

CHAPTER 1

THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF DISARMAMENT IN AFRICA

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Any focus on disarmament in Africa over past last twenty years cannot be separated from the history and impact of the Cold War on United Nations (UN) peacekeeping. The decade 1989-1999 saw a major shift in the disarmament debate. Prior to the collapse of the Berlin Wall the debate mostly focused on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons between the two superpowers of the Cold War. However, the end of the Cold War and the subsequent proliferation of intra-state conflicts or what came to be known as complex emergencies in Africa and in countries of the former Eastern bloc brought about new disarmament challenges.¹

Complex emergencies and most post-Cold War conflicts have been characterized as resulting from a series of inter-locking causes, including collapse of political institutions, the phenomena of 'failed states', civil and ethnic strife, famine, displacement of people, disputed sovereignty, the breakdown of national governments and the decline of national economies.² Most of the characteristics of these conflicts continue to mirror the current situation in Africa's conflict zones. In West Africa many analysts have spoken of a 'new barbarism'.³

Freed from the constraints of superpower rivalry, the mandate of peacekeeping changed as more space was created. United Nations peacekeeping missions were given new mandates as traditional notions of sovereignty were challenged. Post-Cold War crises in Rwanda, Somalia, Kosovo, and Bosnia brought about new challenges for the international community and for UN peacekeeping in general. Debates on the need to intervene (most often on humanitarian grounds) were accompanied by the need to review practice and evaluate lessons learnt.⁴

The United Nations role in conflict prevention and resolution, especially its role in peacekeeping was influenced by a number of events and initiatives aimed at improving peacekeeping practice. The then-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, summarized the 'integrally related' role of the UN as combining concepts of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace building. Unfortunately the shifts in terminology

have not helped to define the activities carried out by the United Nations in the pursuit for peace.⁵ Some analysts talk of ‘peace operations’ whilst other speak of ‘peace-support operations’. What is clear though is that the expansion of peacekeeping following the end of the Cold War and the changing nature of conflict has resulted in changes away from traditional peacekeeping role for the blue berets.

Today UN peace operations not only focus on the security dimensions of peacekeeping but also increasingly encompass aspects of good governance, democracy, human rights, economy and development.⁶

The long-term framework of peace operations define them as comprising three principal activities: conflict prevention and peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building.⁷ Long-term conflict resolution addresses the structural sources of conflict in order to build a solid foundation for peace.

Peacemaking implies the reassembling of the foundations for peace and providing tools for building those foundations beyond the absence of war. It is along this continuum that disarmament sets the basis for peace. Disarmament should become a continuous element in ensuring the sustainability of peace through the long-term removal of weapons in society beyond the peacekeeping phase.

The United Nations Security Council provides the framework, through its resolutions, for all disarmament activities in a UN mission. A review of the mandates of various UN missions shows a doctrinal shift influenced by a number of actors. The origins of this shift have been attributed to the:

- Unexpected expansion of UN peace operations mandates;
- Unprecedented responsibilities in Kosovo and East Timor;
- Unexpected challenges in the UNAMSIL mission in Sierra Leone;
- Frank reports on the UN role in Srebrenica and Rwanda; and
- The May 2000 UN peacekeepers hostage crisis in Sierra Leone.

The above factors strengthened and accelerated the need to review UN peace operations and draw lessons from the experiences of the 1990s. The failed mission in Somalia and the failure by the UN to respond swiftly to halt the

genocide in Rwanda were amongst the factors that compelled the UN to evaluate its peacekeeping doctrine and operations. To respond to this challenge, the Secretary-General appointed an international panel to make recommendations for measures aimed at improving the planning and execution of UN peace operations. The report that came out in 2000 was subsequently known as the Brahimi Report.

The report recommended, *inter alia*, that:

- Robust rules of engagement should enable peacekeepers to carry out their mandate professionally and successfully, to be able to defend themselves and the mission's mandate;
- UN Security Council resolutions should meet the requirements of peacekeeping operations when they deploy into potentially dangerous situations, especially the need for a clear chain of command and unity in effort;
- The UN should define "rapid and effective deployment capacities" as the ability, from an operational perspective, to fully deploy traditional peacekeeping operations within 30 days after the adoption of a Security Council resolution, and within 90 days in the case of complex peacekeeping operations;
- A peace building strategy should include funding for quick impact projects aimed at rebuilding foundations for recovery conducive to sustainable peace;
- Member states should be encouraged to establish a pool of civilian police officers that would be ready for deployment on short notice;
- The UN Secretary-General should be given authority to draw up to US\$50 million from the Peacekeeping Reserve Fund, once it becomes clear that an operation was likely to be established, with the approval of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) but prior to the adoption of a Security Council resolution;
- Support should be extended to the UN Secretary-General for the creation of a pilot Peace-building Unit within the UN Department of Political Affairs, in cooperation with other integral UN elements, and that regular budgetary support for this unit be revisited by the membership if the pilot programme works well.⁸

Most of the recommendations of the Brahimi Report are reflective of the lessons learned in UN peace operations since the end of the Cold War. These lessons significantly underscore the importance of the UN in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peace building, especially in societies in conflict or moving from conflict to peace.

African conflict and the role of the UN in disarmament

At the centre of conflict in Africa is the use of small arms and light weapons. The easy availability and proliferation of small arms and light weapons since the end of the Cold War has exacerbated conflict on the continent. Vast amounts of small arms and light weapons left over from liberation wars and the Cold War continue to circulate across the continent. More arms still flow from the former Eastern bloc into arenas of conflict in Africa. The human and economic costs of firearm violence and conflict in Africa have reached devastating proportions.

Small arms and light weapons today provide the greatest challenge for disarmament for a number of reasons. Small arms and light weapons do not require complex organizational, logistical or training capacity to maintain and operate. Secondly, these weapons are lightweight and are easy to assemble and reassemble. Thirdly, small arms and light weapons are easy to acquire due to their low cost. For example, it is said that for just \$50 million (roughly the cost of a single modern jet fighter) one can equip a small army with some 200,000 rifles at today's prices.⁹ Small arms are so easy available that in El Salvador, hand grenades "are commonly carried by many citizens in their pockets and on their belts, and increasingly are used to settle personal arguments".¹⁰

The easy availability, accessibility and circulation of small arms and light weapons in Africa means that failure to devise strategies to minimize the extent through which parties to conflict have access to them undermine any efforts aimed at building sustainable peace. Efforts to reduce the prevalence of small arms need to include tighter domestic control over the production, sale, transfer and ownership of firearms. African countries have been instrumental in the fight against small arms proliferation in the form of regional and sub-regional instruments such as the Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Illicit Small Arms and the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.¹¹

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their central role in conflict has made disarmament an essential component of peace building. This important and essential aspect has not been lost on the UN. Post-Cold War conflict resolution exercises in Namibia, Mozambique and Angola have, to varying degrees, incorporated disarmament as a component of peace making and peace building.

The Brahimi Report of 2000 emphasized the essential role that disarmament plays in a process of peacekeeping and peace building.¹² Some have argued that a DDR programme should be part of an overall integrated recovery strategy that encompasses economic development, security sector reform, the integration of refugees and internally displaced persons, and justice and reconciliation.¹³ However, disarmament merits attention in its own right and there is a growing literature on the topic that identifies essential benchmarks and guidelines for sustainable disarmament and points to some shortcomings in current practice.

Some of the issues raised relate to neutral programmes that failed to take into account experiences of different groups who were involved and affected by the conflict during the process of disarmament. These 'special' groups include child soldiers, women combatants and the dependents of those who were involved in the conflict.¹⁴ This chapter will deal with some of these issues below.

Disarmament as a component of DDR in the context of this chapter refers to activities designed to facilitate disbanding military fighters and easing their transition back into active social and economic life.¹⁵ In its widest sense, and for the purposes of this chapter, disarmament refers to the complete removal of weapons from a military force. Although this is often elusive, the term is typically used to refer to any programme, movement or action to disarm in general, and specifically to disarm soldiers individually and systematically. However, it should be noted that in cases of internal conflict, disarmament covers all armed formations involved in the fighting, including irregular forces.

However, disarmament does not only occur in the context of a movement from war to peace. Most African armies were faced (and in some cases continue to be faced) after the end of the Cold War with the challenge of reducing the size of their large armies.

United Nations disarmament programmes

Disarmament as a component of DDR varies from case to case and can involve turning in of weaponry, its storage and destruction, the physical relocation of ex-combatants (from cantonment areas to other locations of choice), distribution of incentive packages to ex-combatants such as clothing, food, cash settlements or tools and seeds for farming, and training in various vocations.

Disarmament as part of peace operations is usually undertaken under one of three possible scenarios: as part of the negotiated settlement, after the victor initiates the process, or when a third party initiates the process.

The first type of disarmament is often a large-scale programme, which forms part of a comprehensive peace plan, usually under the auspices of the UN. United Nations operations in Namibia, Cambodia, Mozambique and El Salvador are all examples. These types of disarmament programmes form an integral part of the peace process and as such depend on the political will and commitment of the parties involved in the peace agreement. Thus any changes in the political process will have a direct impact (positively or negatively) on the pace of disarmament.

The linkage between politics and disarmament in UN-brokered peace processes is both useful and controversial. It is useful to understand this linkage because it allows for proper planning of disarmament during the earliest possible stages of the peace process. It also results in an understanding that the political process and disarmament should run parallel to each other and that political actors should be made aware of the impact of their political actions on the pace of the disarmament process.

The other side of the above point is that some actors deliberately act in a manner that derails the peace process and consequently the disarmament programme. The linkages between the two variables were more apparent during the disarmament process in Sierra Leone. After renewed violence resulting from the activities of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the ensuing involvement of the British forces to restore calm and the recommitment of the RUF to its obligations under the peace agreement, disarmament resumed in earnest.¹⁶

National disarmament in peace and war

The second type of disarmament (and demobilization) involves those programmes driven by either a victorious government (or a party to the conflict) or a government during peacetime. Cases in point include Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is important to note that these types of disarmament programmes are undertaken or determined by the unique conditions in each. For the purposes of this chapter, UN disarmament (or similar processes overseen by regional or subregional organizations with an appropriate mandate) is viewed as the most legitimate form for disarmament to take in societies moving from war to peace.

In UN disarmament programmes there is always a need to ensure that the government concerned takes the lead in the process. Although the international community, especially UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) play a supportive role, ownership for the process must belong to national players. In Africa this has been done through the establishment of national DDR commissions (NCDDR). One was established in Sierra Leone (the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) and currently in one is in place in the ongoing DDR process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The important point to note with regard to NCDDRs is that they should be developed to be as inclusive as possible, ideally including the UN mission and representatives of the parties to the conflict. The establishment of periodic contact between these parties ensures not only open channels of communication but also provides a platform to deal with any problems that may emerge. These forums also serve as a confidence-building mechanism which is essential in situations of peacekeeping and peacemaking due to the high level of mistrust between parties who until recently were on opposing ends of the conflict.

Coercive disarmament

The third type disarmament mostly involves the generally rare scenario where third parties assume a responsibility to disarm coercively warring parties. Examples include the failed attempt by the UN in Somalia in 1993 where coercive disarmament was seen as the only available solution to restore peace. Unfortunately this exercise brought neither disarmament nor peace to Somalia.

Planning

The other important lesson learned from African experiences in disarmament relates to planning. Planning is a multifaceted and complex process. It is the most important phase of any disarmament exercise and should be done as early as possible (where possible before formal peace is declared) but parallel to the peace process and its political dynamics. The planning process should involve:

- Timing of the stages of the disarmament programme;
- Identification of lead agencies and soliciting financial resources from possible donors;
- Identification of categories of people to be disarmed;
- Identification of types of weapons to be collected;
- Identification of actors and methods of weapons destruction;
- Identification and establishment of cantonment areas;
- Provision of accommodation and support for special groups such as, female combatants, child soldiers and dependents of ex-combatants;
- Strategies for disarmament, i.e. simultaneous disarmament.

Each of these is elaborated upon in the following section.

Timing

It has been suggested that it is possible and indeed desirable that planning for DDR should start well in advance of the peace process itself. This is because disarmament should be part of the overall strategy of national recovery for a society moving from war to peace. It has been suggested that a 'pre-peace' planning unit be set up in preparation for DDR, where possible. For example, Switzerland supported a planning unit for DDR in Mozambique prior to that country's formal conclusion of the peace process.

The advantage of the above approach is that crucial aspects of disarmament (which evolve as parties to the conflict negotiate the settlement) can be factored into the peace process as early as possible. This can also facilitate speedy and smooth implementation of the DDR programme.

However, there are limitations to this approach. Since DDR forms part of the overall dynamics of peace negotiations and is influenced by the political environment, there are always limitations on the possibility of implementing the process prior to the cessation of hostilities.

In some cases peace has proven to be the necessary condition for disarmament. Angola and Sierra Leone are cases where disarmament was not possible without peace. However, these cases should also be put in context. In the case of Angola, the problem was that the UNAVEM mission failed to ensure that DDR was a component of the peace dividend and insisted on premature elections, which backfired when UNITA disputed the election results, and resorted to war, since they still possessed their weapons.

In the case of Sierra Leone, the problem was not necessarily linked to the poor planning of the DDR programme. The periodic derailment of the disarmament process was related to the entire political dynamic between the government and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) on outstanding issues related to the peace process.

The sequence of DDR has been a subject of contestation. Some argue that it should move sequentially through disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and finally reintegration. However, the experience of UN missions in Africa has taught that due to complex political conditions this is not often an easy continuum to implement.

Currently the MONUC mission in the DRC is faced with challenges that clearly refute the evolutionist thesis of a DDR process. At the time of writing the DRC had just inaugurated the Government of National Unity (GNU) and is still trying to put in place the necessary infrastructure. The process of identifying a national DDR committee is still underway. However, there are parallel disarmament efforts under MONUC, operating with a renewed mandate that includes a focus on DDR for Congolese nationals.

The MONUC DDR office has been involved in voluntary disarmament in some parts of the DRC and is engaging with other non-governmental organization (NGO) partners in ensuring some short-term 'quick impact' programmes for

those disarmed and demobilized.¹⁷ This approach forms part of MONUC's new strategy of 'spontaneous DDR'.¹⁸ This strategy illustrates the multifaceted and complex nature of disarmament exercises and how it defies any assumptions of a clear continuum. This is crucial and needs to be acknowledged in disarmament planning and execution, where the situation calls for it.

Identification of lead agencies

As with conflict prevention and conflict resolution, disarmament has been caught up in the politics of the global international system. For timing, planning and operational purposes, any UN disarmament programme needs to be carried out by an identified lead agency.

The issue of timing is closely linked with the identification of lead agencies in the disarmament process under a UN peace mission. Societies undergoing transition from war to peace face enormous resource constraints due to the destruction of economic, political, social and institutional infrastructure as a result of war.

The UN has always been concerned about ensuring that ownership of activities undertaken during a peacekeeping mission are reflected in the country but this is especially true in relation to the DDR component. Ideally the body or group charged with the task of negotiating and planning the process of disarmament should include representatives of the parties, the UN, and other relevant stakeholders.¹⁹ However, lessons learned from previous peacekeeping operations reflect a doctrine that is in flux and practice that is incomplete.

In some UN missions the planning of disarmament does not take place without specialized agencies such as UNDP. Since disarmament is essentially a political matter for parties negotiating the peace, there is sometimes a need for calculated outside pressure to move the process forward. Also, the national capacity to plan and implement disarmament programmes for the country may often be limited. However, there is a need to strike a balance between giving direction and impetus to the process and avoiding the paternalism that can characterize the relationship between international institutions and the less rich countries (who unfortunately constitute a disproportionate number of societies experiencing conflict).

Joint planning should also include members of civil society who are a crucial link between the UN mission and various actors involved in the disarmament exercise. Care should be taken to include such representatives as early as

possible in the planning process. This should be part of a broader ongoing strategy to involve local communities in sensitization and information sessions about the DDR process itself.

Donor funding

There is no peace without a price. Clearly one of the major problems that have been faced by many UN peace operations relates to the time lag between the moment pledges of contributions (i.e. troop deployment) are made to a UN mission and the time they are disbursed. Thus there is a need to ensure that adequate funds are channelled to the mission timeously and that the contributing actors are held to their commitments to the mission.

Categories of people to be disarmed

There is a need to carefully consider the categories of people to be disarmed. Ideally the main groups include government forces, opposition forces, civil defence forces, irregular armed groups and armed individuals. It should be borne in mind that these different groups have different needs and pose different levels of threat to the security of the peace.

It may be that the entry into the DDR process of some groups may pose a more imminent threat to stability. For example, arms in the hands of private individuals can be included in a follow-up national community arms collection programme (as done in Sierra Leone), while those possessed by militias may be judged to be of a more of an immediate threat.

Types of weapons to be collected

Decisions about the types of weapons to be collected are also linked to the nature of the conflict itself and who was involved in the fighting. Experience from UN missions has shown that weapons that are usually handed in during the first stage of the disarmament process are of poor quality and that the best weapons are held back as surety in case something is perceived to go wrong with the peace process.

This means that there should be clear, strict guidelines as to what types of weapons qualify under the programme. This is, however, not easy to

implement for a variety of reasons. The 'one weapon one person' approach commonly adopted by UN disarmament programmes seems inadequate given the fact that most conflicts in Africa are marked by the use of light weapons.

In the case of Sierra Leone, there were problems about whether hand grenades, rocket propelled grenades and mines should be classified as ammunition or weapons. At Gandorhun, the Civil Defence Force (CDF) instigated protests because these were classified as ammunition and as such did not qualify as a weapon for the purpose of entering the DDR programme.²⁰ There must be a clear and understandable definitional standard used to classify weapons and ammunition.

Actors and methods of weapons destruction

Disarmament is not complete without the destruction of the tools of war. Temporary secure storage facilities for weapons surrendered should be set up and transportation provided to move weapons from campsites to the facility. Adequate measures should be put in place to ensure proper storage and handling of arms, ammunition and explosives. The latter can endanger the lives of those handling them; they are often in bad condition and may have been tampered with.

Another, arguably more viable option, which serves as part confidence building in the peace process is immediate destruction of collected weapons. This can be done on site by a specialist explosives ordinance unit. Where possible, destruction should be done in the assembly areas where former combatants have handed in their weapons and are awaiting demobilization (but recognizing the need for adequate safety precautions).

The selection of any method of destruction should also take into account environmental impact, reliability of the technique to use, numbers and types of weapons involved, and cost of the exercise. It is important that the selection of the method of destruction take into account the fact that this exercise can be a publicity exercise with a very important psychological role to play in sending the message that the war is over.²¹

Cantonment areas

The selection of cantonment areas needs to be carefully done in order to reflect the local political dynamics that might impact upon the sequence and pace of disarmament. Areas that were more affected by the conflict than others may need first priority. Cantonment areas need to be both accessible (in terms of distance) and secure for the ex-combatants.

Ex-combatants should be regrouped and conveyed to cantonment sites with their weaponry. Cantonment areas should be equipped with basic amenities that include:

- Adequate potable water;
- Washing and toilet facilities;
- Cooking and feeding facilities;
- Light;
- Health and medical facilities;
- Transportation of ex-combatants to communities of choice;
- Recreation and training facilities; and
- Specific facilities to meet needs of child soldiers and address gender-specific needs.²²

'Special groups'

Members of a society in conflict experience war and its effects differently. Thus, the other important issue is the manner in which 'special groups' such as child soldiers and dependents of combatants are dealt with. Experience in Africa is not convincing. There has been a failure in most UN disarmament initiatives in Africa to adequately provide assistance and care to child soldiers and dependents of ex-combatants in cantonment areas.

There has been lack of appreciation of the fact that during most conflicts belligerents use unconventional methods of warfare and violate international humanitarian law through the recruitment of child soldiers and abduction of girls to serve as sexual slaves and combatants.

The result is that after the conflict young girls find themselves bearing unwanted children for rebels with whom they have stayed for years (and thus a relationship of dependency ensues) and after the war less priority is given to them while more resources are directed towards the ex-combatants.

Since most UN disarmament exercises work on a 'one man, one gun' basis as a criteria for eligibility to the DDR process, this can exclude child soldiers. Child soldiers should be able to enter the process with or without weapons at assembly points.

Simultaneous disarmament

A disarmament programme that is most likely to succeed is one that has been carefully planned to take into account the above factors. For example, in Sierra Leone the NCDDR ensured that disarmament took place simultaneously and paired districts accordingly. This served as a confidence-building measure as the RUF and CDF realized that they would not be under threat from the other, as they were both disarming at the same time.

In Sierra Leone simultaneous disarmament was used because some districts had a higher concentration of combatants than others. This disproportionate concentration resulted in high distrust and tension between the RUF and government-aligned groups, such as the CDF. Thus these areas were disarmed simultaneously within a one-month period in order to avoid further mistrust between the two groups and to keep the disarmament process on track.

Community weapons collection programmes

In Africa, as elsewhere, weapons have an economic and security value attached to them. This is more so in societies emerging from conflict where people (though war weary) still distrust the state as a provider of security. Adding to this is the fact that in most African conflicts belligerents from both sides (government and 'rebel') engage in indiscriminate arming of civilians resulting in vast amounts of weapons ending in the hands of the general population.

Disarmament programmes as part of DDR and run by the UN are not adequate to deal with the threat posed by civilian possession of weapons (nor does the UN mandate generally encompass civilian disarmament). Initiatives that go beyond formal cantonment and weapons destruction by the UN mission (and

partners such as NGOs) become necessary. Such activities can take the form of community weapons collection programmes.

These activities can be undertaken in two stages. In most cases, governments encourage communities to voluntarily hand in weapons within a specified period in return for amnesty from prosecution for the illegal possession of firearms. This is usually followed by coercive disarmament. Sometimes this requires new legislation to give the security and law enforcement agencies the authority to search for and seize illegally possessed weapons.

These types of follow up disarmament exercises are important to sustain peace, especially in cases where civilians have been heavily armed by the warring parties. However in Africa there is a legacy of mixed results. Coercive disarmament, if not carefully done, can have negative consequences and may result in the opposite of what was set out to be achieved. This has been the case in Uganda where the government has attempted to disarm the Karamajong pastoralists.²³

Challenges for disarmament programmes in Africa

There are many challenges to disarmament efforts in Africa. Firstly, in most regions of the continent, violence has become an intrinsic part of political life. In Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Liberia war and violence have become characterized by unprecedented proliferation of SALW. These weapons are posing new challenges for disarmament both during war and in its aftermath.

Similar to the decommissioning of IRA weapons in the Northern Ireland conflict, weapons are used by belligerents in conflicts as a bargaining tool in order to receive concessions from the political peacemaking process.

Perhaps the realization of the political value of weapons in African conflicts means that disarmament programmes need to apply new ways of removing weapons. For example, the issue of decommissioning weapons where conflicts are ongoing and there is still a political vacuum (which inevitably impacts upon disarmament programmes and processes) needs to be considered, perhaps as part of building confidence between opposing sides.

It should also be noted that ensuring the disarmament of combatants from all sides of the conflict during UN peacekeeping operations is not an end in itself. As discussed above, the shifts from traditional forms of peacekeeping to peace build-

ing have given the UN more roles to play in ensuring that peace is sustainable. This means that activities such as complementary programmes of disarmament may need to be developed.

Beyond pure security issues and disarmament of ex-combatants there is a need to ensure that demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration are done in a sustainable manner.

Conclusion

Recent cases of disarmament in Africa provide both good lessons and challenges for future programmes. The example of the UNAMSIL disarmament programme in Sierra Leone has left a legacy of optimism.

The first lesson is that disarmament is integral to a successful peace process. This means the issue of the disarmament of parties to the conflict should form a specific component of the peace settlement. There should be clear guidelines as to the timeframe, categories of combatants to be disarmed, types of weapons qualifying for collection, incentives available for those joining the process, incorporation of the needs of 'special groups' in the process, and the links between disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration.

The second lesson is that there is no substitute for comprehensive planning. Planning should involve setting out clear guidelines and delegation of responsibility between various actors. There needs to be a lead agency to the process. This should preferably be the national disarmament commission, which needs to set out the programme as well as specify its relationship with other UN agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, the UN mission and NGOs. Such planning should also ensure sustainability of the process through the mobilisation of resources and keeping the momentum and commitment of international partners on course.

Thirdly, it is important to be aware that disarmament does not occur in a vacuum but is an integral part of the politics of peacemaking. This means that all stakeholders should take this into consideration when they devise strategies for disarmament. Issues such as simultaneous disarmament have political connotations in the sense that they form part of confidence-building measures and can either derail the peace process or accelerate it.

Furthermore, the broader political context within which disarmament takes place should be clearly understood and factored accordingly. Negotiations on unresolved or contentious issues such as dates for elections, composition of the new army or lack of detail on composition of a transitional government can compel the parties to hold on to their weapons as bargaining tools. Therefore, those involved with the disarmament process at national level, such as the disarmament commission, should also liaise with the UN mission (who should ideally serve as the appropriate channel of communication) to emphasize the need for the political players to resolve these issues, with a view to their influence on the pace of disarmament.

The issue of weapons collection during disarmament also implies that weapons need to be stored properly and subsequently destroyed. Care should be taken to ensure that those with the expertise and capacity to store and destroy arms are identified as soon as possible. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, as weapons are also political tools they are a temptation and the possibility of rearmament if weapons fall in the wrong hands cannot be dismissed. At times the condition of some weapons that are handed in during disarmament are of very poor quality and can endanger those handling them. Thus there is a need to ensure that competent people are tasked with the task of handling weapons.

Secondly, there is a need for the destruction of weapons handed in during the process of disarmament. Appropriate role players should be tasked with the task of weapons destruction. These can include both UN peacekeepers as well as NGOs with expertise in this field. Symbolic destruction such as the public burning of handed in weapons can serve a very important sensitisation role by demonstrating to the public that the illegal possession and proliferation of weapons has a negative impact on society and that the new political order will not tolerate them.

For example, in Sierra Leone, on 18 January 2002, President Kabbah, together with the leader of the opposition RUF, publicly declared the war over during the public burning of nearly 3,000 weapons, which formed part of those handed over during the disarmament process. This event was aimed at linking the end of war with a weapons-free society.

In conclusion, it is clear that the continuation of war in Africa means that the issue of disarmament will remain important. Ongoing efforts to resolve the conflicts in Sudan, Somalia and Burundi mean that all these countries will need to address the issue of DDR in the coming months and years.

Notes

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