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The Impact of Gendered Misconceptions of Militarized Identities on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Humanitarian Assistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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With expert review by Jocelyn Kelly

Executive Summary

The prolonged conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has often been mischaracterized by a persistent narrative featuring women as perpetual victims of systemic sexual violence and male rebel groups as perpetrators. This incomplete understanding of the situation has resulted in failures to engage in effective and sustainable Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs in the DRC. In short, institutions involved in transitional processes have neglected the presence of female combatants as active participants in the Congolese war, and thus failed to determine how women and girls who have abandoned traditional gender roles to become combatants can reclaim their identities as members in communities reluctant to welcome them back in their midst. As governmental actors, non-governmental organizations, and United Nations entities work to demobilize, demilitarize, and reintegrate fighters, they must come to terms with a novel idea: that redefining gender has become an integral part of long-term social and economic reconstruction.

I. Introduction

The setting of a transnational conflict since the late 1990s, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to receive a large portion of the post-conflict reconstruction funding and associated humanitarian aid allocated to the Great Lakes region.¹ The mission of rebuilding the DRC, as undertaken by a wide variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and inter-governmental entities, does not merely consist of providing emergency relief and restoring essential services, such as health and education, to the population. In the context of the DRC, it also entails the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, defined by the United Nations as “a process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically by finding civilian livelihoods.”²

DDR in the DRC has occurred under the umbrella of the Congolese government, with the support of a wide array of other actors, including donor countries, NGOs, United Nations agencies, the World Bank, and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO (until 2010 known as United Nations Mission in the

¹ Guy Lamb et al., "Rumours of Peace, Whispers of War: Assessment of the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo," The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, (2012).

² UNDDR, "Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards," New York: United Nations Disarmament,

² UNDDR, "Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards," New York: United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, 2006, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://cpwg.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/08/UN-2006-IDDRS.pdf>.

Democratic Republic of Congo, or MONUC).³ DDR efforts were initially launched in the DRC in 2002, and DDR processes presently continue in the country. However, until the third iteration of DDR in the DRC, these programs have not placed sufficient focus on the role that women play as critical actors in armed groups. As a result, the experiences of a large number of women and girls who participated in non-state armed groups remain largely unexamined, and their specific needs neglected in the process of DDR.

II. Female Combatants' Experiences of Armed Conflict in the DRC: An Overview

The process through which some Congolese women transform into combatants is a multifaceted one,⁴ particularly within a society with fairly traditional and rigid gender roles.⁵ Before (and during) the war, women's traditionally low status typically defined them as communal (not individual) beings whose identities depended on their association with a male figure, whether as wives, widows, sisters, mothers, or daughters. For instance, a gap existed between the Congolese law relating to women's rights and how it was implemented. While the law states that Congolese women and men have equal rights, it also stipulates that a woman can be turned out of the house of her deceased husband by her in-laws and be deprived of all goods the couple had acquired.⁶ Furthermore, a married woman needs her husband's authorization if she wishes to undertake any activities outside the household. Finally, although Congolese women who engage in trade form a majority of individuals active on local markets, "they do not hold positions of power on the committees that runs the markets. Women are also excluded from village meetings and other councils that determine local policy."⁷ Such gendered, social standards have an impact on how women involved in armed groups are perceived. Thus, while the dominant assumption with regards to militarized identities is that "men make war, women make peace, serving as victims, spectators, or prize," MacKenzie also suggests that:

Women's peaceful nature and their perceived aversion to risk are sometimes described as stemming from their natural capacity as mothers. In effect, roles that are depicted as natural for women during conflict are often associated with their reproductive capacities and their ability to nurture, cooperate, and sustain life. Instead of soldiering, women's primary roles during conflicts tend to be described as "wives,

³ Andre Kolln, *DDR in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Overview*, Peace Direct (November 2011), 5, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/DDR-in-the-DRC-by-Andre-Kolln.pdf>.

⁴ The term "combatant," as used in this paper is not intended to be congruent with the legal term "combatant," as defined by international humanitarian law. Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions defines "combatants" as members of the "armed forces" and Additional Protocol II as "dissident armed forces and other organized armed groups." By "combatants," this paper refers to women who have directly participated in hostilities as fighters or in a support capacity.

⁵ On the issue of traditional gender roles, see generally: Oseni Taiwo Afisi, "Power and Womanhood in Africa: An Introductory Evaluation," *Journal of Pan African Studies* vol. 3, no. 6 (March 2010); See also Annie Matundu Mbambi and Marie-Claire Faray-Kele, *Gender Inequality and Social Institutions in the D.R.Congo* (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, WILPF, (December 2010), accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/hrinst_genderinequalityinthedrc_wilpf_december2010english.pdf.

⁶ Nadine Puechguirbal, "Women and War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Signs* 28, no. 4 (June 1, 2003): 1273.

⁷ *Ibid.*

girlfriends, and mothers, waiting for their soldiers to return and caring for wounded.”⁸

In contrast to these assumptions, Congolese women's experiences of war are diverse and complex.⁹ Many have fought alongside men in non-state armed groups such as *Mai Mai*, M23 or the CNDP.¹⁰ When Italian photographer Francesca Tosarelli traveled to eastern DRC in 2013, for example, she heard females in uniform recounting their experiences of joining rebel groups after being raped by members of opposing groups.¹¹ Once ostracized by their communities, these women chose to avenge what was done to them by joining rival armed groups. Some women claimed to relate to a particular group's 'ideology,' when such thing existed. For others, the disruption caused by decades of conflict left no alternative livelihoods to joining the fight; they joined rebel groups because looting kept them from starvation.¹² Some female combatants, including many girls and young women, became entangled in the war when rebels abducted and kept them under their control for extended periods. Many had been forced into the war first as 'bush wives,' also serving in a support capacity on the front as cooks, ammunition holders, or intelligence agents when the need arose. Some female fighters were educated while others were not, but in all cases, their lives and livelihoods came to depend on their newly militarized identities, acquired roles that clearly contradict the societal standard of a lively but submissive African woman.¹³

The aforementioned unequal social status between genders often translated into dismissive attitudes by male rebels towards women, even towards women actively involved in the fighting.¹⁴ For women who joined armed groups voluntarily, such de-valorization of their contribution lead some to add another layer to their combatant persona: that of a perpetrator. By engaging in their male peers' violent practices, female fighters negate the latter's assumptions about their weaknesses, and in many instances have not only condoned the use of sexual violence but have become rapists themselves.¹⁵ This tragic aspect of war is exacerbated by the increasing number of rape victims abducted by rebels who go on raping other women over the course of their captivity and forced enlistment.¹⁶

⁸ Megan MacKenzie, "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone," *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 12, 2009): 247; citing April Carter, "Should Women Be Soldiers or Pacifists?," in *The Women and War Reader*, ed. Lois Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: NYU Press, 1998).

⁹ For more on women who have fought in the Congolese civil war, see Nordiska Africanstitutet, Uppsala's Coulter, Persson and Utas, (2008), *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*, p. 19.

¹⁰ "Nord-Kivu: Mademoiselle Kalachnikov," *Courrier International*, October 25, 2013, accessed January 7, 2015. <http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/2013/10/25/nord-kivu-mademoiselle-kalachnikov>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On girls' and women's roles in armed groups and the reintegration process, see Eastern Congo Initiative and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, *We Came Back with Empty Hands: Understanding the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 2013, accessed January 26, 2015, http://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Women_in_War/EmptyHands.pdf.

¹⁴ On how women who have taken up arms are no longer seen as women in Congolese culture, see, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, "Whores, Men, and Other Misfits: Undoing 'feminization' in the Armed Forces in the DRC," *African Affairs* 110, no. 441 (2011): 572.

¹⁵ Ibid., 570. "In most other regards (in relation to definitions of soldiering and violence, the purpose and role of the army, et cetera) women soldiers expressed views similar to those of their male colleagues. For instance, they tended to explain the use of violence against civilians – including sexual violence – in the same way as their male colleagues. [...] Their arguments drew on women's rights to equal access, but particularly women's equal capacity for violence and combat."

¹⁶ Kirsten Johnson et al., "Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations With Physical and Mental Health in Territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo," *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 304, no. 5 (August 4, 2010), accessed January 30, 2015, <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=186342>. The study found that 10% of the men and 40% of the women who reported being subjected to sexual violence were assaulted by a female perpetrator.

When female combatants leave armed groups in which they have served, they do so as stigmatized ‘non-women,’ individuals whose identity is undefined according to local societal standards, and whose status does not (yet?) exist in their original communities. Ostracized as impure after being raped,¹⁷ and unnatural after choosing to bear arms, these ‘social transgressors’ may appear as beyond redeemable, and many have difficulty functioning appropriately within the parameters of traditional society. The same ought to be presumed for those who have taken part in atrocities: seen as potentially dangerous for other civilians, they need far more than a few months of training and employment to once again integrate into communities that have also greatly suffered from the war.¹⁸

Regardless of their situation within the community post-conflict, a return to normalcy is not an option for many, if not most, of these women. In addition to being dismissed by a majority of their male peers and by society, they face a similar negation of their active role in the war. As a result, their status as combatants has not been recognized or addressed in DDR and associated humanitarian programs.

III. The Effects of Misconceived Identities on the Efficacy of Transition Programs

The first two DDR processes to take place in the DRC have been described as arguably “the most complex and multi-faceted [DDR] programme ever implemented in Africa.”¹⁹ This process was also the largest in the world in terms of the number of states involved, individuals demobilized (albeit ultimately unsuccessfully, since some eventually resumed armed violence), and levels of funding.²⁰ Owing to the transnational nature of the Congolese conflict, a Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) was launched in 2002, with a geographical focus on the greater Great Lakes region of Africa, (Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, the DRC, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda). The program’s objectives included: promoting the employment of ex-combatants (e.g. in agriculture, fishing, environment, health and education); creating jobs for high intensity labor (e.g. in road or school rehabilitation); improving basic social services in disadvantaged communities and those of, DDR target groups; and improving infrastructure and access to basic needs (e.g. education, drinking water, and medical supplies).²¹

¹⁷ For stigma of rape in DRC, see generally: Susan Bartels et al., *Now, The World Is Without Me: An Investigation of Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam America, (April 2010), accessed February 10, 2015 <http://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications%20-%20women%20-%20now%20that%20the%20world.pdf>.

¹⁸ For stigma female combatants face in the DRC, see: *Helping Female Ex-Combatants Regain Their Livelihoods*, The World Bank, (2008), accessed January 3, 2015, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,print:Y~isCURL:Y~contentMDK:21965454~menuPK:2246551~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258644,00.html?cid=ISG_E_WBWeeklyUpdate_NL. The report describes ex-combatants’ struggles as follows: “Specific prejudices include the assumption that the women have been sexually abused and hence have lost their ‘purity’. Host communities are also fearful of the aggressive behavior they believe the women may have acquired while away and that members of their military group may follow them to their communities. The women’s own assumptions reinforce these perceptions and they sometimes choose to marginalize themselves from the community.”

¹⁹ Guy Lamb et al., *Rumours of Peace, Whispers of War: Assessment of the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo*, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, (2012), accessed January 5, 2015, 5. <http://www.tdrp.net/PDFs/DRC-Report-2012.pdf>

²⁰ *Ibid.*: “The DRC was the most significant component of the MDRP, with 50% of the entire budget being devoted to DDR-related projects in this country. The final report of the MDRP also revealed that the DRC segment accounted for 36% of all demobilised beneficiaries; 41% and 22% of reinsertion and reintegration beneficiaries respectively; and four out of the five special projects for child soldiers were implemented in the DRC.”

²¹ Henri Boshoff, *Completing the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration Process of Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Link to Security Sector Reform of FARDC. Mission Difficult!*, Situation Report, Institute for

However, programs specifically designed for female combatants were not included. Indeed, the programs had one commonality: their focus on male fighters, who are the traditional focus of humanitarian programs designed for ex-combatants. As one source put it, “DDR programmes often focus on ‘the young men with guns.’”²² The program’s initial aim was to reintegrate approximately 350,000 combatants: 150,000 into the new armed forces and 150,000 into civilian life.²³ During the first phase (2004-2006), more than 102,000 combatants, including 2,160 females (2%), were demobilized by a state entity, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: Results achieved during the first phase*

	Male	% of total	Female	% of total	Total	% of 300,000	Observation
Total strength of ex-combatants treated	182 280	98	3,720	2	186,000	62	Gap 48%
Total of ex-combatants demobilized	99,854	98	2,160	2	102,014	68	40,000 ex-combatants reintegrated
Total of ex-combatants integrated into the Armed Forces	82,426	98.1	1,560	1.9	83,986	56	14% without free choice of DDR or Armed Forces integration
Weapons recovered					104,455	35	Gap 65%

*Table recreated from Andre Kolln, *DDR in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Overview*, Peace Direct, (November 2011), 5. Accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/DDR-in-the-DRC-by-Andre-Kolln.pdf>.

While estimates of female participation in armed groups vary widely,²⁴ these demobilization figures account for only a small proportion of female fighters. The participation of female ex-combatants in the first DDR campaign in the DRC, as well as their access to humanitarian services, has thus been unsatisfactory.

One reason for women’s exclusion lies in policies that grant DDR services to direct combatants only and are based on the common assumption that women cannot be combatants. Having their militarized identities thus mis-categorized, women were typically seen as camp personnel, even though some were active combatants. McKay and Mazurana thus argue that, “[h]aving DDR processes planned and implemented by military officials has

Security Studies, (November 23, 2010), accessed February 21, 2015, http://www.issafrica.org/uploads/SitRep2010_23Nov.pdf.

²² See *Gender Perspectives on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)*, UN Department for Disarmament Affairs in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women United Nations, (March 2001), accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.un.org/disarmament/HomePage/gender/docs/note4.pdf>.

²³ Henri Boshoff, *Completing the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration Process of Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Link to Security Sector Reform of FARDC. Mission Difficult!*, Situation Report, Institute for Security Studies, (November 23, 2010), 2: accessed February 21, 2015, http://www.issafrica.org/uploads/SitRep2010_23Nov.pdf.

²⁴ See Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*, Policy Dialogue No. 3, UPPSALA: The Nordic Africa Institute, (2008), 19. Accessed January 10, 2015, <http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:241304/FULLTEXT01>.

resulted in bias against those the military does not consider “real soldiers” (i.e., men with guns),” while even women in supporting roles should also be included in demobilization efforts.²⁵

Furthermore, DDR policies granting services to direct combatants only – rather than members of armed groups more broadly – exclude many women who served in supportive roles or who have concealed their status as fighters. For instance, as a result of limiting the entire DDR process to a ‘one man = one weapon’ policy in the DRC, only individuals who turned in a weapon were given a reintegration kit. In this context, the only combatants who qualified for the process were those carrying a gun that they were willing to turn in after the fighting was over. Since female fighters rarely possessed firearms of their own – instead sharing with others or performing non-combat duties – they have been unable to take full advantage of the diversity of services available to their male peers under the umbrella of DDR.²⁶ This has deprived those women who had been involved in armed groups, but not directly in the fighting, from assistance. As primarily noncombatants, female members of armed groups were not seen as having significant enough obligations to qualify them for livelihoods programs. Furthermore, some women have been reluctant to expose their status as fighters when this status had previously been concealed.²⁷

Another element contributing to the predominance of this gendered approach to DDR is the existing inefficiencies in donor coordination in the DRC. Indeed, competing strategic, political, and institutional interests of donors (including South Africa, Angola, and Belgium) have made it very difficult to achieve a coherent approach. Rather than providing adequate services to women unable to rely on their communities for support, donors have adopted a pragmatic approach and have tended to focus on operational aspects of defense assistance, such as training and equipment, as favored by the Congolese government.²⁸ Last but not least, the Congolese government appears to have prioritized the creation of a male-dominated army and a Rapid Reaction Force, focusing on the protection of its officials.²⁹ Among those willing and able to participate in demobilization programs, many women were also forced to leave without completing the reintegration process due to the lack of female-specific assistance or facilities in DDR centers.³⁰

Whether due to exclusion or personal choice, as suggested by Mazurana and Cole, the majority of women and girls once active in armed groups have “self-reintegrated” in accordance with “a variety of factors,” such as “how they entered the fighting forces, [...] how long they have been gone from the community, [...] whether they entered the fighting forces as children, [...] whether they were sexually abused, and if so, by which force.”³¹ Cultural factors might equally influence a decision not to participate in the programs, particularly in instances in which women and girls would rather hide their status as a fighter in order to blend in their communities. Former underage female combatants faced a particular stigma resulting in a lack of acceptance from their parents, disrespect from men, and low marriageability; they also reported being feared in the community, and being seen

²⁵ Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After the War*, Ottawa, Canada: Rights & Democracy, (2004), 114.

²⁶ Baaz and Stern, “Whores, Men, and Other Misfits,” 569.

²⁷ For more on women in the DRC who were reluctant to participate in DDR programs, see: Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*, 27.

²⁸ Henri Boshoff, *Completing the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration Process of Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Link to Security Sector Reform of FARDC. Mission Difficult!*, 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ For more on women in the DRC who were reluctant to participate in DDR programs, see: Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*, 27.

³¹ Dyan Mazurana and Linda Eckerbom Cole, “Women, Girls, and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR),” in *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*, ed. Carol Cohn, 1 edition (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), 206.

as “tainted” by sexual violence. Having children during the war also made it more difficult for women to reintegrate; mothers and their children born in armed groups were frequently rejected or subjected to stigma and mistrust.³² Finally, the geographical size of the DRC, exacerbated by poor infrastructure and communications, makes it difficult for lone, traveling women to reach the areas where DDR must be implemented.

IV. Towards a Gendered Approach to Humanitarian Assistance Programs for Ex-Combatants

Following a series of international initiatives on gender in the past few years, institutions involved in DDR programming in the DRC have sought to better respond to the needs of female combatants. The latest iteration of DDR in the DRC thus has a four-pronged approach, including sensitization, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.³³ While the first two DDR campaigns were mostly silent with regards to gender, this third program, known as DDR3 and initiated in December 2013, is based on a gender-specific normative framework that includes (but is not limited to): United Nations Human Rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (1966); the Convention to End all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1977) and its General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations; United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which also recognizes the important role a gender perspective has with regard to peacebuilding and conflict;³⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009) on sexual violence, humanitarian access and human rights agreements, ceasefires and ceasefire monitoring, DDR, vetting, and reparations programs;³⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009), which calls on all those involved in the planning for DDR programs to take into account the needs of women and girls associated with armed groups, as well as the needs of their children;³⁶ the 2002 document, *Women, Peace and Security*, which acknowledges the need for a gender perspective in all aspects of peace processes;³⁷ and the Amani Peace Process in Eastern DRC between the military of the DRC and MONUC, and involving a majority of armed groups.

Furthermore, DDR3 has another critical feature that distinguishes it from previous installments: the integration of the MONUSCO-designed Sexual and Gender Based Violence Global Strategy.³⁸ DDR3 places a particular focus on the demobilization of female combatants, and national programs are required to report in a gender-sensitive fashion while making considerable efforts to reach their target recipients. Its aims are “focusing on training and awareness raising amongst the DRC security forces and agents; the strengthening of accountability mechanisms; and the introducing of a vetting mechanism.” In addition, in order to guarantee the incorporation of a gender perspective into its rules

³² Ibid., 207.

³³ “Briefing: DDR in Eastern DRC - Try, Try Again,” *IRINnews*, (March 4, 2014), accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99741/briefing-ddr-in-eastern-drc-try-try-again>.

³⁴ *Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in United Nations Peacekeeping Activities (MONUC / MONUSCO) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, UN Women Evaluation Office, (2012), accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.unwomen.org~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/10/evaluation-gendermainstreaming-unpeacekeeping-drc-en%20pdf.pdf>.

³⁵ United Nations, “Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009)” Security Council, (September 30, 2009), accessed January 4, 2015, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1889\(2009\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1889(2009)).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Women, Peace and Security*, United Nations, (2002), accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf>.

³⁸ “United Nations Support to SSR,” *United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo, MONUSCO*, n.d. Accessed January 15, 2015, <http://monusco.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=10813&language=en-US>.

and operations, MONUSCO has pledged “to guarantee active participation of women in the peace process as well as in the post conflict and reconstruction contexts” and to “promote communication and sensitization activities in respect of the gender issue inside and outside MONUC.”³⁹

It remains to be seen whether DDR3, a US\$100 million attempt at disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, will succeed where previous efforts have failed. Unfortunately, DDR3’s attempts at gender mainstreaming have yet to be implemented, as DRC Attorney General Rose Mutombo Kiese noted in 2014 in an address on female combatants during an international symposium on the DRC.⁴⁰

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Relying on the premise that gender is a socially constructed role ascribed to an individual in accordance to generally-accepted functions imparted to men and women in a given community, it is possible to surmise that gender may be molded to adapt to social changes. Social reintegration in the context of DDR would thus entail embracing new gender roles and incorporating them into programmatic concepts. In the meantime, increasing women’s access to demobilization-related humanitarian services will require a more nuanced understanding of gender and gender-specific needs in the context of war. NGOs and UN agencies involved in designing post-conflict assistance strategies in rural areas will need to first realize that the amalgam of two seemingly contradictory gender roles in one woman – the feminine caretaker and the masculine fighter – was considered inconceivable fifteen or twenty years ago but has become more common in recent years.

If success in terms of demobilizing female ex-combatants has thus far eluded transitional processes in the DRC, it can be achieved if resources and real contextual expertise are combined at the international, national, and local levels. Although it is fair to surmise that recurrent conflict and instability in the eastern DRC are preventing the normal completion of DDR programs, notions socially constructed *ante bellum* about the roles of women and men during war also impact policies and program implementation. Donors and international NGOs involved in designing DDR programs may consider taking the following actions to increase the effectiveness of these transitional programs:

- *Engage* with the Congolese government, which bears the primary responsibility for facilitating the implementation of DDR programs, and present proposals for the creation of Outreach and Civil Action Teams (OCATs) comprised of female soldiers and officers to be deployed in areas with high former rebel presence. The mandate of these OCATs would be to foster continued dialogue between civilian populations, the former combatants (females) in the latter’s midst, and state armed forces.
- *Build* the organizational capacity of local NGOs already involved in implementing the National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council

³⁹ “Mandate,” *United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO)*, n.d. Accessed February 1, 2015, <http://monusco.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=10742&language=en-US>.

⁴⁰ Niamh Reilly and Roslyn Warren, “Women’s Leadership and Participation in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region: Achievements, Challenges, and Opportunities,” Centre for Global Women’s Studies, NUI Galway, and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, (July 2014), accessed January 21, 2015, [http://www.nuigalway.ie/womens_studies/news_and_events/docs/DC_Women_Participation_Peace_Report_Reilly_Warren_Eng_\(2014\).pdf](http://www.nuigalway.ie/womens_studies/news_and_events/docs/DC_Women_Participation_Peace_Report_Reilly_Warren_Eng_(2014).pdf).

Resolution 1325. The country's civil society is a diverse, active force that includes the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)/RDC, Genre en Action, the *Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise*, and a conglomerate of women groups currently working with inter-governmental organizations and foreign governments to implement gender-based policies. Capacity-building in this context could help enhance the effectiveness of advocacy efforts on behalf of, and call for a focus on, female combatants, as well as for an expansion of the scope of financial grants allocated for women's programs.

- *Capitalize* on the Congolese government's recent, renewed interest in addressing wartime sexual and gender-based violence (as indicated through the appointment of a presidential Senior Adviser on Sexual Violence, Child Recruitment, Ms. Jeanine Mabunda Lioko Mudiayi) to create a humanitarian space for female combatants and their dependents. This can be achieved, first, by moving beyond a reluctance to include unarmed women in the commonly accepted definition of 'combatants,' and second, by following an organizational trend of dispatching gender specialists in humanitarian facilities such as refugee camps, and applying it to DDR centers.