

Humanitarian Considerations in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)

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Question

What evidence and issues exist regarding the touch points between DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) actors, policies and operations and the humanitarian system?

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1. Summary

This rapid literature review finds that disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) raises a number of humanitarian considerations, centred on the treatment of participants and the unintended consequences of the programmes. In particular, DDR undertaken during conflicts is linked to several protection risks and is difficult to implement in a neutral, equitable and humanitarian manner.

By humanitarian concerns, this report means:

- Some of the functions undertaken in DDR, such as removing children from armed gangs, providing healthcare, education and reintegration, are humanitarian in nature. Selection criteria for DDR should therefore be fair and fairly administered, including taking into consideration factors shaping distinct needs such as gender, disability and age.
- Humanitarian risks to individuals in DDR programmes, including potential violations of international humanitarian law (IHL); potential humanitarian needs arising from DDR programmes; risks of violence to individuals in DDR programmes.
- Indirect risks of conflict arising from DDR programmes; and issues of inequity in the distribution of resources in the area in which DDR is undertaken contributing to instability.

DDR is a broad and multi-faceted process involving security, humanitarian and development aspects and actors, with wide-ranging impacts. Humanitarian actors do not undertake DDR, but they may support some DDR processes, and maybe affected by DDR or its effects. According to UN guidance and the academic literature, successful DDR will consider socio-economic conditions in the community, as well as for the ex-combatants. It should be attuned to the range of needs of participants and should abide by relevant international law. The political dynamics of a conflict or post-conflict situation shape the success of DDR. It was first used in post-conflict situations, but the increasing use of DDR in ongoing conflicts creates new difficulties.

The failure or partial implementation creates many humanitarian problems. This may arise from a lack of resources; competing authorities (and particularly the co-option of DDR for war aims); ongoing conflict and instability; mistakes in implementation; and socio-economic conditions uncondusive to successful reintegration. Unsuccessful DDR may see partially demobilised actors remain dangerous, or may fuel new grievances around the perceived unfairness of granting support to former combatants.

There is a large body of evidence on the successes and failures of DDR programmes, how they vary over time and across contexts, and guidance on how to implement DDR. Relatively little refers explicitly to humanitarian concerns, but many of the issues covered can be characterised as humanitarian. DDR has been employed in many situations since the 1980s, meaning that it is not possible to comprehensively survey the guidance or case study evidence. Instead, this review focuses on the main areas where DDR can be said to raise humanitarian concerns, with a particular focus on the problems raised by DDR in ongoing conflicts.

2. Background

DDR has been used since the 1980s. It was initially undertaken at the end of Cold War conflicts in South America and Africa and has more recently been undertaken in ongoing conflicts and counter-terrorism operations (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020). There have been several ‘generations’ of DDR programmes (Özerdem, 2022, p. 336). DDR was initially implemented at the end of conflicts. First generation DDR was focused on former fighters, whereas second generation DDR sought to re-balance efforts by also addressing the needs of communities affected by the conflict and reintegration of former fighters. DDR has thus become more comprehensive and wide-ranging in its approach (Muggah & O’Donnell, 2015). Third-generation DDR is undertaken during ongoing conflict, while fourth-generation DDR is focused on terrorists, which creates a different set of risks and considerations (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020; Muggah & O’Donnell, 2015).

DDR programmes have a range of aims, including supporting peace agreements, helping ex-combatants and others associated with conflict parties,¹ and helping to cement conditions for peace through socio-economic aid to ex-combatants and communities. DDR of ex-combatants has ‘a wide range of economic, social, environmental, and cultural implications for receiving communities’ (Özerdem, 2022, p. 333). It therefore involves ‘integration with ongoing and future humanitarian and development efforts’ (Nezam and Marc, 2009, p. 8). In addition, the treatment of former fighters and others involved in armed groups has a number of humanitarian implications (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020).

There are typically several stages in a DDR programme, although the sequencing and way in which they are undertaken vary. Traditionally, demobilisation and reintegration have been undertaken once former fighters have handed in their weapons. However, particularly in DDR applied in ongoing conflicts, there are differences in sequencing. For instance, ‘DDR programs that offer clear short-term entitlements (carrots) up front, including social and economic benefits, may generate the necessary incentives for eventual demobilisation and, possibly, disarmament’ (Muggah & O’Donnell, 2015).

The stages of DDR are:

- **Disarmament:** the collection of weapons from fighters and their disposal.
- **Demobilisation:** the discharge of soldiers from conflict parties. The former fighters may then be cantoned before being reinserted into civilian communities (reinsertion is sometimes given as a third stage in DDR).²
- **Reintegration:** efforts to help those demobilised reintegrate back into civilian society through training, financial support, reconciliation, and other measures.

¹ According to UN guidance, ‘Five categories of people should be taken into consideration in integrated DDR processes as participants or beneficiaries, depending on the context: 1. members of armed forces and groups who served in combat and/or support roles (those in support roles are often referred to as being associated with armed forces and groups); 2. abductees or victims; 3. dependents/families; 4. civilian returnees or ‘self-demobilized’; 5. community members.’ <https://www.unddr.org/the-iddrs/level-2/>

² <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-1.20-Glossary.pdf> p. 20

In ongoing conflicts, the sequencing of DDR may differ, and participants in DDR may be coerced rather than voluntary (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015; Steenken, 2017).

DDR is performed by a range of peace, security and development actors. It may be led by state security forces, alone or in conjunction with the UN, and bodies such as the IOM are involved in many of the activities related to reintegration (IOM, 2019). 'Because NGOs have experience with humanitarian and development activities in countries where DDR programmes take place, they are often chosen as implementing partners' (Nezam and Marc, 2009, p. 7).

Humanitarian actors are not responsible for DDR processes. They must maintain the 'civilian and humanitarian character of sites and settlements' such as refugee camps, but this may be compromised in situations of ongoing conflict and therefore require liaison with security and DDR actors (Arnold, 2018; Kelly, 2021; Global Protection Cluster, 2010). This may raise difficult dilemmas about maintaining security and humanitarian principles, centred on screening processes, security measures and the identification of beneficiaries (Arnold, 2018; Kelly, 2021). They may advocate for DDR programmes and liaise with DDR actors to implement them, provided they do not compromise humanitarian principles (Arnold, 2018, p. 24).

According to the Global Protection Cluster guidance (2010, p. 155):

DDR programmes should be coordinated and implemented by specialized actors with the required expertise and resources. However, humanitarian and human rights actors can support such programmes by, for instance, (i) advocating for the establishment and adequate funding of DDR programmes where needed; (ii) advocating to ensure that such programmes are available and meet the needs of women and girls on an equal basis as those of men and boys; (iii) working with families and communities to encourage them to accept and prepare for the return and reintegration of former combatants, particularly children formerly associated with armed groups; (iv) assisting families of former combatants to reunite; and (v) ensuring that former combatants have equal access to programmes that provide psychosocial support, education, vocational training or micro-financing for small businesses.

DDR may also be led by armed forces, and members of a conflict party may be forcefully disarmed and demobilised (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015, p. 4). Indeed, DDR is 'increasingly fused with wider stability, recovery and reconstruction operations. DDR is thus increasingly enmeshed in the stabilisation and state-building agendas of bilateral aid agencies' (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015, p. 6). Examples of forceful DDR include the DRC in 2010 and present-day Somalia (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015). As such, it may bring into question issues of neutrality as well as the treatment of those being demobilised according to international law (Felbab-Brown, 2015a).

DDR is increasingly undertaken in ongoing conflicts. DDR was initially undertaken in post-conflict situations and thus linked to a peace agreement and often supported by political will from all conflict parties, as well as taking place in a relatively secure environment. By contrast, DDR undertaken in ongoing conflict can be characterised as: 'rolling internal conflicts, where soldiers, rebels and civilians were conflated during wars, but also in their aftermath. The lines between what constituted a "combatant" and "civilian" were increasingly blurred, with implications for how to construct a fair and durable post-conflict peace settlement. Cease-fires and peace agreements, where established, were seldom successful in fully bringing organised violence to an end' (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015, p. 3). Other features that have come to the fore more recently include organised crime and counter-terrorism operations, which can require very different forms of DDR (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015, p. 4).

3. Past examples

DDR has been undertaken in many contexts since the 1980s, and millions of individuals have gone through DDR programmes. It is not possible to give a comprehensive account of its uses. The examples below are merely used to show some of the humanitarian implications raised by DDR, and are not necessarily reflective of DDR more generally.

The first generation of DDR programmes was only implemented on the condition of a peace agreement, the willingness of parties to engage, and guarantees of security (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020, p. 5). They were implemented in contexts including Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Namibia, and South Africa. In Mozambique, the UN-led DDR of 110,000 former fighters followed an agreement on peace and the creation of a new army including fighters from both sides. Mozambican churches supported the collection of weapons, as well as reconciliation programmes. Disarmament and reintegration efforts had mixed results. Reintegration was hampered by a weak economy. Demobilised children were given educational support, but demanded the adult vocational reinsertion package instead. Women were also not given assistance to match their needs (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020).

In Sri Lanka, DDR was undertaken following the defeat of the LTTE rebel group by the government. As such, it differed from many DDR programmes implemented following a peace agreement made between two sides of a conflict, instead coming after the complete victory of one side. A number of problems have been identified as arising from this situation. International organisations had very little autonomy in executing DDR. The ICRC helped Sri Lankan authorities draft a “National Action Plan for the Demobilisation, Disarmament, Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Ex-combatants,” working in coordination with the United Nations. In particular, the organisation contributed to the development of safeguards and judicial guarantees aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of the population.³ However, the government strictly limited the role of international organisations in carrying out DDR, from the selection of beneficiaries to their verification, and has used DDR as a tool to implement its political vision (Goodhand, 2010). There are also claims that the government has unfairly detained ex-enemy fighters and civilians (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011).

In Somalia, conflict is ongoing as the federal government, supported by the African Union (AMISOM), seeks to take territory from groups such as Al Shabaab. A review of DDR programmes undertaken in Somalia finds a number of potential problems as DDR is heavily linked with the federal government’s war aims (Felbab-Brown, 2015b). Problems with the situation include:

- **The Somali intelligence and security forces make the key decisions.** Somali security forces control entry and exit, with ill-defined entry criteria and often arbitrary decisions. Participants are often not released after DDR programme ends (Felbab-Brown, 2015b).
- **All DDR facilities in the country are focused on al Shabaab and thus exclude others who may benefit from DDR**
- **All likely include ‘detainees’ rather than volunteers.** Participants fear reprisals outside the facility. Many are in DDR programmes as an alternative to military courts, where

³ <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/update/sri-lanka-update-180210.htm>

death sentences are common. There are also rumours that torture is used to persuade some to leave Al Shabaab and enter DDR camps. This raises questions about IHL and human rights.

- **Vulnerable groups are not protected fully.** For instance, ‘UN DDR staff have not been able to find secure and lasting accommodation for several other women who wanted to join the DDR process in Baidoa, including several high-profile Al-Shabaab defectors, several of whom have come with children. One female was placed with relatives, but the house was attacked within a month of her arrival by Al Shabaab, and although she survived, several of her relatives were killed. Several other women have also been targeted and may have been killed, with their current condition and whereabouts unclear’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 126).
- In addition, ‘some children at Serendi reportedly complained of being held against their will and deprived of contact with family’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 127). ‘As in the case of adult defectors and detainees, there appears to be no reliable registration system, case-management database, or other basic mechanisms which would allow transparency over which children have gone into and out of DDR, detention, or other handling processes’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 128). It is argued that the ‘Somali government does not seem to view the children from a humanitarian and rights- and needs- perspective, but perceives them rather from a national security perspective’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 127).
- In a camp in lower Shabelle ‘clans often sought to recruit back the young men in the camps to strengthen their clan militias. Thus clan elders put pressure on staff operating the camps to allow them to recruit in the camps’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 116).
- **Camps may function as tools in the conflict.** There is some speculation that some camps are used to ‘flip’ insurgents to the government side, or run intelligence operations, thus undermining their neutrality and humanitarian functions. Many in the camps move to work for Somali armed forces (Felbab-Brown, 2015b). In the Serendi camp, there are ‘numerous controversies over counter-terrorism activities, human rights of the defectors, the treatment of minors, the quality of programming delivered to defectors, transparency, and accountability’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 115)
- In Lower Shabelle, the ‘local community also believed that its access to land and water was further complicated by the presence of (ex) combatants from outside’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 116).
- **There is a broad spectrum of entrants to the DDR camps,** but admission criteria are not applied consistently, meaning programming can be inappropriate and selection not based on need. Cases include ‘some straightforward cases in need of DDR programming; some who were deemed not to be useful to Somali or international actors as potential intelligence assets or anti-Al-Shabaab fighters (and who may well also need DDR assistance); as well as some entrants that the Somali DDR programmers do not want to release, but do not know what to do with otherwise. As a result, the UN-supported DDR facility was thus simultaneously operating as a straightforward DDR programme, a de facto detention centre, and a half-way house’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015b, p. 119). It is, therefore, hard to align the right treatments to the right cases.

DDR undertaken in other contexts of ongoing conflicts, such as the DRC, Colombia, Haiti, Libya, Mali and Afghanistan, sees similar problems (**Felbab-Brown, 2015a**).

4. Guidance

The UN is one of the leading DDR actors. Its guidance, the **Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards**, was first released in 2006 and is widely cited in the policy and academic literature.⁴ It covers a number of areas including, but not limited to:

- Food assistance, which states, among other things, that ‘food assistance provided to DDR participants and beneficiaries should be balanced against assistance provided to other returnees or conflict-affected populations as part of the wider recovery programme to avoid treating some conflict-affected groups unfairly’.⁵
- Health, including discussion of best practices and the needs of vulnerable groups. It notes that ‘offering health services as part of the DDR process can cause a conflict between the ‘partiality’ involved in supporting a political transition and the ‘impartiality’ needed to protect the humanitarian aspects of the process and humanitarian space’.⁶
- Cross border population movements, including foreign combatants, children, civilians, abductees and repatriation.⁷
- The legal framework for DDR, with a discussion of the relevant international humanitarian, human rights, criminal, refugee, counter-terrorism and arms control law and frameworks.⁸

The ICRC’s *Guiding Principles for the Domestic Implementation of a Comprehensive System of Protection for Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2011)*, synthesise the relevant law to provide guidance on supporting children.

It is based on a ‘detailed examination of the **various rules and principles** relevant to the protection of children affected by armed conflicts’ and expert discussion (pp. 420-428). It outlines states’ legal obligations to children under existing treaties and emphasises that **all children should be demobilised and supported**. States should seek to demobilise all children and provide appropriate assistance, e.g. physical and psychological recovery, educational programmes and vocational training.

Points made include:

- ‘Special attention should be given to the needs and experiences of girls previously associated with armed forces or armed groups: they should be provided with appropriate health care, including care for conditions such as forced pregnancy. They should also be offered distinct educational and professional training opportunities, with the purpose of facilitating their full reintegration into their families and communities.’

⁴ <https://www.unddr.org/the-iddrs/>

⁵ <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-5.50-Food-Assistance-in-DDR.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-5.70-Health-and-DDR.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-5.40-Cross-border-Population-Movements.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-2.11-The-Legal-Framework-For-UNDDR.pdf>

- 'For disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs to be successful, the national authorities should also engage in adequate amounts of dialogue with children's families and communities to pave the way for their social reintegration.'
- 'Peace and reconciliation' events are also important.
- 'States should avoid re-recruiting disarmed and demobilised children, even after they reach the age of majority. They should be excluded from conscription on humanitarian grounds.'
- Specific programmes for girls. 'Careful attention should be provided to girls returning with babies, while being careful not to single out these children. Equivalent special protection should be given to children with disabilities.'
- 'It is important to devote attention not only to those previously associated with armed forces or armed groups, but to all vulnerable children who may decide to enlist or to re-enlist for lack of alternatives. Ideally, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs should be part of broader programs of poverty eradication and socio-economic development.'
- 1951 refugee convention excludes war criminals/criminals against humanity, or those who 'might have' committed such crimes. the ICRC argues for 'exclusion clauses' for children. 'Where children have allegedly committed crimes while being associated with armed forces or armed groups, it is important to take into account the fact that they might have been victims of violations of international law and are not only perpetrators. In addition, such exclusion clauses must be applied only to children who had reached the age of criminal responsibility, as laid down by international or national law, at the time the crime was committed.'
- States should establish registration systems for children coming from other countries.

UNICEF (2019) has produced guidance on reintegrating girls associated with armed groups in South Sudan. The guidance is based on research with girls and service providers in South Sudan during 2018, and may not be applicable to all contexts, but nevertheless highlights what has and has not worked in that context, and offers suggestions based on this (partly in opposition to commonly held misconceptions). It covers issues including healing processes and psychosocial recovery.

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) 'can assist victims by ensuring that they have equal and effective access to justice; adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered; and access to relevant information. They can also support the reintegration in society of demobilised forces, displaced persons and returning refugees, and support special initiatives for child soldiers and child abductees; and gender-sensitive approaches to transitional justice. They can also assist victims and witnesses with measures such as relocation and resettlement' (p. 3).

The European Commission's **JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL An EU strategic approach in support of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration of former combatants** (2021) outlines the EU position. It includes a discussion on vulnerable categories of people, such as children, and the need for voluntary DDR.

The IOM's **Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration: a compendium of projects 2010-2017**, highlights its role in providing assistance for displaced persons and supporting

reintegration. Work the IOM may undertake includes ‘the establishment of cantonment facilities, the repatriation of ex-combatants/fighters and their dependents, registration processes, assistance for victims of conflict and support for the legal processes that underpin DDR efforts’ (IOM, 2019, p. 10). The IOM ‘supports the socio-economic, psychosocial and social needs of excombatants/fighters and their dependents as they transition to civilian life’ (IOM, 2019, p. 11).

It also provides community assistance to reduce violence and stimulate economic activity through ‘engagement with a range of beneficiaries extending beyond ex-combatants/fighters, including dependents, displaced populations, conflict affected host communities and victims of conflict. Interventions are also customised to respond to unique needs associated with gender, age and the disabled’ (IOM, 2019, p. 15).

This work includes an ‘Information Counselling and Referral Service (ICRS) mechanism that helps stakeholders manage and integrate personalised services for ex-combatants/fighters and their dependents in their transition from demobilisation to reintegration’ (IOM, 2019, p. 16).

Cornelis Steenken’s *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR): A Practical Overview (2017)*, provides a guidance to DDR. It mentions a number of aspects of DDR with humanitarian consequences. They include that:

- **Reintegration programmes are needed to pacify soldiers who might otherwise turn to banditry or similar activities** (p. 25). ‘Returning large numbers of XC (ex-combatants) to civilian life can further destabilise local and even national politics by increasing the number of eligible voters in an area. The XCs may turn to political extremism if their expectations are not met’ (Steenken, 2017, p. 25).
- **DDR is a complex process, related to the peace process, and the political, economic and security situation.**
- **DDR operations need adequate coordination and to be sustained.** ‘DDR operations have too often begun as fragmented, uncoordinated efforts with good intentions, and perhaps even short-term successes, before ultimately ending in failure’ (Steenken, 2017, p. 26). Funding imperatives mean that donors, governments etc., are not always sufficiently coordinated, and promises are neglected (he gives the example of a promise to give land to demobilised soldiers in Nicaragua and El Salvador that was not fulfilled).
- **The importance of sequencing.** e.g. reintegration options as incentives as demobilisation stage ‘there may be times — especially in armed societies — where disarming the combatants may, in fact, put them in harm’s way. In these circumstances, allowing some of the combatants to remain armed while demobilising and reintegrating has been beneficial in achieving the peace’ (Steenken, 2017, p. 26).

5. Issues

Differentiated needs and vulnerable groups

Demobilised groups may include child soldiers, female soldiers, as well as people associated with armed groups but not fighting. There is thus a ‘heterogeneity of ex-combatant caseloads’ for DDR practitioners to deal with (Özerdem, 2022, p. 335). Ex-combatants have different needs depending on their experiences of war and demobilisation.

'Special attention needs to be given to the fate of ex-combatants, who have been disabled because of conflict, as well as female combatants and child soldiers' (Özerdem, 2022, p. 343). Differentiation should be made between 'those who left the army before the peace agreement; second, those who were demobilised as senior personnel and finally, the families of combatants who have died in the conflict' (Özerdem, 2022, p. 343). Many DDR programmes have failed to take into account the particular needs of certain categories of people, including children, women and people with disabilities (Velarde et al., 2022).

For instance, child soldiers require specific attention, and there are now many child-focused DDR programmes (Haer, 2017). Children may be sent to interim care centres (ICCs) where support is focused on education, play, psychological support and life training, alongside efforts to reduce the stigmatisation of former child soldiers in the community (Haer, 2017). Contentious issues include the age of adulthood, which may be perceived, by child soldiers as well as the community, as lower than the 18 years stipulated by most international law and organisations (Haer, 2017). DDR programmes for children have also neglected the distinct needs of female children (Haer, 2017). ICRC guidance based on relevant international law and agreements, note that states should seek to demobilise all children and provide appropriate assistance, e.g. physical and psychological recovery, educational programmes and vocational training (ICRC, 2011). It is argued that the 2007 Paris Principles do not sufficiently address disarmament of child soldiers (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020).

Many scholars argue that women's needs in DDR are not considered sufficiently. They have a wide range of roles in armed groups – fighters, spies, messengers, sex slaves, cooks, nurses – but may not be considered by those designing DDR programmes if they do not have a weapon to hand in (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020). Pre-existing views about their roles may prejudice what reintegration options they are given (Haer, 2017; Özerdem, 2022, p. 345). In addition, 'in cantonment sites they tend to face a high risk of sexual exploitation and young mothers and their children often experience a total rejection from their communities and experience continuing abuse and stigmatisation' (Özerdem, 2022, p. 345)

IHL and other legal obligations.

DDR was first carried out voluntarily following the cessation of conflict, but is increasingly being undertaken in ongoing conflict with some degree of coercion (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020; Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015).

IHL includes rules on the detention of combatants. The UN guidance notes that participation in DDR should be voluntary, so IHL on the deprivation of liberty does not apply (UN DDR Resource Centre, 2020, pp. 6–7). However, 'in the event that there are doubts as to whether a person is in fact enrolled in DDR voluntarily, this issue should immediately be brought to the attention of the competent legal office, and advice should be sought. Separately, legal advice should also be sought if the DDR practitioner is of the view that detention is in fact taking place' (UN DDR Resource Centre, 2020, p. 7). In all cases, those undertaking DDR 'should be conscious of the conditions of DDR facilities' (UN DDR Resource Centre, 2020, p. 7).

There are questions about the nature of detention in DDR in many instances. According to a recent critical account of the IHL implications of DDR, in early DDR, 'the question of whether liberty was being arbitrarily deprived in the cantonment sites where the former fighters were prevented from leaving was dodged on the basis that they had volunteered for demobilisation.

But this concern persists across DDR programmes to this day, and is accentuated in the latest generation of DDR' (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020, p. 3). Muggah and O'Donnell (2015) give the example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where 'forceful DDR' was used by peacekeepers to 'neutralise' about 2,000 members of an armed group. Other examples include post-conflict internment in Sri Lanka. The rights of DDR participants may be compromised by forced DDR, torture in DDR sites, and arbitrary detainment and release procedures (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011).

Protection

In unstable contexts, or where DDR practitioners have limited resources, the protection of DDR participants may fall short. Examples of protection risks include:

- In cantonment sites, female combatants face a high risk of sexual exploitation and young mothers and their children often experience a total rejection from their communities and experience continuing abuse and stigmatisation' (Özerdem, 2022, p. 345).
- When DDR is used in ongoing conflicts, armed groups may target those who leave their ranks without consent (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020, p. 10; Steenken, 2017, p. 24). In Somalia, for instance, DDR has been used for those deserting Al-Shabaab. In this case, cantonment is used to protect the fighters from reprisals (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015)
- Armed actors may seek to recruit or re-recruit fighters from camps, or use them for intelligence (Felbab-Brown, 2015a; Kelly, 2021).
- In ongoing conflicts, conflict parties will likely see DDR facilities as a threat as they drain manpower. They make therefore attack such facilities (Felbab-Brown, 2015a).

War criminals and justice

DDR programmes are often linked with prosecutions for war crimes. DDR that focuses on persuading fighters to give up their weapons in exchange for money, jobs and other inducements may neglect to hold fighters accountable for crimes they may have committed (UN DDR Resource Centre, 2020; Felbab-Brown, 2015a). According to the UN, 'the issuance of amnesties or assurances of non-prosecution in exchange for participation in DDR processes, could hinder the achievement of justice-related aims' (UN DDR Resource Centre, 2020, p. 13). The UN will not endorse 'amnesties for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights' (UN DDR Resource Centre, 2020, p. 14). Neglecting justice or reconciliation may lead to conflict with communities resentful of ex-combatants.

Equity

Most DDR programmes now emphasise the need to consider the needs of receiving communities as well as former fighters, to avoid perceptions of unfairness, and to help bolster social cohesion. This is because DDR programmes that 'provide large benefits to ex-combatants during the demobilisation phase can cause major resentment among the civilian population. In a sense, these large payments are viewed by civilians as rewarding those who may have committed atrocities during the violent conflict' (Knight, 2008, p. 47). DDR can have other indirect effects on the community – for example, lump sum payments to the demobilised can work, but

can also have an inflationary effect (Knight, 2008). DDR guidance emphasises the need to provide assistance to all conflict-affected groups.⁹

Failure

DDR may fail to work, for a number of reasons, and reignite instability. For instance, in contexts such as Mozambique, South Africa, El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique, Angola and Nicaragua ‘some demobilised combatants turned to banditry’ (Knight, 2008, p. 70). Reasons include a lack of economic opportunities and a failure to deal with the volume of former fighters and weapons (Jennings, 2007). The underlying political settlement may fail. The broad aims of DDR, including the relatively short-term security goal of gathering weapons, and the longer-term process of ‘reintegration’, can create contradictory incentives and processes, and will involve different actors and sets of expertise (Jennings, 2007).

DDR according to best practice can require significant resources and coordination, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected states. Reintegration, in particular, shares features with ‘development’ work – ‘DDR may be deployed as a substitute for investment in recovery and reconstruction. In the process, expectations of what DDR can reasonably accomplish are expanding beyond what is realistically feasible’ (Muggah & O’Donnell, 2015, p. 6). Because of the cash or job incentives offered by DDR, it is common for many to ‘cheat’ in order to enter the programmes, making it hard to align the security and development goals, and stretching the resources of DDR programmes (Jennings, 2007). Particularly in ongoing conflict, ‘generating employment opportunities will be excruciatingly challenging’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 53). In some cases, full reintegration has been neglected in favour of a simple return to communities (Felbab-Brown, 2015a). The failure of this aspect of DDR may lead to more instability and conflict.

Where there are large populations of youth at risk of joining armed groups or organised crime, DDR programmes may not be able to be deployed at a sufficient scale. However, it can be argued that ‘even if such a small programme cannot solidify peace dynamics at country level, it may well make a critical difference in the lives of a community and significantly improve or even save the lives of some ex-combatants, thus making the effort worthwhile from a humanitarian perspective’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 45). It thus raises difficult questions of balancing efficacy, scale and considering unintended consequences.

Ongoing conflicts

Ongoing conflicts present significant challenges to DDR (Felbab-Brown, 2015a). DDR is increasingly deployed in ongoing conflicts, rather than following peace agreements as originally intended. It therefore runs the risk of indirectly contributing to the dynamics of the conflict, and being attacked by conflict parties.

The fundamental difficulty with DDR in ongoing conflicts is that ‘it actively changes power dynamics on the battlefield’ (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 37). It therefore raises issues related to the ‘neutrality of the agencies and actors conducting DDR processes and the effects of this

⁹ <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-5.50-Food-Assistance-in-DDR.pdf>

consideration on the trust, access, and safety requirements of those processes' (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 38). If DDR actors are only applying DDR to some conflict parties/groups, they are unlikely to be perceived as neutral. They may also struggle to enforce DDR, as 'disarmament and demobilisation often require guarantees on how the peace deal will be enforced and how security of the disarmed groups will be provided – a very contentious and complex issue' that cannot be ensured in ongoing conflict (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 41).

It is very difficult to practise 'do no harm' principles in an ongoing conflict. 'even if donors apply conflict-sensitive principles to individual projects, this does not prevent them from having perverse effects on conflict dynamics at a macro level...What does it mean to be conflict sensitive at the micro level when you are supporting non conflict sensitive government policies by freeing up new government money' (Goodhand, 2010, p. 356).

In ongoing conflicts, **DDR programmes and participants are subject to more threats and spoilers.** The biggest threat is that 'members of armed forces and/or armed groups may continue to perpetrate or foment violence while DDR is underway' (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020). In 'non-permissive security environments [practitioners] often lack adequate intelligence and situational intelligence' in order to understand and mitigate against these threats (Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015). DDR participants are at threat from retaliation and re-recruitment. 'To incite sustained defections from an armed group, broader DDR interventions (Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation) have to be intertwined with robust protection and accountability policies and practices' (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020, p. 11).

Research from the DRC suggests that it may be hard to demobilise armed groups if some decide to split, and hard to protect those who do demobilise (Richards, 2016). DDR guidance 'does not address the challenges that arise when recalcitrant fighters, unwilling to report to DDR, break ranks and form new armed groups' (Richards, 2016, p. 1). Demobilised soldiers are threatened by persisting groups – 'some ex-combatant interviewees indicated that they were particularly attractive targets for [an armed group] because they were known to have been provided with DDR assistance, often in the form of cash' (Richards, 2016, p. 7). Richards (2016) therefore calls for safe places of resettlement; the use of UN peacekeepers to protect cantonment sites; mobile patrols to take and safely transport deserters; and mobile disarmament sites to avoid attacks.

The ability of DDR practitioners to control DDR programmes – in terms of entry and exit criteria, education and other assistance provided, whether certain categories of recipient are treated differently, and so on – may be limited (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 38). Security actors may control many of these aspects for their strategic ends (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 38). As such, DDR programmes may fail to fulfil many of their humanitarian functions in terms of providing needs-based support to participants. In weak or conflict-affected states, DDR actors may not have 'the leverage to ensure effective protection of vulnerable groups affected by that DDR programming' (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 43). The DDR undertaken may be more akin to detention or even be used to gather intelligence or recruits (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 48). DDR practitioners therefore need their own sources of intelligence to make sure vetting of participants is done accurately, rather than subcontracted to those with an interest in the conflict (Felbab-Brown, 2015a).

Such situations will likely create dilemmas for DDR actors. While they may be unable to implement DDR according to needs, and may see human rights significantly compromised, it has

been argued that 'UN involvement in such internment camps might still serve important humanitarian objectives (and detainees or defectors might be much worse off without UN support), but in such situations, the UN needs to recognise that it is simultaneously supporting detention/ internment and DDR, as the two are intertwined on the ground' (Felbab-Brown, 2015a, p. 54). In addition to practical calculations of cost and benefit, there is a less clear legal and political framework for such situations (Casey-Maslen et al., 2020).

DDR has many overlaps with countering violent extremism (Cockayne & O'Neil, 2015). The processes used to assist participants may be the same, especially for those who are motivated by money and status. However, some authors emphasise that individuals motivated by extremist ideology require different forms of reintegration. They may not, for instance, have goals that are 'amenable to negotiated political settlement' (Richards, 2018, p. 374). The forms of risk assessment of DDR participants undertaken by states and security forces may be arbitrary or inadequate – Richards gives examples of those used by the Sri Lankan army and Somali security forces (Richards, 2018). There is no guidance on assessments for screening for violent extremist offenders (Richards, 2018; Casey-Maslen et al., 2020, p. 11).

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Key websites

- United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration resource centre:
<https://www.unddr.org/>

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