

Gender Perspectives on **DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR)**

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How and why are gender perspectives relevant to DDR of former combatants?

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) are activities designed to facilitate disbanding military fighters and easing their transition back into society. They are often given priority at the cease of hostilities, as it is important to help former combatants settle into peacetime occupations.

These activities can involve the turning in of weapons and weapons caches, the physical relocation of ex-combatants (often first in camps and then to other locations), distribution of benefits packages for ex-combatants (this can include clothing, minimal amounts of food and cash settlements), and development of credit, training or other programmes to assist the reintegration of combatants into their communities.

Why are gender perspectives important to DDR?

Armed conflict affects women and men differently. Although each conflict presents specific dynamics, men may have been more active in organized fighting, while women may have had to flee to refugee camps, been subjected to violence, had to assume non-traditional responsibilities and seen their domestic responsibilities intensified in their efforts to secure food, shelter and security for their families. These different experiences need to be recognized in order to construct DDR programmes that respond to the actual (rather than assumed) needs of all those involved.

Women and men have unequal access to resources following conflict. Given existing gender biases and inequalities in most societies, men are often better positioned to take advantage of reconstruction initiatives. They may be better educated; they are often more confident in dealing with outsiders; and they tend to be more visible. DDR programmes often focus on “the young men with guns”. They are seen as the powder keg that must be diffused and tend to be the most visible. Special attention is generally required to ensure that women and girls are not excluded from programmes and that women also

benefit from reconstruction efforts. Without these efforts, DDR activities run the risk of widening gender inequalities.

Finally, the achievement of sustainable peace is a complex process that must involve all members of society. DDR activities that only focus on one segment of society (former male combatants), without considering how that group interacts with the rest of society, have had limited effect. Understanding how societies can rebuild (including the gender dimensions of this process) increases the possibilities for lasting peace (Kingma, 1999).

Gender perspectives within DDR initiatives

Although each situation must be understood on its own terms, here are examples of issues that arise when DDR initiatives are reviewed from a gender perspective:

Ex-combatants are a heterogeneous group. The group of ex-fighters can include women, men, boys, and girls. Each of these groups can be further divided: people with and without physical disabilities; fighters from various sides in the conflict; volunteers versus those forced to fight; people who served as commanders and those who participated in the rank and file.

Both women and men have taken up arms.

Although the percentages vary from situation to situation, women as well as men have often participated as combatants in armed struggles (especially wars seen as national liberation struggles). At times, DDR initiatives have failed to acknowledge women combatants. For example, the demobilization programme in Mozambique in the mid-1990s only granted resettlement allowances to men and only men’s clothing was issued (Baden, 1997).

Women ex-combatants may have specific needs (needs different from those of men) relating to children, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV-

AIDS, and difficulties obtaining skills to earn a living. Reports from countries as different as Namibia, Chad and Nicaragua recount similar experiences for female ex-combatants relating to domestic violence linked to their husbands' sense of insecurity due to unemployment or recent release from the armed forces. Demobilized women also faced resentment from local people and often downplayed their leadership skills to win acceptance (Sorensen, 1998). A study of ex-combatants in Eritrea found that women fighters found reintegration more difficult than their male counterparts, often because during the struggle they experienced relative equality with their fellow fighters. Following the end of hostilities, this equality was questioned (BRIDGE, 1996).

In other cases, demobilization activities did not recognize and build on skills gained by women combatants during the conflict. For example in Zimbabwe, although women in the armed forces were given considerable informal training as nurses, on demobilization they were often ineligible to qualify for the civilian nursing profession because of their lack of formal training (ILO, 1998).

There are groups of people who were directly involved with armed fighters but are not seen as soldiers. These groups, primarily women and girls, support combatants (voluntarily or forced) while not directly engaging in combat: carrying supplies, cooking food, washing clothes and providing sexual services. They are often not a focus of DDR activities, as they are not seen as security threats. These groups may not be eligible for DDR programmes, as they tend not to have weapons to trade in. Yet, their lives have also been disrupted and they too need to be reintegrated into society.

A broad perspective of the socio-economic situation is required. Although there may often be pressures to get the guns out of the hands of combatants, it is important to understand more than just the needs, interests and situation of combatants. There are at least two important pieces in a reintegration initiative: the combatant and the family/society into which they are to be reintegrated. Just as the combatant's life has changed during the conflict, so have the lives of non-combatants. Family members not directly participating in the fighting may have still been victims of violence: they may have fled their homes, had to take on new responsibilities and learn new skills, overcome harsh obstacles and be carrying their own war horrors.

These families also need support if they are to successfully receive and reintegrate ex-combatants.

Specific issues relating to gender roles and responsibilities can arise in this process. Family members may need to adapt to changed responsibilities or to renegotiate household resources. Many marriages do not survive. The gender-based and sexual violence which women and girls face in situations of armed conflict and displacement often continue in post-conflict transition periods, and in many cases the incidence of domestic violence increases. Men who have suffered physical disabilities may have trouble re-adapting to family life. Family composition often changes with an increase in the number of widows, orphans and dependents.

Psychological rehabilitation needs are important.

Reintegration programmes often focus on economic reintegration, providing food, allowances and skills training. Yet, ex-combatants and their families may also require other types of support, including psychological trauma counselling, to rebuild their lives. For ex-combatants the transition to peacetime can be stressful and difficult. There is a need to look at the psychological transition as well as the socio-economic. This is important from a gender equality perspective, as there are often high rates of domestic violence associated with returned combatants. There may also be different post-traumatic stress symptoms for women and men ex-combatants. Support for psychological trauma must be appropriate to the situation and culture. Western notions of therapy are not always relevant.

Human rights violations and persecution.

According to one analyst, "the confidence and security perceptions of people—including ex-combatants—depends to an extent on how past and ongoing human rights violations... are being handled" (Kingma, 1999). This issue can provoke dilemmas as the merits and impacts of persecution versus amnesties are hotly debated. Women's and men's perceptions of these issues may vary as may the profile of violations.

Women's NGOs have played important roles in the investigations of human rights violations in countries such as Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala and Sri Lanka. As well as healing personal wounds, addressing impunity and compensation can also help to restore confidence in authorities and regenerate a sense of community (Sorensen, 1998).

Concrete implications

A gender perspective in DDR activities raises the following questions:

- **What are the goals of the initiative?** Although there is often pressure to adopt a narrow focus, initiatives should be grounded in a careful understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics (including gender relations). This broad understanding will help to ensure that initiatives actually promote stability. Narrow goals and limited focus (for example, only including male combatants) often fail to promote peace. It is important to support combatants, their families, and all those affected by the conflict.
- **Who is eligible?** It is important to consider who will participate in the activity and ensure that eligibility criteria do not exclude important groups. Different groups to consider include: men and women, the spouses of combatants, boys and girls, armed and unarmed military members, and rural and urban combatants.
- **Who is consulted and involved?** Participatory processes can play invaluable roles in planning DDR initiatives. Specific attention may be required to ensure that the views of women and girls (as combatants, spouses, family members and generally as members of society) are heard and taken into consideration.
- **What is offered?** It is important to consider the package of benefits offered as part of the DDR initiative. Will women and men be offered the same package? Is the package equally attractive to women and men? Will women be eligible for access to land (if that is part of the reintegration package)? If agricultural tools are offered, are they tools that both women and men will use? Will women face specific barriers when trying to take advantage of support (for example, lower education levels which prohibits their participation in specific training initiatives, social opposition to women assuming non-traditional roles)? Does the package include socio-culturally appropriate trauma counseling (recognizing that needs may be different for women and men/girls and boys)?
- **How are others affected by the initiative?** Even if the DDR initiative is limited to ex-combatants, is there a clear view of how others will be affected (particularly the families of ex-combatants)? In many cases the success of reintegration depends on the rebuilding of family and social life. This

cannot happen if pressures continue to force families apart (domestic violence, alcoholism, continued separations). The importance of understanding family dynamics is particularly important when child soldiers are involved.

- **What is the timeframe?** Although there is often pressure to deliver immediate results, reintegration is a long process. Planning must begin early, include sufficient time for consultations, and anticipate developments. It is not enough to plan for dearming and disbursement as a one-time package. A longer timeframe holds more potential for success.
- **What is the legal, political, economic and social context of the initiative?** Are there barriers or obstacles specific to women or men that should be taken into account, for example, legal, social and economic obstacles to owning or managing land or property?
- **How can local capacities and organizations be strengthened?** Local NGOs, including women's organizations, can be important players in DDR initiatives, but capacity building or additional support may be required to maximize their effective participation.
- **How can greater learning and understanding of the gender dimensions of DDR be encouraged?** There is little documentation on the gender dimensions of DDR. More research and focused studies are required.

The outcome document from the **twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Follow-up to the Platform for Action** (June 2000–A/S-23/10/Rev.1)) highlights the importance of a gender perspective in post-conflict reconstruction. Agreed actions include to:

- Address the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive and durable manner, as well as the differences in the impact of armed conflict on women and men, and take them into account in the relevant policies and programmes in order to, inter alia, enhance the protection of civilians, particularly women and children. (Para 98d)
- Provide support to and empower women who play an important role within their families as stabilizing factors in conflict and post-conflict situations (Para 98j).
- **Security Council Resolution 1325**, adopted in October 2000, specifically mentions the need to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and their dependents in DDR (disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation) initiatives (para 13).

Resources

The following studies and articles provide some information on gender perspectives and DDR:

Baden, Sally (1997). **Post-Conflict Mozambique: Women's special situation, population issues and gender perspectives to be integrated into skills training and employment promotion.** ILO Action Programme on Skills and Entrepreneurship Training for Countries Emerging from Armed Conflict. Geneva: International Labour Office (Training Policies and Systems Branch).

Ibañez, Ana Cristina (1999). **Combatientes y Género: Implicaciones para la Reintegración.** Paper presented at Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence, The World Bank, Washington, DC, June 1999.

ILO (1998). **Gender Guidelines for Employment and Skills Training in Conflict-Affected Countries.** Geneva: Training Policies and Systems Branch, International Labour Office.

Kaffel, Hasebenebi (1999). **The Reintegration Efforts of Demobilized Fighters in Eritrea: Gender Perspective.** Paper presented at Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence, The World Bank, Washington, DC, June 1999.

Shikola, Teckla (1998). "We Left Our Shoes Behind," in M. Turshen & C. Twagiramariya (eds.) **What Women Do in Wartime.** London: Zed Books Ltd.

Sorensen, B. (1998) **Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources.** The War-Torn Societies Project, Occasional Paper No. 3. UNRISD. <http://www.unrisd.org/wsp/op3/toc.htm>

For general resources on gender issues in post-conflict situations see:

BRIDGE (1996). Issue 3: Conflict and Development. **Development and Gender In Brief.** Institute of Development Studies.

ICRC (2000). **Women and War.** Geneva: Available at: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/women>

International Alert (2000). **Mainstreaming Gender in Peacebuilding: A Framework for Action.** Women Building Peace Campaign.

Mooney, Erin (1998). **Internal Displacement and Gender.** Notes for a presentation to Humanitarian Principles Workshop: Focus on a Child Rights Approach to Complex Emergencies and Internal Displacement. Brussels, October. http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/Internal>Displcmt_Gender.htm

UNCHS (1999). **Women's Rights to Land, Housing and Property in Post-Conflict Situations and During Reconstruction: A Global Overview,** United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, Land Management Series No. 9. http://www.unchs.org/tenure/Publication/Womrights/pub_1.htm

Woroniuk, Beth (1999). **Gender Equality and Peacebuilding: An Operational Framework.** Ottawa: Canadian International Development Agency. Available at: <http://w3.acdi-cida.gc.ca/peace>

For an overview of demobilization, reintegration and peacebuilding see:

Kingma, Kees (1999). **Post-war demobilization, reintegration and peace-building.** Paper presented at the International Conference and Expert Group Meeting, The Contribution of Disarmament and Conversion to Conflict Prevention and its Relevance for Development Cooperation. Bonn 30-31 August 1999. Available at: <http://www.bicc.de/>

Global Information Networks in Education (GINIE) and UNESCO (1999). **Child and Young Adult Soldier: Recruitment Prevention, Demobilization Procedures & Reintegration.** Electronic document available at: <http://ginie1.sched.pitt.edu/childsoldiers/recruitment.html>