

## SECTION 5

# WORKING WITH SPECIAL GROUPS<sup>11</sup>

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There are a number of guiding questions that may help frame some of the discussions about 'special groups', in the DDR process. Some of these include: Who should be disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated? Should the process be sequential? Does reintegration work? Or indeed what is reintegration for special groups?

Additionally there is scope to discuss the training needs of operational actors in dealing with 'special groups,' perhaps in the disarmament and demobilization phases in particular. And should the needs of core commanders and core fighters in the armed groups be prioritized? This is a debate that is increasingly of concern as successive DDR processes are deemed to have failed or only partially succeeded.

The debate has raged and was starkly defined during the workshop with military presenters clearly preferring to deal only with armed combatants while the humanitarian/non military participants favour a wider definition of who should be included in the reintegration phase, in addition to the disarmament and/or demobilization phases.

Even if those who are eligible for official DDR programmes are limited to only those who are 'combatants', we still face the issue of how we define a 'combatant' and additionally what qualifies the 'combatant' for disarmament and demobilization. Then, once these criteria have been established, how do we properly identify these individuals and ensure that only the genuine ones get through?

The reintegration needs are probably greater for the non-combatants associated with the fighting groups/forces. These non-combatants include: children, workers, domestics, sex slaves, human shields, camp followers, and abductees. However, unless they pass through the disarmament and demobilization phases they are unlikely to be identified or come to the attention of agencies working on reintegration, in fact they may well be totally excluded or worse, still remain in captivity or situations of subservience perpetuating the command structure after the military elements have been disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated.

Priority must be given to those who are in the groups/forces illegally (children under fifteen years old, slaves, abductees, and prisoners of war). Vulnerable groups such as children, women (particularly those used for sexual services), the elderly, the wounded, and the insane among the fighting forces/groups, combatants and non-combatants alike should also be prioritized. We must also ensure that core commanders go through the process and not just manage it.

All of these issues have huge implications for DDR and the type of training and skills needed by those at disarmament and demobilization sites. The one-man-one gun policy leaves out vulnerable groups and puts them at risk of remaining invisible or even in the informal/remnant command structure. In this context, it was suggested that the military work with humanitarian actors to assist with tasks such as the identification of children, traumatized combatants and women. On the other hand, including all individuals associated with the armed forces/groups makes nonsense of the military objectives set by most DDR programmes, turning the process into a humanitarian activity which revolves around visibility. The counterpoint to this view is that disarmament and demobilization processes, as they stand now, work against the victims, people associated with the forces, and often against the offended communities if they are seen to reward fighters.

## Sequencing and the uniformity of the process

The way we talk about 'DDR' suggests that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration is a linear process that takes place after a conflict. However, the realities of many situations and programmes are that people move in and out of armed forces/groups at different stages of a conflict, even at different points in the year. Child demobilization has been possible in many countries prior to the conclusion of conflict, but there has rarely been any disarmament associated with these activities.

DDR processes do require specific planning for each and every 'special group', their needs have to be taken into consideration at pick up points, at disarmament sites, in terms of discrepancies about access to weapons and how they are registered at demobilization sites in terms of screening, encampment, move to family tracing centres and their return.

Is there a case for saying that changing the sequence of DDR would circumvent the need for specific targeting of 'special groups'? Reintegration which targets communities throughout the conflict, during the peace process, and beyond may create the prerequisite environment where 'special groups' feel they no longer need the armed forces as their social and economic needs can begin to be addressed.

Equally, reintegration options and development activities remove the justification used by many forces for the presence of children, camp followers, elderly and sick among them and provide an opportunity for them to be filtered out if their presence is genuinely about social welfare. If the factions claim that their grievances are about lack of equal opportunities to services and development programmes, reintegration activities can start before DD or in tandem; combatants and others who have freedom of movement will be drawn away from the armed forces without incentive-led DD.

Equally, in societies and communities where it is culturally accepted that each and every household owns weapons and each and every adult (male) is considered a combatant, what is the value of a formal DD component? Is it not possible that alternative options would actually attract genuine removal of people from the fighting forces who see the value of such options, but who would be prone to reject involvement in a process against their will or better judgment?

Providing DD for 'special groups' in armed forces can legitimize illegal recruitment. Passing children under 15 through a DDR process can put up the numbers of soldiers in one faction or another to improve their post-conflict bargaining power. However, the very presence of the children is illegal, and those who recruited them or allowed them into the forces should be considered war criminals.

In Sierra Leone, the DDR process was largely considered a success by the international community. However, out of the estimated 48,216 children involved in the armed forces, only 7,000 went through official demobilization programmes. This significant disparity was especially pronounced with girls and women who were even less likely to go through the process. This example clearly illustrates the shortcomings surrounding the inclusion of special groups, such as children who move with the forces/groups (orphans, separated, workers), women who move with the forces/groups (workers, domestics, sex slaves), human shields, camp followers, and abductees, within DDR programmes. The exclusion of these groups has serious humanitarian as well as security implications which in turn directly affect future peace prospects in a region.

## **Who should be demobilized?**

It is clear that all those attached to the armed factions in supporting or abusive roles should be included in the demobilization phase of the DDR process. This would encourage the visibility of hitherto marginalized groups within

DDR processes and would allow them to take part in the reintegration programmes. However, this process should be managed so that certain groups (combatants and commanders) are tracked into more focused disarmament and demobilization stages, while associated groups move more quickly into reintegration.

### ***Vulnerable groups***

The demobilization phase is significant because currently it is a catalyst for those who will be allowed to continue through and benefit from the reintegration programmes. However, it is also where the exclusion of special groups continues (it usually begins in the disarmament phase). Although most DDR practitioners acknowledge the existence of 'special groups' and the need for their inclusion in the DDR process, this knowledge has not been translated into implemented policy on the ground.

Many past and current DDR programmes still have a one-person-one-gun policy on paper, meaning that in order to take part in the programmes an individual must turn in a weapon, although in practice there is a more liberal interpretation of the policy. Most domestics, sex slaves, human shields and camp followers do not have weapons and hence no need to be disarmed. However, by not going through the disarmament process, they are not identified by the UN or NGOs working in the cantonment areas. Additionally, when weapons are indeed actually shared by combatants, individuals such as child and female soldiers do not have the bargaining power within the groups/forces to obtain one of these to turn in. Ironically, these are the individuals who often have the greatest reintegration needs, but are unlikely to come to the attention of agencies working in this area. In fact, many remain captive, perpetuating the abusive command structure after the stronger military elements have been disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated.

## ***Core commanders***

Another group that is often overlooked but can be detrimental to peace prospects are the core commanders and their followers, who often manage the DDR process but do not go through it themselves. This point was painfully illustrated in Liberia where, arguably, the most notorious core commander/“political leader”, Charles Taylor, never went through the process. Instead, he was given a position in the interim government until his “victory” in the flawed elections of 1997. While some may argue that previous DDR efforts in Sierra Leone have succeeded, others argue that key core commanders and their factions failed to go through the process. Today, the Sierra Leonean National Army contains many who fought to overthrow the current President, Tejan Kabbah, the man whom they are now charged with protecting.

Thus it is critical that every core commander, as well as the rank and file fighters, go through some form of disarmament and demobilization programme even if they will eventually be reintegrated into a national army. A break between old and new service must become an essential component of the DDR process and should not be compromised for the sake of political expedience or perceived short-term security needs.

## ***Sequencing and prioritising***

The sequencing and uniformity of the DDR process are also important. There is a greater need for flexibility within DDR programmes. For example, removing children from armed forces must be a priority; their presence is a violation of the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as other instruments of international law. Simply removing them from fighting forces is not enough, however. Proper alternative care must be in place beforehand.

Additionally, special priority must be given to the additional 'special groups'. While most practitioners are in agreement with this point, the question of how is still debatable. To begin with, there is a need to clarify the categories of 'special groups'. Beyond that, there is a need for better intelligence gathering in order to identify and locate the special groups; a Certified Personnel Register (CPR) would be ideal, but is admittedly unlikely to be produced by faction leaders.

## **Lessons from working with special groups**

While strides have been made towards including special groups in DDR programmes, the level of success achieved is still rather low. Vulnerable groups need to be recognized, located, and included in reintegration programmes, while the core commanders must not be exempt from DDR.

Children under fifteen represent a unique challenge and must be removed from armed forces whenever possible. The specialized agencies that work with children, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, should be brought into DDR planning to identify how opportunities to remove children can be created.

Meeting the needs of special groups requires flexibility in the sequencing of DDR programmes as *ad hoc* and sporadic opportunities may arise to remove certain individuals or groups without a fully-fledged DDR programme being in place. This requires that resources are readily available for such initiatives and demands a high level of coordination and cooperation among agencies.

The needs of special groups, how to identify and adequately respond to these needs, and monitoring the reintegration of individuals from special groups into post conflict societies needs to be better understood and analysed.