Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: New Avenues for Research and Policy.

Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs constitute a process with the specific objective of facilitating the transition of combatants into civilian life. Policy makers need to rebuild the intellectual foundations of theory and practice of DDR.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *DDR programs should mirror the contextual nature of armed violence. A political economic analysis of armed non-state groups will improve DDR interventions.*

- *Disarmament and demobilization does not necessarily secure peace and stability. Focus instead on a gradual process in which violence management rather than violence monopoly is the defining program goal in order to secure stability.*

- *Revise the assumptions behind "reintegration" and abandon the predominant 'economic blue print' approach in favor of holistic solutions.*

What have such different countries as Afghanistan, Colombia, Somalia, South Sudan and Burma just to name a few in common? These states face a major challenge to their monopoly of violence and the imperative to bring under control armed non-state actors (ANSA). Alone in Afghanistan for instance, the government has estimated that as many as 1,870 armed groups exist, including tribal militias, community defense forces, warlord militias and criminal gangs. Armed non-state actors are defined as any organized group with a basic structure of command operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its objectives. Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs are often launched as the ultimate solution and 'fix' to the problem posed by these armed actors.

DDR programs constitute in general terms a range of initiatives with the specific objective of facilitating the transition of combatants to civilian life. DDR programs are now so increasingly refined that a set of standard templates are well in place in the United Nation's Integrated DDR Standards from 2006. As outlined in these disarmament is the collection, management and/or destruction of arms, while demobilization is the controlled discharge of members of armed groups from military to civilian status, and reintegration is the long-term process of integrating ex-combatants economically, politically and socially into communities. Never before have DDR

programs been so expansive in their scope and areas of competency as they are now. Contemporary DDR programs are concerned with an ever expanding field of interventions regarding access to land, cash transfers, employment and livelihoods, to name just a few.

Table 1.

Disarmament is the comprehensive collection, documentation, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of ex-combatants and the civilian population. **Demobilization** is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed groups. The first stage involves the processing of combatants in temporary centers. The second stage encompasses a support package called "reinsertion." **Reintegration** is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income during the post-conflict recovery period. Reintegration addresses social and economic issues.

A political economic analysis of Violence

In spite of the development of international standards and the general theory and practice of DDR, such templates are, inevitably, not local and context specific. The DDR concept was developed in a context of international armed conflict of internal conflict with largely well-organized insurgent armies and statutory armies. However the contexts of todays armed conflicts and uses of violence are generally much more diffuse and difficult to manage due mainly to two reasons: the existence of a range of non-war contexts that experience extreme high levels of violence and highly influential ANSAs, and secondly contexts of armed conflict that are characterized by overlapping forms of 'hybrid violence' and a range of ANSAs that are very different from the insurgent armies of the 20th century. Violence in the global south is not regulated within particular state institutions like the armed forces and the police.

This raises the question of whether DDR as we know it is an appropriate template for violence reduction in todays' conflicts. This is the case of South Sudan. The basic argument put forward in the project is that the realities of a context like South Sudan challenge the assumptions which standard DDR programmes or templates are based on. This is mainly due to two reasons: firstly, different perceptions among national power holders, in this case South Sudan's Peoples Liberation Army, and international actors and donors about what the programme was supposed to achieve; and secondly, difficulties in distinguishing combatants from civilians and objectively verifying who

should qualify for the DDR programme because, on the ground, such exercises are closely intertwined with local politics of patronage and networking. In sum DDR, as a set of standardized practices in peacekeeping, runs the risk of failing due to the specificities of context. As such the project is a critique of DDR as one of the dominant forms of international peacekeeping or, as the United Nations Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations puts it: 'DDR is a strategically crucial component of peacekeeping operations and longer term peacebuilding'. The centrality of DDR interventions for the international community is linked to the assumption of a secure environment and, by default, human security. This is far from the case in South Sudan, I contend. In spite of the mixed results, DDR programmes remain uncontested as a central tool in the liberal peacebuilding project.

To re-imagine DDR programs will therefore require programmers to invest in context (conflict) analysis and recognize the varied nature of armed groups and their relation to the political economy of violence. DDR in other words should in principle ask: which actors provide citizens with security and are seen as legitimate in local contexts? Understanding the triangular relationship between armed groups, states, and the populations is essential in developing effective strategies to deal with these groups. Issues of legitimacy, resource mobilization and recruitment are of outmost importance for the future design of DDR.

> 'the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and those associated with armed groups is a prerequisite for post-conflict stability and recovery' United Nations Integrated Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Standards.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Stability?

When engaging with armed groups, disarmament should not necessarily mean the immediate and complete destruction of weaponry. It could eventually come in stages. Arguably ensuring stability in places such as Afghanistan, Libya, South Sudan, Syria and Iraq will have to bypass the DDR standard response (to disarm and demobilize first) and focus instead in power-sharing agreements as the best solution in the short term. To achieve stability, in other words, the United Nations, sovereign states and international donors need to follow diverse strategies to deal with armed groups and not only their "elimination" vis a vis DDR programs. Violence management rather than its monopoly by states could eventually bolster stability in unstable settings.

Reintegration

Reintegration in DDR programs is based on the assumption that armed groups members have special needs for reintegration support as opposed to the broader war-affected population. The logic of "reintegration" presupposes that these groups are thought to be outside society and of the state. This might not be the case and in fact the majority of armed actors are deeply interwoven into both. In many situations, it does not make sense to target armed individuals as a specific group, since ANSA membership defy in many cases the civilian/combatant dichotomy moving between those categories.

Secondly reintegration aims to bring a reduction in the causes for joining armed groups. However the alleged root causes as unemployment, marginalization, corruption and the general lack of opportunities require large and expensive investments carried out over long periods of time. DDR by its nature can only bring about a few quick wins. It is generally believed that education or vocational skills training of ex-combatants is a first step in economic reintegration. However, a recent independent evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) worldwide work with reintegration programmes concluded that 'relevance can be limited and efforts conducted often limited both financially and technically' In many instances, DDR programmes send ex-combatants on vocational skills training courses and assume immediate results, which in reality rarely happen.

In short, training does not provide sustainable jobs, and, in fact, it might not even provide participants access to employment at all. More often than not, training is poorly suited to labour market needs. For some critical observers, vocational training persists because it is what donors and implementing actors know and are willing to fund, and it therefore involves little risk. If the economic reintegration of combatants is the overriding ambition of programs, then the discussion should be situated within the wider political economy of the specific context in question.

Reintegration in South Sudan centres on entrepreneurship, self-employment and thereby the willingness to take risks and responsibility. Reintegration, in other words, seeks to constitute ex-combatants as active and economically responsible individuals. Paradoxically, at the same time, South Sudan's DDR programme invisibilizes, obscures and ignores the ex-combatants' endogenous capacity for resilience and adaptation through eliding actual strategies of economic survival and

evidence of people-led recovery. Too little is known about the economic activities and labour experiences of demobilized combatants.

Conclusion

The South Sudan case shows that there is often more to getting local politics and the military complexities right than the simple bureaucratic challenge of management of programmes. One has to take the interests of local actors seriously and to recognize how the interests and resources of internationals in charge of peacekeeping can provide opportunities to local actors that produce unintended consequences. As for South Sudan, there are enormous uncertainties that may seriously compromise any future commitment to DDR. Behind the scenes the underlying unresolved disputes between Sudan and South Sudan will likely continue to disincentivize both parties from completely committing to a DDR process. Besides right-sizing the army, the international community expects that the DDR will improve security for civilians. But security in the country goes beyond DDR, even if it is a necessary step towards security sector transformation, and is not only related exclusively to the rightsizing of the South Sudanese armed forces/ Sudan People's Liberation Army or reintegration of combatants.

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Further reading

2013. 'Context Matters: The Conventional DDR Template is Challenged in South Sudan'. In *International Peacekeeping,* 20(5):585-599.
2012. 'Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in South Sudan: The limits of Peace and Security Templates'. *DIIS Report,* 07, Copenhagen, Danish Institute for International Studies.