying size, while others fought alongside men or commanded units made up of men and women. Some hauled ammunition, cooked, farmed, or undertook other

¹³ A UNDP activity report revealed based on a study at one cantonment site carried out by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) that 68 per cent of women and girls did not join voluntarily.

¹⁴ There are several factors leading children to voluntarily enroll into the armed groups, independently or through the active campaigns undertaken by armed groups to encourage the enlistment of children. Where conflict has led to the destruction of the political, social, and economic infrastructure children enlist, as do many adults, in the hope of escaping the poverty and the abject social conditions in which they live, viewing the army as their only viable means of survival. Generalized poverty and the breakdown of basic social services has also led some orphans or children who have become separated from their families to seek out the protection of an armed group for their own safety, for food, or for a sense of belonging. Unable to provide for their children's and their own needs, some parents encourage their children to be recruited into the armed forces or armed groups, thinking that the children will be provided money, food, and education, as well as protection from other armed groups. In addition, as the conflict takes its toll, children have increasingly joined up in order to avenge their family or friends, whose murder or rape they have often witnessed first hand.

support roles or served as a sex slaves. In Liberia age could be a distinguishing factor with young ones performing domestic chores while the older girls and women served as commanders. Many women were abducted with their children while others became mothers while serving with armed groups.

Some ended up staying with the armed factions for long periods out of fear, or lack of better alternative options, while others were able to escape.

Abduction

Other women and girls were abducted. Some subsequently escaped. Some of those abducted were raped and sexually abused as well as being ill-treated.

Yassa, a mother of four, told Amnesty International that: *"I was forced to become a wife of a LURD commander. They would do things like force us to eat human beings but I could not do it. I have one child from one of the LURD guys but he is now in Sierra Leone. I was forced to take a gun but didn't fight."*

Fannie was captured in Foya by government troops and forced to kill one of her children. She was forced to take up a gun. In the six months before she was able to escape she was gang raped by 10 men. One day when she went for water she escaped and fled to Guinea. She now has three children.

Magdalena was forcibly recruited by government soldiers in Foya. Although she was only 10 she was given a gun. Despite being raped and beaten by the soldiers, she told Amnesty International that: *"I stayed with them throughout the course of the war as I was so young and I had nowhere else I could go."* As a result of her rape and ill-treatment, now aged 20, she can not have children and walks with a limp.

For protection

Other women have joined one group as a means of protection against another group after previously being forcibly recruited or abducted.

Florence, now aged 30 and who has two children, joined the LURD in 1999. In 1993 her sister was killed in front of her by ULIMO fighters who also cut off her other sister's foot. Her father and brother were also killed in the same attack while her mother later died in the bush. Florence was captured by ULIMO in 1993 and raped by a man that she now sees around in Voinjama. She told Amnesty International that: *"I saw my sister killed by ULIMO in 1993. I don't think I will ever forget that. I was raped when I was 14 and see the man who did that to me around town - he works for an NGO. I decided to join the LURD for my own protection. I never took a gun though. I cooked and hauled ammunition."*

Esther, a mother of three children, from Voinjama, was forced to join government forces in 1998. She cooked for them and was raped by their soldiers on a regular basis. She was able to escape after one year and fled to Guinea where she joined the LURD. She told Amnesty International that: *"I joined the LURD in the end to protect myself from being abducted by government forces. I did not have anyone to help me and my three children."*

After being beaten and raped by LURD forces, Flora, a 26-year-old mother of two, decided to join the LURD as a fighter so that she could protect herself from the other male LURD fighters. One day while she was out collecting water, she was able to escape and fled to Guinea. She told Amnesty International: *"After being beaten and raped so much by the LURD I decided to join the LURD to protect myself. I thought I that I would be better off with an arm than without one."*

As a means of survival

Some women and girls perceived association with an armed group as their best chance of survival.

Magdalena was forcibly recruited by government soldiers in Foya. Although she was only 10 she was given a gun. Despite being raped and beaten by the soldiers, she told Amnesty International that: *"I stayed with them throughout the course of the war as I was so young and I had nowhere else I could go."* As a result of her rape and ill-treatment, now aged 20, she can not have children and walks with a limp.

Some women and girls formed relationships with male combatants as a means of obtaining their support and protection.

Government troops captured Annie, now a mother of three living in Voinjama. As she tried to escape to Guinea, she was forced to take a weapon and ended up staying with them for almost three years. She told Amnesty International that: *"When I was running to Guinea to escape the war I got caught by NPFL fighters. They gave me an arm and told me that I had to fight or be killed. I decided to join and had to fight to be with one of them. He used to beat me all the time and now I have scars. I stayed with them for three years - I was too afraid to leave."*

Avenging the death of a relative

Siata, 23, is from Voinjama and has two children. She joined the LURD in the second war because the NPFL had killed her parents in the first war. She told Amnesty International that *"I was in Voinjama. My parents died in the 1990 war. They were killed by NPFL (former Charles Taylor rebels from the first war) who were killing Mandingos and Muslims. I decided when the second war started to join the LURD to avenge the death of my parents as my heart was not settled. I was married to a boy commander but he died in 2002."*

Some women joined to avenge the death of their husbands. Esther, originally from Sierra Leone, fled to Guinea with her two children after her husband was killed by government troops in Foya in 2000. She told Amnesty International that: *"After I watched government troops kill my husband I left quickly for Guinea with my two children. After I was in Guinea for a while I decided that I wanted to join the LURD. I was angry that government troops had killed my*

husband. I left my children with family members. I actively fought and commanded a small unit of mostly women."

2.2 Treatment endured during the conflict

The majority of the women and girls experienced rape and other forms of sexual violence. Women and girls also experienced other forms of violence and trauma including the loss of family members, witnessing the death of a family member, having to kill, being beaten, shot at, starved, threatened with death, and being forced to cook and eat human beings. The harsh treatment they endured in captivity left many women with disabilities.

Esther is 25 and has four children. She is originally from a small village outside of Kolahun in Lofa County. Her husband and parents were killed when the LURD attacked her village and she herself was abducted. While she was with the LURD she was shot in the back and is now in pain and has difficulty working: *"They thought I was stealing food so one of them shot me in the back. I feel pain all the time and it is hard for me to work. I never had access to treatment either."*

Massa, who is now aged 49, is originally from Kolahun. She was captured by government troops in 2002. She told Amnesty International: *"Government troops captured me and my children. They raped me, hit me with their guns, and made me carry heavy loads of ammunition. I finally escaped from them and went to Guinea. Now I am constantly in pain from the beating and it is difficult for me to eat meat because of all the slaughter of human beings and the eating of human flesh that I witnessed when I was with them. Also when I see a man in a uniform I feel badly for the whole day."*

2.3 Consequences of women's and girls' participation in the fighting forces

The combination of the discrimination that the WAFF felt from the wider community, their own guilt and shame, and their inability to find a husband because of their past, set them apart from other women and girls generally affected by the war in Liberia.

Many women former fighters are now widowed or have been abandoned and left to shoulder overwhelming responsibilities and conditions alone. With little help to ease the burden, they have full responsibility for their children, some born as the result of rape during the conflict. They continue to suffer the physical and mental consequences of the harsh and inhumane treatment they endured during the war. Few have access to appropriate medical care particularly where long-term care is required. They are largely uneducated, jobless and with few skills and without their own homes.

Research shows that shame and stigma have a significant impact on a woman or girl's ability to reintegrate into society after a conflict. Shame and stigma that women felt from both their association with fighting forces and with the fact that they were raped or victims of sexual violence prevent them from seeking out the services and support they needed to fully reintegrate and move on with their lives.¹⁵

Physical and psychological consequences of rape

Many of the women who had experienced rape are often suffering some form of multiple reproductive and mental health problems including perforation of uterus, vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF), recto-vaginal fistula (RVF), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, sexual aversion, disgust for marriage, problems in forming trusting relationships with males, and nightmares of being raped.

For many of those experiencing nightmares, the memory of the attack was so immediate that they spoke as if it happened just days before despite it happening years before. They often spoke to others, prayed, or talked to their pastor to alleviate their bad dreams. -

Magdalena, now aged 20, said she was forced to join the government troops when they entered Foya. She was so severely brutalized that she now walks with a limp. She was raped and sexually abused, and is unable to have children. She told Amnesty International: *"I often dream of being raped just exactly as it*

¹⁵ See Amnesty International, *Getting Reparations Right for Survivors of Sexual Violence* (AI Index: AFR 51/005/2007)]

happened. I was also made to kill and then cook human beings. Often they made me eat that and it made me so sick that I had to have an operation in Guinea. Many others spoke of the physical impact that the rape or sexual violence had on them."

Many women were left needing medical treatment that is either not available or which they cannot afford. Jackie, a 33-year-old woman with four children, was with the government forces for over one year. During the conflict she was raped and now needs an operation that she cannot afford: *"I was raped and need an operation. I don't have any money and when I go to the hospital I get mixed messages about what is wrong with me. I still bleed a lot. I know I need an operation but I don't have the money for that. Right now friends are helping us with clothes and I also need money for my children to go to school."*

Lucy is 28 and a mother of three children whose husband left her. She was with the LURD for two years and while with them she was gang raped. She did not know that DDDR was an option. Now, although she managed to get access to some land, she has significant health problems as a result of the rape. She is worried about her future and her ability to take care of her children: *"Now I do swamp rice farming to take care of my children. I have a lot of health problems. I don't get my period anymore. I hurt a lot. I need medical care but I don't know where to go and find it. It hurts when I am working and I sometimes worry that I will have to stop and then how will I feed my children? My children are not in school. I only sow rice to eat as there is nothing left to sell. How will I get money for my children?"*

Largely, however, the stigma of having been associated with the fighting forces has led the majority of women to return to their communities on their own and often in secrecy. Despite the overwhelming psychological needs of women and girls very few professional counselling services are available in Liberia. International organizations such as IRC, American Refugee Committee (ARC) and Foundation for International Dignity (FIND) are involved in community-based programmes to protect women from the ongoing violence in their homes and communities. Women Action Centres (WAC) were set up in some communities to address the wide array of

needs for women including psycho-social counselling, legal aid and medical help.¹⁶ Two NGOs, CVT and Pentecostal Mission Unification (PMU) showed evidence of counselling programmes, primarily targeting children. Discussions with women's organizations in Kolahun spoke of the large numbers of women in the out-lying areas of Kolahun and Foya who were suffering significant mental and physical health problems. However, due to the difficulty of travel and long distances outside the major towns of Kolahun and Foya many women did not have access to these services.¹⁷

Children to care for and lack of economic opportunities

According to information gathered by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which oversaw the reproductive health and sexually based gender violence component at three cantonment sites, 70 per cent of the women going through demobilization had children.¹⁸ Most of the women interviewed by Amnesty International had between one and three children. The few women who were childless had either been brutalized at a very young age so that they were unable to have children, or their children had been killed during the war. Those without children were vulnerable to life without long term security also putting pressure on women who were childless.

The burden of caring for multiple children alone especially in the cases of young mothers often results in child abuse or neglect. The stress that women are under due to a lack of any kind of access to financial support is overwhelming to many of the women. Furthermore a complete lack of a support system exacerbates the stress that women with children are already under and this is considered a reason for high rates of child abuse. According to staff from child protection and women's organizations, women and girls who returned home with children borne while they were in captivity

¹⁶ WAC were structures organized by the International Rescue Committee that now serve as permanent structures in communities helping women deal with gender based violence.

¹⁷ Interview with gender specialist with the IRC, Kolahun, September 2007.

¹⁸ Liberia Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme (DDRR), Activity Report, UNDP Administered Trust Fund, December 2003 to August 2004, p. 29. It also highlighted that 68 percent did not join fighting forces voluntarily and 73 percent experienced sexual assault.

were often rejected by their families, and women who had children born out of rape were more likely to abuse or neglect them. This likelihood was further confirmed in conversations that Amnesty International had with the Center for the Victims of Torture (CVT) who stated that mothers admitted to feeling a strong rejection for children they had conceived as a result of rape.¹⁹

Lack of economic opportunities resulted in women working in areas they hadn't considered working in prior to the conflict. In Monrovia, a former female general organized many of the women who she fought with into a cooperative selling crushed rock. Women involved in the project that Amnesty International spoke to were largely widowed and had to take care of their children and crushing rock was an opportunity to do this. In Kolahun and Voinjama a large number of the women that Amnesty International spoke to were involved in agricultural contract work.

The impact of discrimination on future prospects

Access to land, housing, and jobs were major concerns for former female combatants and WAFF. Some complained of being discriminated against because people in the community knew their past. Information gathered from child protection social workers highlighted several incidences where former combatants were prevented from getting jobs they were otherwise qualified for. In one instance a school teacher was prevented from getting a job at a school which reportedly claimed it feared that, because she was formally associated with fighting forces, she would beat the children. In other cases, market women were discriminated against because the community would refuse to buy from them. Getting married again was also considered unlikely.

Only a few women Amnesty International interviewed in Lofa County and Monrovia had boyfriends or were married. The majority had lost their husbands in the conflict or had been abandoned. Many reported having "bush" husbands who they now were no longer with.²⁰ Staff from the Ministry of Gender in Lofa County estimated that 25 per cent of the women in Lofa County were widowed, and an

¹⁹ For more information on the activities of CVT please see <http://www.cvt.org.main.php>–

uncountable number were abandoned concluding that the majority of the women were on their own. Many expressed the desire to remarry largely to help with the financial burdens.

Ongoing discrimination against women also had an impact on women's livelihoods. Despite the crushing poverty in Liberia, participatory research carried out by a Liberian NGO, THINK, on WAFF, revealed that husbands or boyfriends often discouraged women's efforts to go to school and the worst case scenarios resulted in domestic violence.

Isolated and with few options

The conflict in Liberia was characterized by significant displacement and abduction. When it ended, thousands of women and girls were living away from their families and communities. In some cases women chose not to return to their families or were unable to face the overwhelming burdens. Without skills, and in some cases without the financial support they had relied on during the war, either from being provided for by the faction to which they were associated, or from looting, some women resorted to jobs such as prostitution, putting themselves at risk of more violence. Information gathered from child protection agencies in Lofa County indicated that prostitution was high after the end of the conflict especially along the border areas between Liberia and Guinea.

3. The DDDR process in Liberia

Overall, the DDDR programme was aimed at "consolidating national security through the disarmament and reintegration into society of all ex-combatants as a precondition to facilitating humanitarian assistance, restoration of civil authority, promotion of economic growth, and sustainable development."²¹

²⁰ These were men they had been with while serving as female combatants or WAFF. Often these relationships were forced and the women stayed due to lack of options.

²¹ UNDP Liberia Programmes, Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration, <http://www.lr.undp.org/ddrr.htm>

Although the programme ultimately failed to meet the needs of many WAFF and GAFF and did not ensure women's participation proportional to their actual level of involvement, from the outset the importance of gender issues was stressed. UN Security Council Resolution 1509 required UNMIL to develop an action plan to implement a DDRR programme for all armed parties, "with particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women".²²

The resolution also underlined the importance of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peace building, and recalled the need to address violence against women and girls as a tool of warfare. UNMIL's mandate already included a gender perspective in accordance with Security Resolution 1325. The First progress report of the UN Secretary-General on the UN mission in Liberia in September 2003 also stressed the importance of addressing the gender specific needs of female ex-combatants as well as wives and widows of former combatants, as well as the importance of preventing sexual violence.

For example, both women and children would have their own housing facilities in the disarmament camp sites or ICCs: women would be separated from men and children would be separated from adults.²³ It also called for: *"briefing, counseling and training programmes for the eventual reintegration of former combatants that would take into consideration the differences in experiences during the conflict of women and girls as compared to men and boys. Additionally recognizing the high rates of sexual violence in the conflict, reintegration programmes must include prevention of sexual violence."*²⁴

However, a lack of political will to ensure a gender based approach became apparent, characterized by the failure of the JIU to follow the mandate set out for them in internationally agreed guidelines. There was a failure to take into account lessons that had

²² Resolution 1509 (2003), UN Doc. S/2003/1509, 19 September 2003

²³ UNSC, First progress report of the SG, page 6. In a DRC DDR process, which started in June 2003, for example, some girls were reluctant to enter the intern care centers out of fears that they would be sexually abused among other items.

²⁴ First Progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission in Liberia, 15 December 2003, UN Doc S/2003/1175

been learned in previous DDR programmes, and a failure to involve Liberians including women and former combatant groups in the planning and implementation of the DDRR programme. [Another indicator was the lack of funding allocated to cover the DDRR of women estimates of which were significantly less than the actual numbers of women estimated to require DDRR. Moreover, at the government level, the newly established Ministry of Gender lacked resources and expertise, while the NCDDRR, considered to be the lead government agency on the process, perceived themselves as lacking influence in what they called “a completely donor driven process”. UNMIL’s gender expert had just arrived in 2004 and UNIFEM’s capacity was limited when the process began. Lobbying from UNICEF ensured that the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) was involved in the process as implementers but UNFPA did not have a significant role in the planning.

The perception of many women’s groups was that UNMIL, which was in charge of the Disarmament and Demobilization phase, rejected their attempts to get involved despite the assistance they provided during the first, failed, attempt to begin DDRR in December 2003. Several women, including representatives from Women in Peacebuilding Programme (WIPNET), highlighted to Amnesty International how women’s attempts to be involved in the early stages and to be consulted throughout the DDRR were rejected, stating that *“the policy in Liberia on female combatants was linked with that of child combatants and little mention was made of women’s unique needs and contributions in the programme. The women who tried to get involved in the planning of the DDR process were told to go home and take care of the children”*. Overall she felt the greatest challenge was dealing with a leadership largely made up of men who believed that women should not be involved in DDRR.²⁵

In discussions between Amnesty International and UNDP staff in September 2007, UNDP staff clearly stated that little effort was made to involve women’s groups and that a gender component was definitely missing. It also became clearly evident, in discussions that Amnesty International had with staff involved in DDRR that their lack

²⁵ UNIFEM Women Building Peace Through Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Beijing + 10 Review Conference 9 March 2005

of familiarity with internationally agreed guidelines on DDRR and Security Council Resolution 1325 were major factors that impacted upon the attention that gender concerns received in the process.

While it must be recognized that DDRR programmes are inherently difficult to establish and run smoothly – not least due to the volatile areas in which they are usually implemented – several actions taken by the UN significantly undermined the effectiveness of the DDRR programme in Liberia in general and had implications for all those associated with fighting forces. Certain failings particularly affected women and girls.

On 7 December 2003, UNMIL officially started the disarmament phase of the DDRR despite fears that it was premature.²⁶ These fears turned into reality when ex-combatants, reportedly frustrated about not receiving the US\$150 they expected to receive immediately after disarming, fired shots and gained control of the disarmament site at Camp Schieffelin, near Monrovia. In fact, the UN had planned to give them US\$150 three weeks after they relinquished their weapons, but the word had not reached the fighters.²⁷ Many fighters returned, still armed, to Monrovia where rioting and looting ensued. At least nine people were killed in the disturbances. To make matters worse, the UN was overwhelmed by the number of ex-combatants wanting to disarm. For example, the UN had expected 250 ex-combatants to present themselves but more than 1,000 showed up on the opening day.²⁸ The first disarmament phase was officially suspended on 27 December 2003.

On 21 January 2004, UNMIL initiated a countrywide campaign to inform and encourage Liberians to participate in the DDRR process to help resolve some of the previous concerns,

²⁶ Nichols, Ryan, *Small Arms Survey, Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region* (hereafter referred to as *Disarming Liberia*), p.113; First Progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Mission in Liberia, 15 December 2003, UN Doc S/2003/1175, p.3

²⁷ BBC Monitoring International Reports, *Disarmament of Ex-Liberian Soldiers Commences; Complaints over Unpaid Incentives*, 8 December 2003; Deutsche Presse-Agentur, *1,400 Liberian fighters disarm on first day of UN campaign*, 8 December 2003

²⁸ Nichols, Ryan, *Disarming Liberia*, p.113

including by using the radio, newspapers, and former generals, including at least one female general, commanders and combatants. These communications described to Liberians that once adults turned in their arm or ammunition, they would stay in a demobilization camp site for four days and would receive counseling, medical care, and papers (or identity (ID) cards).²⁹ On the fifth day, the participants would graduate and receive the first US\$150 TSA as well as a bag of rice, oil, beans, and salt.³⁰ Two or three months later, the adults would go and pick up their second TSA of US\$150.³¹ Some time later, education and skills training programs would start as part of the rehabilitation and reintegration effort.

Although UNMIL attempted to address some of the other challenges with the December fiasco, when the DDRR process restarted on 15 April 2004 it experienced some of the same problems. By mid-December 2003 UNMIL estimated that between 45,000 and 60,000 combatants would participate in the DDRR process.³² However, by December 2004, when UNMIL closed the last disarmament site, they had processed 103,019 individuals from LURD, MODEL and the GOL forces through the disarmament phase and 101,495 through the demobilization phase.³³ Of those that went through the demobilization phase, 22,370 were women, 8,532 boys, and 2,440 girls. Over “28,314 weapons, 33,604 pieces of heavy munitions, and 6,486,136 rounds of small arms ammunition were collected during the formal disarming phase”.

The significant discrepancy in numbers of people appears to have arisen in part because the UN did not undertake a survey prior to the DDRR to determine how many participants to expect, which would have helped the UN effectively establish criteria for screening potential participants. UNMIL also decided to proceed with the disarmament and demobilization phases despite not having a comprehensive list of combatants from the various armed

²⁹ Irma Specht, *Red Shoes, Experiences of girl combatants in Liberia*, International Labour Organization (ILO), 2004

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Nichols, Ryan, *Disarming Liberia*, p.5

³³ Some individuals that went through the disarmament phase did not go through the demobilization phase.

factions making it unclear who was a legitimate fighter. In some cases, however, even though UNMIL had the commander's lists, commanders excluded legitimate potential participants or added individuals that shouldn't be able to benefit from DDRR to lists. The opportunity to gain money was a significant motivation for commanders to manipulate the lists. Adequate screening by the UNMIL would have helped cut down on this, but effective screening was also a problem.

According to the DDRR plan, to participate in the process and programmes individuals had to present a serviceable weapon or 150 rounds of ammunition. Women and children associated with the fighting forces could present themselves without weapons or ammunition".³⁴ The screening process carried out by UNMIL involved asking those that turned up at the cantonment site such questions as their roles in the conflict and testing their knowledge about weapons. UNMIL often relied on information from armed faction commanders, local NGOs, or NCDDRR staff, which had a record of providing false information.³⁵ In addition, UNMIL delegated the screening process at the disarmament sites to "local NGO staff who lacked the training and authority required to effectively identify and reject illegitimate participants."³⁶ As a result, one UNMIL official indicated that up to 40,000 individuals who did not meet the criteria went through the DD process. Others, primarily women and girls, missed out on the process entirely due to misinformation and poor communication.

Another major challenge for those associated with the fighting forces that wanted to access disarmament and demobilization sites was difficult access that women had to some of the permanent disarmament sites. For example in Lofa County, which is one of the largest counties in Liberia and where much of the fighting occurred, there was only one disarmament camp site in Voinjama, which stayed open for just short of two months. This single site and short time frame made it extremely difficult for people from cities such as Foya and Vahun to travel to. In order to give

³⁴ UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, <http://www.unddr.org/>

³⁵ Nichols, Ryan, *Disarming Liberia*, p120

³⁶ Nichols, Ryan, *Disarming Liberia*, p120

individuals a chance to participate in cities such as Foya and others, UNMIL sent “mop up” centres to Kolahun and Foya in Lofa County for a couple of days each. However, few people were able to access these “mop up” centres as well, and they didn’t offer medical screening and counseling, compared to the more permanent camp sites.

Lastly, because of the huge number of people that went through the demobilization phase, there was a funding short fall of US\$39 million in mid 2005, which encouraged other problems.³⁷ According to the plan, UNDP was supposed to provide education or skills training and a stipend of US\$30 a few months after they went through the demobilization camps, however, because of the funding short fall some 40,000 individuals had not yet started their education or training in mid 2005. As a result in part to the delay, there were reports of children being recruited, particularly in the southern counties of Liberia, for Cote d’Ivoire.³⁸ While many of these 40,000 have now participated in some form of education or skills training there was a short fall which is now planned to be addressed in the final reintegration phase. There are plans for at least 9,000 to benefit. However, this fails to incorporate all of those associated with war who did not benefit including women.

4. Women’s experience of DDDR in Lofa County

Women and girl’s participation in the DDDR programme in Lofa County must be understood in the wider context of a DDDR programme that was poorly organized, more focused on gathering guns than addressing needs and helping people to rehabilitate and reintegrate. The mandate to respect and implement a gendered approach has largely gone unheeded. Although the below information and testimonies are predominantly from Lofa County, some illustrative examples are also included from other counties in Liberia.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch. 2005. Youth, Poverty, and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors. Vol. 17, No. 5 (A). New York: Human Rights Watch.

³⁸

The majority of the women blamed the greediness and manipulation from commanders as the reason they missed out. Some who had seen the earlier DDR process fail in 1996, simply did not trust the new DDRR process and actively chose not to participate. Many feared the stigmatization associated with being labelled as a WAFF and decided that the risk of being associated with the process was higher than any benefit they might receive from it and chose not to participate. Others were out of the country, were too ill to participate, or simply did not know where and when it was happening. Some feared they would not be able to travel abroad in the future.

4.1 Disarmament and demobilization

Findings published by UNIFEM with regard to the DDRR process in Liberia found that *“women combatants, supporters and dependents were not engaged in the formal DDR process to the extent to which they were entitled. The separation of women supporters and dependents from other female combatants undoubtedly resulted in many women losing out on their benefits... the exclusion of many of these women from the formal DDR process will have negative ramifications for their economic and personal security if they are not given adequate tools and resources with which to reintegrate”*.³⁹

According to one estimate, some 14,000 women associated with the fighting forces throughout Liberia between the ages of 18-24 did not participate in the Liberia DDRR programme. While this number is only a rough estimate, Amnesty International's research in Lofa County of women and girls of all ages found that thousands of women combatants and WAFF, such as the women and girls interviewed by Amnesty International in Voinjama, Kolahun and Foya, did not participate in the DDRR programme. While the Liberia DDRR programme rightfully incorporated some gender friendly approaches to the demobilization camps that have been missing in other African DDRR programmes, such as separating males from females in the demobilization camps and providing gender appropriate medical screening, women and girls that did participate in the DDRR process, participated in a process that largely fell short of being a fully gender

³⁹ UNIFEM, *Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* October 2004, p.18.

aware process and as such did not answer to their needs. None of the women that Amnesty International spoke to were aware that they did not need to have a weapon to disarm.

Non-participation in the disarmament and demobilization programme has had significant consequences for former combatants who were then ineligible for the skill training or formal education reintegration packages. With few other opportunities and the challenging post war context, self-demobilization is extremely challenging.

Access to the DDDR Programme

Two crucial factors in women's access to DDDR was their knowledge and understanding of the process and their relationship with their former commanders. Poor dissemination of information and the abusive nature of some women's relationships with their commanders acted in many cases as barriers to DDDR.

To be eligible for the DDDR programme, participants had to present a serviceable weapon or ammunition which met the required entry criteria; be a child (under 18) associated with the fighting forces (CAFF); or, be a WAFF. It was left to UN Military Observers (MILOBS) to determine, through a series of questions, whether women seeking to enter the DDDR programme were legitimate WAFF.

Although the DDDR Framework document stated that WAFF did not need to carry a gun to access the DDDR programme none of the women and girls that Amnesty International interviewed were aware of this.

One girl, Esther, from Kolahun told Amnesty International that: *"I am now 14. I was with the LURD for two years in 2003 and 2004. I had to tow ammunition and arms for them. They beat me. They did not feed me. I never heard about it and then it was over. I didn't participate in DD because I did not know if this was an option was for me."*

Annie, now aged 13, from Vonda, was with government troops for eight months washing clothes, cooking and carrying rice. She told Amnesty International: *"I heard about disarmament from my friends. I couldn't disarm though because I didn't have any ammunition. I have friends that were able to disarm."*

Massa, 24, who was with government troops for two years cooking and hauling ammunition did not benefit from DDR because she gave her weapon to her commander and he gave it away. She assumed she was no longer eligible. She told Amnesty International: *"There was a lot of confusion about DDR. So many of the women and girls who should have benefited in the end went to Guinea. Others were just too scared to disarm. They were afraid that they guys in charge would kill them."*

Vivian now aged 20 told Amnesty International: *"We heard different things about DDRR. From some we heard that if we did not fight then you could not take part. But most of the information was coming from Monrovia. I ended up benefiting because my boyfriend gave me ammunition."*

Another young woman from Voinjama told Amnesty International: *"I think most people missed out because there was no clear information. Most did not know how they would access it and we were always relying on rumours from Monrovia."*

According to the NCDDR, information on the DDRR programme only became available for dissemination late in the implementation of the programme. This resulted in numerous women and girls simply not knowing that they were eligible to benefit from the DDRR programme. Once available, the information was transmitted by radio. The importance of providing gender-sensitive approaches to information dissemination to ensure that women access information that affects their lives is critical.

Poor information dissemination also created a lot of misconceptions about the programme. According to child protection staff, many women and girls believed that if they participated in the DDRR programme their picture would be broadcast internationally and then later they would not be able to travel abroad.

For most women, a crucial factor regarding access to DDRR was their relationship with their commanders, often compounded by lack of information.

The rationale behind the “mop up centers” or mobile disarmament for example was to provide more opportunities for those living in smaller towns like Kolahun and Foya to participate in the DDRR programme. However, not only did few know that mobile disarmament was an option but the lack of monitoring of mobile disarmament allowed commanders to take the TSA or ID cards from some of those who had disarmed, preventing many women in both Foya and Kolahun from continuing with the DDRR process. This was also true for other rural areas.⁴⁰

For those who knew about the process, manipulation by commanders was the main reason why women and girls did not participate. Both women in Lofa County and independent observers felt that either family members or others who had a favourable relationship with a commander, whether they had participated in the conflict or not, were most likely to benefit from the DDRR, while many former combatants of WAFF were excluded by commanders with their own agenda, often financial.

“There were so many problems with the DDR mostly the commanders gathered up all the guns and then gave them to someone else.”⁴¹

Many turned over their weapon on the instruction of their commander only to see him hand it over to someone else. Not one person felt that they had any recourse to address this when it did happen.

Fannie told Amnesty International that: *“I was forced to take a gun. When it came time for DDR the Commander told us that he was going to collect all of our arms and then we would get the money when he turned them in. But he never brought the money back to us.*

⁴⁰ Information provided in conversations with NEPI, Monrovia and IRC in Kolahun.

⁴¹ Interview with child protection staff in Voinjama, September 2007.

He lied to us. I did see that others benefited from the DDRR and feel they have gotten opportunities that I wish I had.

One woman, Kassa, told Amnesty International: *"When DDR came around I took my ammunition to the UN and they told me to see the commander before I could disarm with the ammunition. I went to the commander and gave him my ammunition. He never gave me any money and I did not go back to the UN. I was upset by this but I did not feel that there was anything I could do about it or didn't feel I had anyone to complain to."*

Another woman, Yassa, from Voinjama who did disarm told Amnesty International, that some women did not benefit unless they were prepared to have sex with their commander: *"I was able to get ammunition from my commander and so I was able to go through DDR. Some women left Liberia so they weren't able to disarm. Other girls refused to make love to the soldiers so they did not get ammunition."*

Tenneh, aged 23, who was from Foya, stayed with the LURD for two years and although given a weapon she never used it. She used to wash clothes, haul water and carry ammunition. She refused to have sex with a commander so did not benefit from DD. She told Amnesty International: *"In order to get the 'lucky ticket' [and go through DDR] you had to make love to a man with arms. I didn't want to so I didn't get anything to disarm with. All the girls I knew who disarmed made love to those men and came back from the DD and mocked me."*

Although unaware that they did not need a weapon to disarm Esther, Massa and Jemma thought they were unable to disarm after their commander had been killed as he had collected their arms before the disarmament had started and they were relying on him to disarm. All three women suspected that his death was linked to DDRR in some way and that whoever killed him most likely stole all the arms and ammunition in his possession and benefited from it. Esther told Amnesty International: *"I did not disarm because my commander was killed. None of us had any access otherwise. This was a big problem for so many of us. There was nowhere we could go to complain."*

Women who chose not to be associated with the process

*"No matter how well done a DDR programme is there will always be a sizable number of women who will not participate DD because they simply do not want to be identified with the process"*⁴²

Several women spoke of not wanting to be associated with the process due to the stigma associated with it. This was particularly true for women who had children as a result of rape and who feared others would not be accepted back into their community and would be unable to remarry. According to staff at CVT, the fear that association with the DDRR programme would effectively be a barrier to remarriage was a common reason why women would have actively chosen not to participate in the DDRR. Not only did women want to remarry to help them financially but culturally there was also a strong sense that a woman without a husband was a second class citizen.

Diana is now 25 and has three children. She was with the LURD between 2000 and 2004 and was primarily responsible for cooking and towing ammunition. One of her children was conceived after being raped while with the LURD. She told Amnesty International: *"After my entire family was killed by government troops because they were hunting for Muslims, I stayed in Kolahun and when the LURD entered I was forced to cook for them. I was not allowed to eat. I used to have to carry arms and ammunition to Bopulu. We could never complain or even let on that we were tired or they would most certainly kill us. There were so many women and girls with us. Women were raped all the time. I had one child with them and now I have three. I haven't told anyone here about my experience as I want to marry so that I can get help for my children. That is the reason that I didn't go through DD or otherwise everyone would know."*

Other women did not trust the process due to their previous experience of DDR in 1996. In the 1996 DDR less than two percent of those who were demobilized were girls and even fewer women. Later evaluations recognized that women and girls had played a significant role in the Liberian conflict. However, at the time, women and girls

⁴² Interview with child protection officer, UNICEF, September 2007

were not fully recognized as part of fighting forces and as a result they were rarely considered for DDR.

Dessie, now aged 30, fought with government troops in both wars. She told Amnesty International: *"When the DDRR process started in 2004 I had no confidence that it would be any different than the first DDR which women were totally excluded from. I choose not to waste my time and participate. I told a large number of the women that I commanded that I was not going to participate some followed my lead while others tried and then had their own experience from it."*

Women who were unable to participate

Many of the women Amnesty International spoke to were out of the country in Guinea or Sierra Leone while the DDRR process was going on - in refugee camps:- taking care of sick family members or in hospital addressing health related emergencies of their own. In general women were overwhelmed with responsibilities making it difficult to participate in DDRR. Some women reported being unable to travel to the cantonment site and leave their children and their livelihood for a week or more. Many women, especially those with no help at home, complained that they simply had not been able to take that kind of time away from home.

Hawa, is now 30 and has four children. She was in Guinea when she heard about DDRR. She told Amnesty International that: *"At first I was with the government troops and then later I was with the LURD. They took our food from us. I was badly treated by both the government troops and the LURD. After I was with the LURD I went to the refugee camp. I heard about the DDR but I was already in the refugee camp and could not leave the children."*

Dedeh is 30 and has three young children. She was taking care of her sick mother during the disarmament phase: *"I did not go through DDR because at the time my mother was very sick and I had to take care of her. I could not leave her to go through it. I do see that some people benefited from DDR."*

Faith is 18 now and was only 13 when captured by government troops. She was repeatedly raped and cannot have children. She was seeking treatment at the time of the disarmament and demobilization and thus could not go through it herself. She told Amnesty International that: *"I was living in Foya when government troops entered. I stayed with them from 1999-2003 I was captured with other small girls. There were eight of us all together. We were all used by this one commander who would rape all of the eight girls. Now I have stomach problems. I am told that I have an infection but when I take medicine I don't really feel better. I was in my village seeking traditional medicine when the DDR was going on so I missed out. I am still not all right fully."*

Problems experienced by women during Disarmament and Demobilization phase

Some women and girls who did participate in the DDRR programme spoke of the obstacles they had in disarming including being harassed by men when they were on line to disarm, or being ridiculed or hit while waiting. Once in the programme, some experienced problems related to medical care and career counselling.

Some efforts were made to provide medical assistance and counselling for those suffering the consequences of sexual and gender based violence at the cantonment sites, however in some cases it was not enough.

An UNDP activity report about the DDRR programme highlighted a number of problems in this area: *"For STI we can see that the frequency is one point below the outside rate (4.86 per cent for 5.84 per cent). When compared to the statistics of the reproduction health agencies managing the STI awareness activities at the cantonment sites, mainly among women the figure is raised to 70 - 80 per cent. This disparity shows that due to lack of knowledge of the symptoms, or lack of confidence with the screeners, a ten-minute check is not long enough to capture information on these diseases".*⁴³

⁴³ Liberia Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (DDRR), UNDP Trust Fund activity report, December 2003 to August 2004, p.26.

A few days in the cantonment site was also considered too short a time to deal with some of the reproductive health, sexual and gender based violence concerns facing some of the women. It was observed that the time was too short for many women to feel comfortable confiding on a sensitive issue such as rape without any guarantees that there would be follow up. Women often lacked confidence in the medical care provided at the centres. *"There was a hospital but there was no good doctor available at the time. I find now that there are better doctors around now but it is difficult to access them as they are not always available"*.

Furthermore, once the women left the cantonment site all medical assistance was cut off making it impossible to obtain ongoing treatment. A member of the Ministry of Gender recalled how in Buchanan she observed several cases where it was clear that the women would need further medical care beyond what was available at the cantonment site but that no referral was made available leaving them with no help.

The lack of psycho-social counselling available to men and boys during DDRR is now considered to be having serious social consequences for Liberian society, especially in relation to the current high rates of rape. It also reportedly facilitated the easy recruitment of former combatants from Voinjama to Guinea in February 2007⁴⁴.

At times women and girls simply did not benefit from the programs available at the cantonment site because it was simply too crowded and some chose to stay away. Jackie, 18, was able to go through DDRR, after serving with government soldiers for two years farming and hauling ammunition, she was given ammunition by her uncle who was a commander and went to disarm. She did not stay at the cantonment site in Voinjama but did collect the US\$300. She told Amnesty International: *"I turned in ammunition at the DDRR and received my \$300. I couldn't go to the cantonment site though, it was so crowded. So never went through the demobilization part. I did in the end receive an ID card."*

⁴⁴ Interview with NEPI, September 2007

4.2 Rehabilitation and reintegration

The first set of reintegration programmes began in June 2004, some are still continuing today, while others are yet to start. The final reintegration programme, due to start in early 2008, will be running fully by the NCDDR and will target the remaining estimated caseload of 9,000. Despite lessons which should have been learned from the previous DDR that took place in Liberia, and guidance from internally agreed guidelines on DDRR which states: *"The period of rehabilitation and reintegration will be a long one, and if not well planned, it is highly unlikely that ex-combatants will reintegrate and that divisions between them and the receiving community will widen as time goes on. Recognizing this danger from the outset is part of ensuring long-term stability and peace building,"* the manner in which the reintegration programme has been conducted has been short-term in nature and has largely not met the needs of its beneficiaries.⁴⁵

The major problems, so far, have been both: that the majority that should have participated did not have access to the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes; and that there is reportedly a high drop out rate for those who do participate. Large numbers of the women and girls who did participate in the disarmament and demobilization, and had ID cards, did not participate in reintegration programmes due to the stigma of being associated with the process. Many also did not fully participate because of the lack of child care facilities they were unable to attend. Reintegration packages offer formal schooling or skill training options for children and apprenticeship skill training programmes for adults as well as an allowance of US\$30 a month and a starter kit on completion of the training. Skills training courses last from eight months to one year. Although reintegration packages were technically only open to those with ID cards obtained from going through the disarmament and demobilization process, due to the poor coordination of the overall programme, some people were able to enter without ID cards, especially those programmes that were funded by parallel partners.

The quality and availability of programmes has varied significantly from one location to the next. Lack of coordination of

⁴⁵ Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, October 2004, p.38

reintegration programmes has created a lot of confusion in communities and among civil society organizations making monitoring difficult.⁴⁶ The success of programmes depends a lot on the integrity of the implementing partner and their knowledge and understanding of women and girls' unique needs in a post-conflict environment.

One woman leader told Amnesty International that she decided to start a skill training enterprise to provide an alternative route from prostitution for women and girls. Her initiative later became an approved skill training centre for the DDDR programme although the programme was not restricted to those with ID cards. Likewise in Kolahun where there were few available opportunities for women and girls and huge needs, Mary, a community leader, opened up her own home to girls in need. However, she acknowledged that sometimes her help was insufficient to address the girls' needs and, for example, in September 2006, five of the 15 girls she had taken into her home ran away to Voinjama to be on their own. Mary told Amnesty International: *"When the girls first came they were very aggressive and had a hard time following my rules. In the end they left and went to Voinjama. I think they will end up getting involved in prostitution as a means to support themselves. They need a much greater intervention than I am able to provide."*

Programmes have not been uniformly available throughout the country and in rural areas like Foya and Kolahun there are far fewer programmes available than in Voinjama or in Monrovia, in particular. Programmes that lacked provisions for capital or seed money at the conclusion of the programme have left many women trained but unemployed, frustrated at not being able to use their new skills and knowledge.

Lack of participation

According to UNDP approximately 40-50 per cent of those that went through disarmament and demobilization obtained ID cards and chose formal education did not continue, and either gave their ID cards to others, lost them or sold them. The number of proxies or

⁴⁶ USAID and the EU funded the UNDP trust fund but also funded separate programmes for children using their own implementing partners.

those that simply did not use their ID cards themselves were higher for women than men. Discussions between Amnesty International and women's organizations revealed that this was linked to the stigma associated with being a part of the DDR programme and many women simply did not want to have that association as they saw it as an impediment to their actual ability to reintegrate into their community.

Barriers to participation and high drop-out rates

Discussions with women in Monrovia revealed that many of the women who obtained IDs and went through the process were at first excited about the prospect of learning a new trade but many of the programs simply didn't start, or the training programs stopped in the middle, or the teachers walked out. This resulted in large numbers of women feeling let down by the process. One woman told Amnesty International *"When DDR came most of them were waiting to go back to school but after a certain time DDR broke down, there was no tuition, the teachers stopped showing up and everyone got discouraged and dropped out"*.

In addition, lack of childcare often prevented women and girls from being able to fully participate in or finish programmes. Formal provisions were not made for childcare and instead women were expected to pay for childcare or make other arrangements. Programmes that did not cater comprehensively to women and girls' unique needs resulted in large numbers of women and girls dropping out. Some programmes allowed children to accompany the women or girls to the programme but it was left up to the women and girls to ensure that the children were cared for.

Child protection staff and women's organizations throughout Lofa County and in Monrovia told Amnesty International that young mothers seemed to be at the greatest risk of dropping out of the training and education programmes due to their inability to cope with all the demands of caring for themselves and their children.

Programmes that successfully kept women and girls participating throughout the life of the programme recognized their care needs and tried to address them by providing counselling and allowing them to bring their children to the skill centre. Other

concerns expressed were the difficulty of providing basic needs for their children including health care, clothing, food and opportunities for their children. Although this need was recognized and staff of the implementing partners appealed to donors to make funds available for a more holistic program, Amnesty International did not find any programme that was designed to take this reality into account.

The lack of psychosocial counselling, as a result of insufficient funding, provided for in reintegration programmes appears to have contributed to high drop out rates. The failure by implementing partners to take the time to understand the problems faced by the women and girls and to attempt to address them led to many women and girls dropping out. Teenage pregnancy also contributed to the high drop out rates for girls who had chosen formal education, as part of their reintegration, as school policy mandated that pregnant girls could only attend at night and night schools were not always available.⁴⁷

Some organizations were more successful in addressing potential barriers to participation in or completion of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Community Empowerment Program (CEP), a formal programme based in the suburbs of Monrovia, catered to women and girls aged between 16 and 45 who had been female combatants or WAFF. Prior to the start of their programme they carried out a needs assessment and found that teenage pregnancy, gender based violence, illiteracy, lack of access to markets, lack of functional clinics and schools were the major issues or needs affecting women and girls. They then designed a programme to address these issues with the result that 90 per cent of participants were able to complete the programme⁴⁸. According to CEP staff, key

⁴⁷ According to UNICEF, Liberia has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Africa with 23 per cent of girls under the age of 18 giving birth. The Government of Liberia-UNICEF Programme of Cooperation, 2005. Rebuilding Social Services and Reintegrating Children Associated with Fighting Forces Supporting the Reintegration and Rehabilitation process.

⁴⁸ According to CEP staff, key elements necessary for helping women and girls reintegrate are: ensuring strong psycho-social support through individual and community counselling; engagement and counselling with the community that they were reintegrating into; family planning training; life skills training; reproductive health; business training and vocational training.

elements necessary for helping women and girls reintegrate are: ensuring strong psycho-social support through individual and community counselling; engagement and counselling with the community that they were reintegrating into; family planning training; life skills training; reproductive health; business training and vocational training.

THINK, which first started programming work in 2003 with a group of female combatants, and which has also been successful in helping women and girls to reintegrate, is now in the process of carrying out research on girls' participation in reintegration programmes.

Preferences for business and skill training over formal education

Discussions with women themselves and staff of women's organizations revealed that women and young mothers preferred to learn a skill or start a business as they felt that this was the quickest way of gaining the financial support or income they needed immediately.⁴⁹ Formal education was seen as taking too long and some women without any education did not feel comfortable in the classroom as they thought of themselves as too old or out of place to be going to school. Largely women opted for tailoring, as there were few other choices that women felt were appropriate for them. Brick building, carpentry or driving seemed more the domain of men and other choices such as tie-dying, hair dressing, or soap making were not necessarily lucrative in a post war context. Tailoring was a popular choice for women but areas then became saturated with high numbers of tailors making it difficult for all individuals to thrive.

One 20-year-old woman, Vivian, used the initial money she got through participating in the disarmament process to start setting up a business. On the advice of her mother, who looks after her child while she attends classes, she chose to be trained in tailoring. She told

⁴⁹ A study carried out by CHF International in Lofa County among ex-combatants revealed that approximately 67 per cent of men and 83 per cent of women would prefer to have their own business rather than being an employee. However, access to start up capital was rare: 96 per cent of respondents need to take out a loan to start a business but only 5 per cent had access to credit.

Amnesty International: *"I only want to do tailoring. I wasn't interested in school. I never went to school. If I do tailoring I can make money and be able to take care of myself and my child I can't do that if I go to school."*

Insufficient starter kits and lack of appropriate options

Women leaders in Kolahun stated that some women who did manage to go through DDRR became frustrated with the RR programme as they ended up with insufficient starter kits, making it impossible to be productive at the skill they learned. In Kolahun, Amnesty International interviewed women who, at the end of the programme, received one sewing machine that was to be shared between three people. In other cases, because of a need to address immediate needs women and girls would sell off their sewing machine or start-up kit to buy medicine for their sick children, food for the day, or clothing. In most cases however the implementing partners that were supposed to supply starter kits did not and few women and girls felt they had any form of recourse to demand this entitlement. A common complaint among women in Kolahun was that they now could lay bricks, sew cloth, or make soap but did not even have five Liberian dollars to do it.

Need for more opportunities after training

Evaluations and studies are now revealing that, despite the potential benefits of vocational training, in such a challenging post war environment it has not resulted in lasting employment or actual livelihoods for most women. Additional findings are revealing a greater need for support in finding jobs and establishing business start-ups. Furthermore these findings revealed that the women that Amnesty International spoke to saw an additional need to learn business skills and basic literacy as well as receiving micro-credit or some capital start-up. Staff from the Ministry of Gender observed to Amnesty International that the current sum available in micro-credit programmes was too small, and it made it difficult for women to make it work for them.

Community attitudes towards women and girls

A key determining factor in a woman or girl's successful reintegration was whether she was accepted back into her community. Initially, in communities, there was a lot of hostility towards female combatants and WAFF. They were considered aggressive and looked down upon by the community including by their own families, particularly if they came back with children from the war. Yet few programmes dealt with this dilemma, leaving most women and girls to fend for themselves. Their return was often seen as an additional burden for the family and not always welcome. The discrimination felt by women and girls had a huge impact upon their ability to reintegrate. In formal education, the feeling of being stigmatized impacted upon women and girls' performance in school.

In general, however, observers felt that there were many positive examples of reintegration, where there had been intervention by local community structures or community based organizations, and a demonstrated willingness by the women or girl to fit in and be productive. In general when WAFF or former combatants were seen as productive and able to take care of themselves, and contributing to the community in some way, their communities had been more accepting.

Ongoing protection concerns

High incidences of rape and other forms of sexual violence in homes, schools, and communities is, at least in part, due to the failure of the DDRR programme to provide adequate psycho-social counselling to former combatants. However many also thought that the lack of prosecution for rape were also contributing factors. Sexual abuse and exploitation has become the norm in schools, the community and in the home in Liberia and is threatening the ability of women and girls to reintegrate.

Women's organizations and Ministry of Gender staff share the perception that former male combatants were more likely to be the perpetrators of rape due to their lack of psycho-social counselling. They stated that: *"What we see now is that rape is rampant. The*

other day I heard about the gang raping of an 11-month-old baby. Men and boys also need to be counselled otherwise they will rape again.”⁵⁰ This point was also made by Watta Modad of the Women and Children’s Resources Center which provides counselling to the community as a whole where there are still a lot of social problems, including rape, to ensure there is healing at the community level. She told Amnesty International: “The issue of rape is a serious one. There is a whole generation of men who have repeatedly raped women and in my experience these are the ones who will easily rape again. In the past women would never tell and only address it if someone else finds out. But as long as women are silent about it the rates will remain high.”

While cases of rape and domestic violence are being reported to the police – largely due to the awareness raising that has been carried out by NGOs about the amended rape law - the actual number of prosecutions remains low.⁵¹ Culture continues to play a significant role in preventing women from reporting rape due to the stigma involved. Even when women and girls report rape or sexual violence to the police, they rarely see the case through either because of pressure from the police and family members, or because of the inhumane and degrading treatment they receive at various stages of the judicial process. The poor treatment of women and girls throughout the legal process is reportedly a major deterrent to prosecution. In extreme cases deals are made between families and girls are required to marry the perpetrator. Poverty also plays a role as parents agree to not press charges if the perpetrators pay them off.

⁵⁰ Interview with Minister of Gender, September 2007.

⁵¹ The new rape law, passed on 17 January 2006, repealed Section 14.70 of the New Penal Code and expanded and strengthened the definition of rape to include penetration by any foreign object, the age of the child including provision of the CRC to anyone below 18 and does not have the capacity to consent to sex. It also includes the offence of gang rape, punishable by a life sentence; provides for first degree felony rape under the age of 18 punishable by life imprisonment; and raises the sentence for rape as a second degree offence punishable by seven to 10 years. It provides for trials to be held in camera. AFELL Liberia “*Factors Affecting the Prosecution of SGBV Offences in Liberia An Assessment and Review of the capacity of the Court System*” April 2007.

Plans are now being made for the creation of a Special Court or a fast track court to deal only with crimes of rape and sexual offences. Capacity building in the form of training on how to deal with such cases directed at police and other court officials will also take place. UNFPA is providing support to the Ministry of Justice, and the Special Court is due to be ready by April 2008.

According to a study carried out by Save the Children in 2006: *"Sexual exploitation of girls is so common, that it has been described as a 'normalised' trend, almost acceptable or at least something that doesn't startle Liberians any more. According to groups consulted, there has been a definite change in morality and the behaviour which could be described as 'for the worse', and at the cost of the survival and development of the young female Liberian and her perceived capacity to protect herself."*⁵² Through the assistance of staff from a child protection agency, Amnesty International held a group discussion with girls between the ages of 12 and 17 who were attending elementary or junior high school. They stated that all had been approached for sex by their teacher at one point or another during the year. One of the girls told Amnesty International: *"It is bad. I tell my friends that it is bad but some of them go with the teacher anyway. They want to get a passing grade so if they don't go they risk being failed by the teacher. There are some brave ones that have told the principal and it resulted in the teacher in the school getting fired."*

In discussions with community members in Lofa County, the question of women and children at risk of abuse in the community came up frequently: *"We have six girls in our agriculture project but our programmes and funds are too small to meet all the needs of the community. There are so many problems with abuse also. We tried to deal with it by providing a workshop for community members but a lot of work remains to be done."*

6. Conclusions

It is an undisputed fact that women and girls played a significant part, and fulfilled a variety of roles in the 14 years of

⁵²From Save the Children UK Liberia program *"From Camp to the Community"*⁸ May 2006 p. 3

conflict in Liberia, yet two successive DDRR programmes failed to answer their needs.

After the first conflict, women and girls were largely excluded because their roles were generally not recognized, and women and girls who took part in the second conflict did not receive the assistance the international community had agreed upon as a part of the DDRR programme, or through other programmes to help protect women.

The overall DDRR process was fraught with difficulties and those in charge of the process made little genuine effort to consult with national entities during the planning stages leading many Liberians to see the process as being donor driven rather than feeling a sense of ownership. DDRR started prematurely, in early December 2003, despite fears that the timing was too hasty. Well over the number planned disarmed and demobilized leaving insufficient funds available for rehabilitation and reintegration work. Inadequate monitoring allowed some commanders to manipulate the process and, as a result, many of those most in need of DDRR were excluded from the process, while thousands of non-eligible individuals are estimated to have taken part. The success of reintegration programmes was left to chance and to the integrity of individual organizations rather than a national effort of closely monitored criteria.

Moreover, the process was created without sufficiently understanding and taking into account women and girl's experiences in the war and their subsequent needs. Insufficient attention was paid to ensure that women and girls participated in the DDRR process, and avoidable problems, such as poor information dissemination, created insurmountable barriers to participation for many women in Lofa County. Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes failed to incorporate basic elements such as child care to ensure women were able to fully participate in the programmes, aided by a degree of flexibility, such as night classes, to enable women to work round their other immediate obligations.

As a result, the many women and girls who did not fully participate in DDRR programmes are having a significantly harder time reintegrating into civilian life than those who fully participated fully. Women and girls are dealing with the aftermath of rape and other sexual violence from the war, and after the war, and they need special medical and psychological assistance. They are also dealing with major social issues that need special attention, such as: limited social acceptance in communities; protection concerns; and lack of available livelihood opportunities. The lack of access to justice, education, jobs, housing, and appropriate medical care, to help them to reintegrate into communities, are also major concerns.

Amnesty International fully recognizes the challenging post war environment in Liberia where economic and social structures are in ruins. While DDRR programmes are not designed to rebuild Liberia, but if done well they will provide an opportunity for at least a segment of the population to acquire skills and have options for reintegration. If the programs are not done well, as in the case of Liberia, there could be serious implications for Liberian society as a whole, with the threat of greater social problems and a possible return to conflict.

Like efforts to improve DDRR programmes in other regions of the world, the international community needs to put money and resources into efforts to ensure that commitments to women are met.⁵³ This should include ensuring that programmes at all stages of the DDRR process address the unique needs of women and

⁵³Efforts taking place through the World Bank's Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP)'s Learning for Equality Access and Peace (LEAP) Program are exploring new approaches to gender and DDR issues through gender related research and pilot projects in the Great Lakes Region focusing specifically on Burundi, the Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Program's focus is to understand all aspects of the female experience in the context of the war and to design programs which address women's unique needs and assists in their reintegration. The programme is designed to analyze the key need in a context, and address it in that unique context as it recognizes that women and girls generally do not participate or benefit adequately in conventional DDRR processes.

ensuring that women and girls are protected from ongoing sexual violence and abuse in their schools and communities. Abiding by commitments to ensure women and girl's full participation in DDRR programmes and by commitments to protect women and girls from violence and discrimination will assist in short and long term security and development.

7. Recommendations

Recommendations to the Government of Liberia

In order to ensure that the final phase of the DDRR fully takes into account the specific needs of female combatants and women formally associated with the fighting forces, the government with the NCDDR should take the lead and:

Make sure that all staff involved in its planning and implementation are familiar with Security Council Resolution 1325, as well as, relevant international guidelines to provide for a gendered approach to both implementation and planning;

Ensure that gender appropriate information campaigns are made accessible to women and girls by working with women's organizations that work in the various areas;

Ensure that specific gender dynamics related to access to land and housing are considered, especially in the remote areas of Lofa County;

Ensure that psycho-social counseling is available in communities to all those (children, women and men) who need them;

Ensure that education and training programmes are accessible and flexibly designed to meet the needs of women and girls, including ensuring that funding is allocated for child care and/or other necessary arrangements, to allow women and girls to participate in training;

Ensure that programmes are designed to provide access to credit and/or capital once the training is over, and to create incentives for women to work in a cooperative manner to maximize their options;

Ensure that programmes are accessible to women experiencing particular health problems related to their experience of the conflict;

Ensure women and girls have access to quality career counseling which allows them to make choices that make sense for them that will lead them to choose marketable vocational skills;

Support women in skill training and business activities that will improve their overall livelihoods;

Ensure that micro-credit schemes and business training are options within the overall reintegration package;

Ensure that communities and community based groups are intricately a part of the process and assist in the reconciliation and healing processes; and

Ensure that the variety of roles, experiences of women and girls, and the consequences for women and girls must be reflected in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process.

Recommendations to the donor community

The donor community should:

Provide sufficient funding so that civil society organizations are funded to monitor all post-conflict processes including the last phase of reintegration;

Be involved in all stages of the planning process and play a monitoring role to ensure that it takes the gender-sensitive approach forward;

Ensure that lessons from the Liberian DDRR be learned and taken into account for other future DDRR programmes; and

Consider the needs of the overall war-affected population when making decisions on the provision of additional funds to improve DDRR.

Annex I International guidelines and international law for ensuring a gender based approach to DDR

There are a number of internationally recognized guidelines that guide DDR processes in general with a view to ensuring a gender based approach. Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are also critical tools for moving gender equality forward in conflict and post-conflict situations. A document produced by UNIFEM, CEDAW and Security Council Resolution 1325: “A Quick Guide”, explores in detail how drawing on the synergy between these instruments can effectively maximize the impact of norms and standards to gender equality in all conflict and post-conflict situations.⁵⁴

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 mandates member states to engage women in all aspects of peace building. With regard to DDR it specifically “encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants.” Since it was passed, the UN Security Council has recalled the principles laid down in Resolution 1325 when establishing the DDR-related mandates of several peacekeeping missions, such as the UN Missions in Liberia and Sudan and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

General Recommendation 25 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on special temporary measures also provides guidance on women’s protection against discrimination and violence which is relevant to post-conflict processes including DDR. General Recommendation 25 also provides information on other international legal standards that apply to women and girls situations in post-conflict contexts.

⁵⁴ http://www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php

The recently finalized UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) are a comprehensive set of policies, guidelines and procedures covering 24 areas of DDR. The IDDRS consolidate policy guidance on DDR, providing an integrated-UN approach on the planning, management and implementation of DDR processes. They are also the most complete repository of best practices drawn from the experience of all UN departments, agencies, funds and programmes involved in DDR. The IDDRS are accompanied by the DDR Briefing Note to Senior Managers and the Operational Guide to the IDDRS.

The IDDRS include a module on Women, Gender and DDR which was adopted to address the fact that previous DDR efforts had concerned themselves mainly with male combatants, and had largely ignored women's roles in conflict and post-conflict situations.⁵⁵ The module recognizes that this approach had failed to deal with women as combatants and those women combatants may have different needs from their male counter parts. It also recognizes that previous approaches had failed to address other essential non-combat roles undertaken by women associated with fighting forces, and that failing to include women in the process was a failure to recognize the importance of women's participation in post-conflict peace building initiatives.

In recognition of this, the module states that in UN-supported DDR the following principles of gender equality are applied:

Non-discrimination and fair and equitable treatment: In practice, this means that no group is to be given special status or treatment within a DDR programme, and that individuals should not be discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, political opinion, or other personal characteristics or associations. This is particularly important when establishing eligibility criteria for entry into DDR programmes;

Gender equality and women's participation: Encouraging gender equality as a core principle of UN-supported DDR programmes means recognizing and supporting the equal rights of women and

⁵⁵ http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/og/OG_5_10.pdf

men, girls and boys in the DDR process. The different experiences, roles and responsibilities of each of them, during and after conflict, should be recognized and be reflected in the design and implementation of DDR programmes;

Respect for human rights: DDR programmes should support ways of preventing reprisal or discrimination against, or stigmatization of those who participate. The rights of the community should also be protected and upheld.

In the Secretary-General's 2002 *Study on Women, Peace and Security*, undertaken in response to Security Council Resolution 1325, the Secretary-General recommended the following actions on DDR:

Action 1: Incorporate the needs and priorities of women and girls as ex-combatants, 'camp-followers' and families of ex-combatants in the design and implementation of DDR programmes, including the design of camps; the distribution of benefits; and access to basic resources and services, including food, water, health care and counselling, in order to ensure the success of such programmes, women and girls' full participation, and their access to benefits.

Action 2: Increase the number of programmes for child soldiers, fully include attention to the specific situation and needs of girl soldiers, and identify means to support child soldiers, including girls, who do not enter DDR programmes.

Action 3: Recognize the impact of armed conflict and displacement on family relations, and develop awareness of the risk of increased domestic violence, especially in the families of ex-combatants; and develop programmes on the prevention of domestic violence that are designed for families and communities, and especially male ex-combatants.

Action 4: Recognize and use the contributions of women and girls in encouraging ex-combatants to lay down arms and participate in weapons-collection programmes, and ensure that they benefit from any incentives provided for such activities.

Action 5: Ensure full access of women and girls to all resources and benefits provided in reintegration programmes, including skills development programmes.⁵⁶

In addition to adherence to international guidelines special attention should be paid to ensuring that planners have a good understanding of the legal, political, economic, and social context of the DDR programme and how it affects women, men, girls, and boys differently, both in the armed groups and in receiving communities. Planners must also understand the different needs of women, men, girls, and boys who were combatants, supporters of combatants, wives, and dependents. It should be well understood that women and girls have different needs in the post-conflict period.

⁵⁶ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf>

Annex II International legal standards

International law applies in peace and wartime. The right to enjoy human rights without discrimination is a principle underlying all international human rights law. It is reflected in every major international and regional human rights instrument as well as in the UN Charter. Freedom from discrimination has also been recognised as a right in itself.⁵⁷ Freedom from discrimination is a non-derogable human right – a right that cannot be compromised even in times of emergency such as war, internal disturbance or natural disaster.

International human rights law also provides protection against specific forms of discrimination – including discrimination against women. Liberia has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) but has not yet domesticated it. The country is in the process of preparing its first CEDAW report, due out in April 2008. Particularly relevant to the post war context is General Recommendation 25 on temporary special measures. In this recommendation the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women notes that the obligation not to discriminate does not mean identical treatment for all women. It notes that the principle of equality often requires different treatments for different situations.

CEDAW General Recommendation 25.8 8: In the Committee's view, a purely formal legal or programmatic approach is not sufficient to achieve women's de facto equality with men, which the Committee interprets as substantive equality. *In addition, the Convention requires that women be given an equal start and that they be empowered by an enabling environment to achieve equality of results. It is not enough to guarantee women treatment that is*

⁵⁷ In its General Comment 18 on Non-discrimination the Human Rights Committee notes that article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights “provides in itself an autonomous right. It prohibits discrimination in law or in fact in any field regulated and protected by public authorities.”

identical to that of men, rather, biological as well as socially and culturally constructed differences between women and men must be taken into account. Under certain circumstances, non -identical treatment of women and men will be required in order to address such differences. Pursuit of the goal of substantive equality also calls for an effective strategy aimed at overcoming under-representation of women and a redistribution of resources and power between men and women.

The position of women will not be improved as long as the underlying causes of discrimination, and of their inequality, are not effectively addressed. The lives of women and men must be considered in a contextual way, and measures adopted towards a real transformation of opportunities, institutions and systems so that they are no longer grounded in historically determined male paradigms of power and life patterns.

Women's biologically determined permanent needs and experiences should be distinguished from other needs that may be the result of past and present discrimination against women by individual actors, the dominant gender ideology, or by manifestations of such discrimination in social and cultural structures and institutions. As steps are being taken to eliminate discrimination against women, women's needs may change, or become the needs of both women and men. Thus, continuous monitoring of laws, programmes and practices directed at the achievement of women's de facto, or substantive equality, is needed to avoid a perpetuation of non-identical treatment that may no longer be warranted.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa has several relevant provisions that include:

Article 2 on the elimination of discrimination against women states that: States Parties shall combat all forms of discrimination against women through appropriate legislative, institutional and other measures. Particularly relevant are c.d. and e. c. which integrates a gender perspective in their policy decisions, legislation, development plans, programmes and activities and in all other

spheres of life; d. take corrective and positive action in those areas where discrimination against women in law and in fact continues to exist; e. supports the local, national, regional and continental initiatives directed at eradicating all forms of discrimination against women.

Article 3 on the right to dignity. The following provisions are particularly relevant. Article 3.3: States Parties shall adopt and implement appropriate measures to prohibit any exploitation or degradation of women; Article 3.4: States Parties shall adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman's right to respect her dignity and provide protection of women from all forms of violence, particularly sexual and verbal violence.

Article 4 on the rights to life, integrity and security of the person provides that states parties shall take appropriate and effective measures to: enact and enforce laws to prohibit all forms of violence against women including unwanted or forced sex whether the violence takes place in private or public; adopt such other legislative, administrative, social and economic measures as may be necessary to ensure the prevention, punishment and eradication of all forms of violence against women; identify the causes and consequences of violence against women and take appropriate measures to prevent and eliminate such violence; actively promote peace education through curricula and social communication in order to eradicate elements in traditional and cultural beliefs; banish practices and stereotypes which legitimize and exacerbate the persistence and tolerance of violence against women; punish the perpetrators of violence against women and implement programmes for the rehabilitation of women victims; establish mechanisms and accessible services for effective information, rehabilitation and reparation for victims of violence against women;

Article 12 on the right to education and training is relevant in that it obliges parties to take measures and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and guarantee equal opportunity and access in the sphere of education and training; protect women, especially the girl-child from all forms of abuse, including sexual harassment in schools and other educational institutions, and

provide for sanctions against the perpetrators of such practices; provide access to counselling and rehabilitation services to women who suffer abuses and sexual harassment; integrate gender sensitization and human rights education at all levels of education curricula including teacher training.

1. States Parties shall take specific positive action to:
 - a. promote literacy among women;
 - b. promote the enrolment and retention of girls in schools and other training institutions, and the organization of programmes for women who leave school prematurely.

Article 13 on economic and social welfare rights provides that states parties shall adopt and enforce legislative and other measures to guarantee women equal opportunities in work and career advancement and other economic opportunities. In this respect, they shall:

- a. promote equality of access to employment;
- b. promote the right to equal remuneration for jobs of equal value for women and men;
- c. ensure transparency in recruitment, promotion and dismissal of women and combat and punish sexual harassment in the workplace;
- d. guarantee women the freedom to choose their occupation, and protect them from exploitation by their employers, violating and exploiting their fundamental rights as recognized and guaranteed by conventions, laws and regulations in force;
- e. create conditions to promote and support the occupations and economic activities of women, in particular, within the informal sector;
- f. establish a system of protection and social insurance for women working in the informal sector and sensitize them to adhere to it;
- g. introduce a minimum age for work and prohibit the employment of children below that age, and prohibit, combat and punish all forms of exploitation of children, especially the girl-child;

- h. take the necessary measures to recognize the economic value of the work of women in the home;
- i. guarantee adequate and paid pre- and post-natal maternity leave in both the private and public sectors;
- j. ensure the equal application of taxation laws to women and men;
- k. recognize and enforce the right of salaried women to the same allowances and entitlements as those granted to salaried men, for their spouses and children;
- l. recognize that both parents bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of children and that this is a social function for which the State and the private sector have secondary responsibility;
- m. take effective legislative and administrative measures to prevent the exploitation and abuse of women in advertising and pornography.

Article 14 on health and reproductive rights provides that:

- 1. States Parties shall ensure that the right to health of women, including sexual and reproductive health is respected and promoted. This includes:
 - a. the right to control their fertility;
 - b. the right to decide whether to have children, the number of children and the spacing of children;
 - c. the right to choose any method of contraception;
 - d. the right to self-protection, and to be protected against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS;
 - e. the right to be informed of one's health status and of the health status of one's partner, particularly if affected with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, in accordance with internationally recognized standards and best practices;
 - f. the right to have family planning education.
- 2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to:
 - a. provide adequate, affordable and accessible health services, including information, education and communication programmes to women especially those in rural areas;

- b. establish and strengthen existing pre-natal, delivery and post-natal health and nutritional services for women during pregnancy and while they are breast-feeding;
- c. protect the reproductive rights of women by authorizing medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the fetus.

Article 16 on the right to adequate housing provides that women shall have the right to equal access to housing and to acceptable living conditions in a healthy environment. To ensure this right, States Parties shall grant to women, whatever their marital status, access to adequate housing.

Under Article 24 on the special protection of women in distress States Parties undertake to:

- a. ensure the protection of poor women and women heads of families including women from marginalized population groups and provide them an environment suitable to their condition and their special physical, economic and social needs; ensure the right of pregnant or nursing women or women in detention by providing them with an environment which is suitable to their condition and the right to be treated with dignity.

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

Article 16 on protection against child abuse and torture provides:

1. States Parties to the present Charter shall take specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of the parent.

2. Protective measures under this Article shall include effective procedures for the establishment of special monitoring units to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting referral investigation, treatment, and follow-up of instances of child abuse and neglect.

Article 27 on sexual exploitation provides:

1. States Parties to the present Charter shall undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and shall in particular take measures to prevent: (a) the inducement, coercion or encouragement of a child to engage in any sexual activity; (b) the use of children in prostitution or other sexual practices; (c) the use of children in pornographic activities, performances and materials.