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The Struggle to Satisfy: DDR Through the Eyes of Ex-combatants in Liberia

KATHLEEN M. JENNINGS

This article calls for a re-examination of the justification, formulation and implementation of DDR programming in certain post-conflict environments. Qualitative fieldwork among ex-combatants in Monrovia, Liberia, suggests that the extent and form of DDR programming must be more sensitive to and predicated on context, accounting for conflict histories and current socioeconomic conditions and local institutional capacity. Moreover, in some post-conflict societies, a better use of international community resources may be to delink disarmament and demobilization from reintegration, focusing reintegration resources instead on open-access jobs programmes with discrete, complementary bilateral or multilateral programmes for particularly vulnerable groups.

Over a relatively brief period, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have emerged as an essential element in the international community's toolbox for post-conflict reconstruction, to the extent that some donors see them as 'a substitute for wider recovery and development efforts and projects in post-conflict' areas.[1] Yet despite DDR's near-standard use in post-conflict situations, the extent to which it is an effective tool to achieve security and development goals remains unclear.[2] The impact of this programming on ex-combatants themselves is also little understood.

Building primarily on qualitative fieldwork among ex-combatants in two sites in Monrovia, Liberia, I argue that the extent and form of DDR programming must be more sensitive to and predicated on context, taking into account conflict histories and current socioeconomic conditions and local institutional capacity.[3] Specifically, in areas emerging from extended conflicts, where the line between civilians and combatants was unclear, the conflict period engendered great mobility and social change, and the existing needs are both wide and deep, a better use of international community resources may be to delink disarmament and demobilization from reintegration, focusing reintegration resources instead on open-access jobs programmes with discrete, complementary bilateral or multilateral programmes for particularly vulnerable groups. This implies that post-conflict donor policy must occur in the context of a more meaningful prioritization of programming according to needs, which may in turn necessitate reconsideration of the international community's activities in post-conflict environments.

First, the situation in Liberia is outlined and the DDR programme analysed. On the basis of open-ended interviews and focus groups with Monrovia-based ex-combatants from the National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL), Liberian government forces or aligned militias, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO),

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I argue that, although a primary rationale for reintegration programming is to 'satisfy' ex-combatants, this goal seems unmet.[4] Various problems with the DDR programme are traced and the impact on ex-combatants' experiences explained. Lessons from these experiences of relevance to other post-conflict planning processes are then examined. The article concludes by discussing how the particular needs of some post-conflict environments prompt reconsideration of the international community's current template for post-conflict reconstruction. With reference to Liberia, I find many reasons for optimism, tempered by the realization that failure to reintegrate vast numbers of ex-combatants may undermine, or hinder the consolidation of, successes thus far achieved.

Post-war Liberia: A Success Story?

Post-war Liberia is in many ways a success for national actors and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).[5] Most importantly, organized violence has essentially subsided since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in August 2003. The presence of 15,000 UN peacekeepers is clearly important to maintaining the peace, but also significant has been the subscription to the CPA by almost all segments of society. But serious challenges loom. Poverty and unemployment are pervasive; the formal and private sectors are inchoate; and most infrastructure has been ransacked or destroyed. In rebuilding capacity and reasserting governmental authority, state institutions must overcome a history of predation. The nation remains polarized, and in some areas ethnicity is politicized.[6] Finally, a feeling of insecurity and unpredictability persists, exacerbated by high numbers of ex-combatants and rumoured weapons caches.[7]

It is therefore troubling that one of the international community's main tools to help mollify ex-combatants – the DDR programme, particularly its reintegration component – has been so problematic. From the outset, DDR was a priority for UNMIL.[8] DDR minimally consists of disarmament, defined as 'the collection, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population'; demobilization, which is 'the process by which armed forces (government and/or opposition or factional forces) either downsize or completely disband'; and reintegration programmes, which are 'assistance measures provided to former combatants that would increase the potential for their and their families' economic and social reintegration into civil society'.[9] Rehabilitation, which was included in the Liberian programme, is not as well defined, and seems to refer primarily to psycho-social and related services. Because no informants reported receiving counselling or other rehabilitation benefits, either at cantonment camps or afterwards, this article does not specifically address the rehabilitation component.[10] While disarmament and demobilization are primarily seen through a security lens – focusing on the benefits to public and military security of disarming, demobilizing, and dispersing 'foot soldiers', collecting arms, and managing and neutralizing elite spoilers – reintegration is often represented as a development imperative.[11] Yet the post-disarmament fate of ex-combatants is clearly relevant to public and national security in these environments, as

unintegrated, disgruntled ex-fighters pose a threat to peace.[12] Thus, a major factor driving reintegration programming is the desire to keep ex-fighters secure and satisfied, at least throughout the international presence.[13]

In reality, the DDR programme has contributed to a feeling of dissatisfaction among many ex-combatants in the teeming market areas of Red Light and Duala. While it may be easy to dismiss ex-combatants' dissatisfaction, it would not be wise, given the calamitous impact that groups of disaffected young men have had in recent West African history.[14] The oft-used formulation, 'no satisfaction, no peace', is illustrative: the phrase, according to one informant, is not a threat but a statement of fact.

'You Have to Satisfy the Ex-combatants'

By examining Liberia's DDR programme from the viewpoint of individual recipients, we can ascertain how the programme actually functions and is perceived, and identify findings useful to potential future programmes. As might be expected, ex-combatants' opinions were mixed. Informants generally seemed grateful for the UN's presence and the DDR programme. They expressed satisfaction with the disarmament and demobilization elements – particularly the cash reinsertion benefits – and emphasized they wouldn't have voluntarily disarmed except to UN peacekeepers. Yet there was greater ambivalence about reintegration programming. Complaints about corruption, lack of access to schools and training, lack of promised tools, and the quality of training were widespread. More troubling, many ex-combatants expressed feelings of frustration, verging on bitterness, over what they claimed were unfulfilled promises by the international community and the lack of change in their personal situations. Many identified lack of jobs as their primary grievance.

One conversation deserves particular mention, touching on many of the experiences articulated in other interviews and focus groups with ex-combatants of different affiliations. Joseph[15] is a 26-year-old ex-combatant who expressed his views in the Liberian Broadcasting Service (LBS) transmitter site community, located on the edge of the bustling Goba Chop market. As in much of Monrovia, there is no electricity, sanitation system, or running water. Some trees provide shade for the youths, exclusively male, who lounge on benches beneath. The men – many ex-combatants that fought for Taylor's NPFL and/or government forces or militias later controlled by Taylor's regime – tended to appear around midday: mornings were spent either in school or doing 'small-small' business in the market. The community is poor; most inhabitants lack salaried employment. Many came to Monrovia as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or are ex-combatants who settled there when the fighting ended. The area is home to a large population of former fighters. Joseph fought for a government-aligned militia from 2000 to 2003, primarily against LURD rebels. Originally from Nimba County, Joseph was in Monrovia for two epic battles, dubbed 'World War I' and 'World War II'. He was again in Monrovia at the war's end in August 2003; he now lives near the LBS transmitter site community and was learning plumbing in a DDR training course.

During our extended conversation, Joseph stressed that the fighting was over and it was time for all Liberians to be 'free'. Yet later he explained that the situation in Liberia was not settled, because youths and ex-combatants – terms he used synonymously – were not 'satisfied'. Repeatedly he said that 'you have to satisfy the ex-combatants', because otherwise, people will do things 'the other way' and could 'spoil things'.[16] Although emphasizing that *he* wouldn't fight again, Joseph warned that 'other people' might if they don't get satisfaction. Importantly, this sentiment was echoed by other informants, both in formal interviews and informal conversations at both sites: many were quick to say that *they* would not fight again, but that 'other people' might be driven to create problems out of hunger, anger, dissatisfaction, or a feeling of being 'disrespected'.

According to Joseph, ex-combatants and youth are dissatisfied by lack of money, tools, and especially, jobs. Like most informants, Joseph seemed to initially believe that completing a DDR training course would lead to employment.[17] Although he still hoped to get a plumbing job after receiving his certificate, Joseph seemed disillusioned. He repeatedly returned to two related themes: the need to 'satisfy' people and the problem of making promises that were not being kept. Thus, the lack of employment prospects facing him and many other ex-combatants was, he explained, a betrayal by the powerful towards the newly powerless. Nor was this an isolated event. Joseph explained that in the cantonment site they were told they would receive zinc to rebuild their houses, which never materialized; he also claimed (like many informants) that he was not receiving the monthly stipend he was entitled to as a currently enrolled DDR participant. Although Joseph favoured the UN's continued presence in Liberia, he seemed realistic about its impact on his personal situation and prospects. He concluded that, if the international community could not provide, it was 'better for you to tell the truth' beforehand.

Joseph's account resonated because of the many commonalities between his experiences and others'. Like Joseph, most informants enrolled in DDR said they appreciated the cash benefits and were happy for the opportunity, but disappointed by the programme's implementation – marred by corruption and vastly oversubscribed and under-resourced – and, in their view, its broken promises. Most seemed glad that Liberia had peace, but were unsure what this meant for their lives and place in society as ex-combatants. Some went to school, but more spent their days doing 'small-small' business, having emerged from training courses (if ever admitted) with no discernible change in their situation.

Problems with the Liberian Programme

Cumulatively, these findings point to problems that arise out of both the way the Liberian programme was formulated and implemented and, to some extent, conceptual contradictions and unintended consequences of DDR itself. These problems are examined below. The findings also prompt questions as to the form of reintegration programming in light of the society's current challenges. Is a large-scale focus on job training really in the best interests of ex-combatants or

best use of resources in a country with few actual jobs and income-generating opportunities? What does reintegration mean in Liberia?

Design and Implementation

UNMIL assumed peacekeeping duties from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) forces on 1 October 2003. DDR was declared a priority and required to start quickly in accordance with the CPA. This was at odds with both the prevailing security conditions and UNMIL's inability to rapidly deploy its 15,000 peacekeepers. Preparations were inadequate: only one of the three planned cantonment camps was ready in time, and camp security could not be guaranteed.[18] Commitment to disarmament was subject to politicking by the parties, and little information about the process was disseminated to ex-combatants.[19] Moreover, the NGOs expected to implement reintegration programmes generally lacked capacity or were unwilling to prioritize reintegration over existing activities, especially given the short lead time and lack of up-front funding from the UN Development Programme trust fund.[20]

Thus, when more ex-combatants than expected arrived to disarm at Camp Scheiffelin cantonment site near Monrovia's airport in December 2003 – and found that they would not receive a cash payment immediately after handing in their gun – rioting ensued, which escalated and spread to Monrovia, killing nine. The DDR programme was suspended. It resumed in April 2004 after the process was redesigned, more peacekeepers deployed and more camps opened to receive members of all armed groups. Entry requirements were also lowered, requiring only 150 rounds of ammunition or a weapon, a change perhaps made to ensure 'camp followers' would be included.[21] This change significantly impacted upon the credibility of the DDR process and its ability to produce the anticipated reintegration benefits, the implications of which are examined below. In return, ex-combatants received a DDR identification card, were briefly housed in cantonment camps – although the enrolment surge cut cantonment time dramatically – received two cash payments of US$150 each, and were entitled to reintegration programming, consisting of formal education, vocational training, public works training, or agricultural, livestock and fishing programmes. School and training fees were to be paid by the DDR programme for up to three years, and participants in registered reintegration activities were to receive a monthly stipend (decreasing from US$30 a month in year one to US$15 a month in year two, to nothing in year three) and, if in vocational or agricultural programmes, a set of tools upon completion.

After restarting, the process proceeded calmly. The DD components formally ended in November 2004, with 102,193 people registered as disarmed and 92,714 demobilized.[22] The high number of ex-combatants registered and disarmed is an important measure used in support of Liberia's programme; in actual fact, it is evidence of one of its primary failings.[23] When Jacques Klein, former head of UNMIL, declared success on the basis of much greater than anticipated registration numbers – over 100,000 people against initial estimates of 38,000 ex-combatants – his claim not only took the existence of 100,000 ex-combatants at face value but ignored the fact that only an estimated 27,800 guns and six

million rounds of ammunition were collected: around one gun per four fighters, compared to Klein's own February 2003 estimate of three guns per fighter.[24] Klein's pronouncement further overlooked the crucial point that reintegration programmes could not cope with and pay for the huge influx. Indeed, when the disarmament and demobilization components ended, the Joint Implementation Unit (JIU) estimated that 11,484 ex-combatants were in reintegration programmes, with another 35,000 expected to be covered by existing reintegration funding, leaving 47,121 unaccounted for. Moreover, the numbers say nothing about what happened to ex-combatants on a group or individual level after leaving cantonment sites.

The explosion in DDR enrolment and the gap between numbers of disarmed versus weapons collected is evidence of serious problems with the design and implementation of the Liberian process, with knock-on affects for reintegration programming and the situation of many ex-combatants today. There has been a 'dangerous disconnect' between disarmament and reintegration in Liberia, both in terms of capacity – a lack of space in and funding for reintegration programmes – and timeliness, with many of the disarmed unable to access programmes for months or years, if ever.[25] The result is an inability to fulfil the expectations of ex-combatants.

Integral to DDR's spiralling enrolment was the fact that, as openly acknowledged by informants, people commonly 'cheated' to get into the programme – normally by non-combatants pledging some of their first cash payment in return for guns or ammunition to hand in.[26] The extent and form of cheating is a function of the low entry criteria to DDR and inconsistency of enforcement.[27] According to informants, it was particularly important that the programme only paid for one gun (or collection of ammunition) per person. This made cheating a pragmatic and opportunistic response by those with multiple firearms, as well as non-combatants seeking enrolment to access benefits they would otherwise be ineligible for. However, widespread cheating clearly overstressed the reintegration component, undermining its effectiveness.

Besides lack of access to reintegration programmes, DDR participants complained almost unanimously of corruption (examined further below). Informants also highlighted their inability to support themselves while in school, even with stipends. This meant that they skipped classes to earn money – a risk because some schools levied financial penalties for absences, with excessive absence leading to expulsion from school (and effectively the programme). Thus, although most expressed a desire to take advantage of the training and education offered them, they were also pressured by the need to support themselves and their dependents, and cognizant that the two priorities occasionally conflicted.

Reinforcing Pre-war and Wartime Practices: Corruption and Problematic Power Relationships

The corruption in the DDR programme described by informants primarily revolves around payment of monthly stipends. The most common complaint concerned consistent, prolonged delays in dispensing the cash by schools (which distribute the money for the JIU); students also found that some money was missing

by the time they received it, having been (allegedly) skimmed off by the school principal or administrators. This is important not just as another example of corruption in a post-conflict environment, but because such actions replicate and reiterate power relationships and experiences of marginalization from pre-war and wartime society.

The 'big man' has long been a feature of Liberian society and power structures.[28] The term 'big man' does not connote a specific position, but rather stature, wealth and power. For example, Paul Richards et al. describe how in the early twentieth century, 'big men' encouraged their wives to cheat so as to pursue damages against the implicated young men.[29] This should be considered in conjunction with Mats Utas's contention that male youth participation in the war is partly attributable to their limited access to potential wives. The youths would not otherwise have the 'right' to take wives owing to their liminal status as lacking power and wealth; but being a fighter reversed the equation.[30] Relatedly, David Keen has argued that the Liberian war was in part an opportunity for young men to grab and redistribute power from 'big men' to themselves.[31] However, many informants described a clear and enforced power relationship between them and their wartime commanders that normally involved 'kicking up' money or spoils, at risk of severe punishment – illustrating the practical limits of any such redistributive impulses.

It is thus troubling that programme recipients again find themselves at the mercy of 'big men' – in this case, school principals and administrators. This is not to conflate school administrators with commanders or warlords; the point is rather that the programme has created power structures in which older people, mainly men, are in a dominant relationship to, and control the resources of, relatively powerless youths, and that they take advantage of this relationship to enrich themselves. The ex-combatants are powerless because they have little recourse to impartial authority: most informants feared that complaining would result in expulsion. Many expressed frustration, even anger, at this arrangement. Others seemed resigned; one informant explained that Liberia has always been and will always be that way. While it is unrealistic to expect corruption to be entirely absent from large-scale post-conflict programming, it is nevertheless disturbing that a process intended to facilitate the transition back into civilian society has fostered power structures reminiscent of most ex-combatants' pre-war and wartime experiences.

Creating a Market for Ex-combatants

As argued above, the ability of non-combatants to claim ex-combatant status in order to benefit from international programming was facilitated by the programme's design, specifically the permissive entry criteria for DDR.[32] Yet it also points to a prevailing opportunistic attitude among both ex- and non-combatant youths in a society recovering from years of bloodshed and international community neglect. As one informant explained: 'Opportunity comes and you just have to benefit from it'. Moreover, it seemed that informants condoned cheating because the programme itself was seen as fair game for manipulation – a perception seemingly rooted in the recognition that DDR is

essentially unfair. Although it is self-justifying to excuse cheating by recourse to 'fairness', the frequency with which the sentiment recurred indicates that it is likely to be a shared one. Many non-combatants 'passing' as ex-combatants argued that: 'I suffered too, so I should benefit too'. Similarly, ex-combatants also seemed generally dismissive of suggestions that cheating to enter was wrong, so long as genuine ex-combatants were not denied their own benefits. One ex-combatant in Duala explained that, in Liberia, 'everybody fought', and therefore everyone should benefit if they could. Unfortunately such action, coupled with limited resources, greatly contributed to the access and implementation problems described above.

Yet a more fundamental problem is that, in singling out ex-combatants for preferential treatment, DDR has in some ways increased the problem it intends to treat, by adding to the ranks of 'ex-combatants' and arguably hindering reintegration. Because ex-combatants got benefits by virtue of being ex-combatants, claiming the label became attractive for many similarly impoverished. Thus, in a society with few functioning services, DDR created a market for ex-combatants. The fact that entry into the DDR programme was often perceived in transactional terms – and the entrepreneurialism of ex-combatants in shifting weaponry to demand – demonstrates the adaptability and opportunism often associated with market actors. The logic was taken further by some informants who, disappointed with their reintegration benefits, said they would prefer a larger one-off cash payment. One group of ex-combatants in Duala said explicitly: 'Pay us off'.

Creating a market for ex-combatants is problematic both for the overburdened DDR programme and the Liberian society, government, and international community. The existence in Monrovia of a large number of ex-combatants, genuine or otherwise, constrains national and international policymaking: the 'big men' that still command support among many ex-combatants trade on society's perception of these youths as troublemakers to wring concessions out of the international community and government. Such threats and manipulation featured in the jockeying for government jobs after the CPA was signed and after presidential candidate George Weah's loss in the second round of the election. They may also influence decision-making around resource distribution, government appointments and other difficult issues.

Potentially more problematic is that, in segregating and creating a market for ex-combatants, the programme may cement the division between ex-combatants and civilian society, undermining its own rationale. Here it is important to note a conceptual flaw in DDR as practised. Dedicated reintegration programming gives rise, intentionally or not, to the sense that ex-combatants 'deserve' special assistance more than civilians. Significantly, this idea of 'deserving' or specially disadvantaged ex-combatants has been appropriated by ex-combatants themselves. Thus, many informants employed the rhetoric of 'victimcy'[33] when discussing their current and past situations, while downplaying their own roles in perpetrating violence by, for example, claiming that others may have looted but they did not. Obviously the levels of force and coercion used by and against individual ex-combatants differ, but the generality of such claims necessarily prompts scepticism, and possibly indicates the extent to which international community

frameworks are co-opted by those in the affected population. The extent to which this language use by ex-combatants is genuine or opportunistic is difficult to discern after relatively brief fieldwork. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that this 'victim paradigm' could hinder re-inclusion into broader society and rehabilitation between ex- and non-combatants.

Perception is not just a matter of how ex-combatants see themselves, but also how society sees ex-combatants. Here, significantly, the difference between genuine and self-identified ex-combatants is largely incidental: although people may have chosen the ex-combatant label for short-term gain, they have ended up lumping themselves with this group both administratively and socially. Our informants seem aware that, as a population, they are widely perceived as troublemakers, and some informants were eager to disassociate from this stereotype by emphasizing that they keep out of trouble. On the other hand, it was common to hear informants brag, including many claiming to stay out of trouble: 'If they want to treat us like ex-combatants, we'll show them what "ex-combatants" really means', or similar.

Thus, there is an apparent dichotomy between the professed desires of the individual – to get a job and live peacefully – and the 'forced' action of the collective, where ex-combatants claim that the actions of others 'make' them behave as troublemakers, as they are 'expected' to. This echoes to some extent Joseph's claim that *he* would not fight again, but *others* might. The fact that these behavioural expectations seem generally perceived by ex-combatants, and function as a ready-made excuse for inappropriate behaviour, is problematic from both reintegrative and security standpoints.

The Security–development Dilemma

The seeming prevalence of cheating to enter DDR, and the relaxed attitude displayed by ex- and non-combatants alike towards such actions, puts paid to the international community's implicit assumption that entry to DDR would be subject to some kind of peer control mechanism, such that 'real' combatants would point out non-combatants to international staff in order to prevent them from falsely claiming benefits.[34] Conversely, every informant that admitted to falsely enrolling in DDR claimed that the programme was essentially open-access. One informant said: 'If someone didn't benefit, it's due to their own negligence' – a sentiment echoed by others. This is not strictly true, as many probably could not access DDR owing to disability, inability to travel or reluctance to be registered, for example.

Nevertheless, the perception of DDR as 'free benefits for the willing' is important. It points to a dilemma that has plagued the reintegration component. The programme was too oversubscribed to run smoothly, to ensure access to programming and benefits, and to fulfil the promises made to recipients. But it was also insufficiently broad in design or impact to have a wider developmental effect at the community level.

Significantly, this suggests that the programme's effectiveness was compromised by a contradiction between security and development goals. Specifically, if disarmament aims to collect as many weapons as possible from civilian and

combatant populations, it makes sense to cast a wide net in determining eligibility to disarm.[35] But if the primary goal of reintegration is to improve the socio-economic situation of ex-combatants, the opposite imperative applies: weeding out non-combatants is crucial to programme integrity. Where the line between civilians and combatants is relatively clear, such that weapons amnesties or buy-back programmes can be run alongside DDR without undue confusion, this contradiction is unproblematic. Yet where this division is unclear, and incentives are sufficiently high to encourage cheating, it is evident that using disarmament and demobilization as the sole entry point to reintegration benefits necessitates either overly tight or overly lax entry requirements.[36] Both conditions applied in Liberia.

In practice, therefore, security and developmental ends are at odds, complicating planning and undermining effectiveness. This challenges the idea that different sectoral ends are maximized within a single overarching programme. Importantly, this dilemma is not unique to Liberia; and similar contradictions will likely arise in other post-conflict environments where the distinction between civilians and combatants is unclear and arms availability and incentives to cheat are high. Angola is a case in point, where the process also experienced a significant inflation in ex-combatants: from 65,000 anticipated in August 2002 to 105,000 registered in 2003.[37]

The cumulative effect of these problems is evident in the disappointment informants expressed over DDR's unfulfilled promises and lack of benefits. As one informant said, 'Change is small-small'. Taken together with 'no satisfaction, no peace', an inability to keep promises may result in idle ex-combatants nursing a grudge against international and national authorities. This prospect seemingly worries society at large. A 2006 public opinion survey found that almost half the respondents cited rehabilitation and reintegration as the biggest challenge currently facing Liberia.[38]

Reintegration into What?

Finally, I argue that, in Monrovia today, the appropriate question is not, 'Are they reintegrating?' but 'reintegration into what?'. Reintegration cannot be implemented uniformly. To be effective, it must take into account the experiences and characteristics of the people being reintegrated and the society being reintegrated into.

Asking 'reintegration into what?' thus shifts the focus from individual ex-combatants onto the wider society, and focuses on the larger context and aim of the policy intervention. It highlights that, where countries experience both massive destruction and significant mobility and change through conflict,[39] the assumption that a reasonably cohesive and functioning society exists into which reintegration can occur is questionable. What does reintegration mean in Liberia, where 'everybody fought'? How does it account for the reality of a country with unemployment estimated at over 85 per cent, large-scale death and displacement, little functioning infrastructure and institutions, and significant recent urbanization? How does the international community's concept of reintegration reconcile with a society that has experienced important changes in the roles of youth and women? Asking 'reintegration into what' seems a first step

rarely taken, with the exception of market analyses commissioned to determine how many mechanics and seamstresses a post-conflict society can absorb. The remedy is prescribed before diagnosis.

Yet in societies with such great needs, it is an ethical and practical imperative to fundamentally rethink priorities: what is most important in terms of security and development, and how can these goals best be achieved given limited resources and time? This may necessitate casting off assumptions about the international community's priorities in post-conflict environments, including the way reintegration programming is conceived and conducted. Are job training and education for a limited number of beneficiaries the most productive use of resources in these circumstances? Is creating a market for ex-combatants really in the best interest of a country and region, particularly when the participants in that market think they are being promised benefits that will not be realized? If security is the goal, isn't the inability to manage expectations and deliver on promises counterproductive? And if a wider developmental impact is desired, is it sensible to target so many resources specifically to ex-combatants? By attempting to achieve each aim, DDR may be compromising both. What is the best use of resources to tangibly benefit the most people?

The obvious answer is employment creation, and DDR programmes should be more pragmatic and adaptable in form and content in order to achieve this. Jobs programmes targeting infrastructure in particular are economically sound. Paul Collier et al. write that: 'the returns to early rehabilitation of key infrastructure destroyed during the conflict can be extremely high'.[40] This makes all the more absurd the practice of contracting western companies or militaries to do work that could be done more cheaply and with greater social impact by local workers, ex-combatants or not. In addition to the livelihoods impact, employment may also help generate confidence building and reconciliation.[41]

Conclusion: Reconsidering Priorities

Little can now be done to change the Liberian DDR programme, yet the Liberian experience provides insights relevant to DDR and broader post-conflict policy-making. Specifically, it cautions against complacency about DDR as an uncontested, normative good that is equally suited to all conflicts and societies. It also raises questions about how DDR is formulated and implemented in post-conflict societies. The most pertinent, is whether the current practice of DDR is the best use of national and international community resources, especially when the reintegration programming is geared towards preparing ex-combatants for jobs that do not exist. In the absence of clear practical evidence that reintegration programmes have positive security and developmental impacts, has DDR earned its status as a post-conflict policy imperative?

DDR programmes in places like Liberia may be more effective by delinking disarmament and demobilization from reintegration – not punitively, but to focus reintegration resources on open-access jobs programmes (prioritizing infrastructure rehabilitation) with discrete, complementary bilateral or multilateral education or support programmes for particularly vulnerable groups, including

disarmed youth, women, and children and non-combatant war-affected youth and the disabled. Employment programmes could target ex-combatants, but not exclusively, and should be developed cooperatively by national and international authorities and donors. Complementary programming could be run by specialist international or non-governmental organizations, ensuring it does not get lost in a larger programme; access can be influenced by the disarmament and demobilization process (notably in the cases of child soldiers, disabled veterans, women fighters or 'camp wives') but should not be bound to it. To increase weapons collection, meanwhile, buy-back programmes could be created for civilians to turn in weapons, offering smaller payouts but not requiring cantonment. The point is not to remove reintegration activities entirely, but to channel limited resources more effectively, in a way that has wider developmental impact than programmes limited to ex-combatants. This would also address the unintended side-effect of creating a market for former fighters.

The 'pay us off' mentality expressed by some informants indicates that delinking may be successful so long as jobs are created. Crucially for those that have gone through the programme without much benefit, delinking may be a way to 'satisfy' by providing an immediate, concrete reinsertion benefit, without creating false or unfulfilled expectations. Indeed, managing expectations through effective pre-programme communication would be key to successful delinking, so that ex-combatants are aware of what they are entitled to before the process begins – thus preventing the problematic disconnect between programme expectation and delivery seen in the Liberia case.

Delinking disarmament and demobilization from reintegration may not be suitable everywhere. In areas that better fit the DDR paradigm – for example, where there is a clear difference between civilians and combatants – a holistic approach may be preferable. Thus, in formulating DDR, policymakers must be sensitive to the conflict history and current socioeconomic and governance situation to determine if, in that context, the concept is meaningful and can be meaningfully implemented.

Relevant aspects of conflict histories include the extent of voluntary versus forced recruitment, the conflict's length and geographical distribution, the number of factions and their perceived legitimacy, the government's role, and the extent to which there was clarity between civilians and combatants.[42] There should also be consideration of how the society operated during and before conflict: in Liberia, the history of corruption should have alerted policymakers to the potential for abuse of the DDR programme by both administrators and participants. It is also crucial that practitioners be aware of what has been done in neighbouring countries, to counter claims generated on the basis of that activity. For example, several ex-combatants falsely claimed that the cash payout for going through DDR in Sierra Leone was significantly higher than in Liberia, leaving them feeling cheated and, combined with their own experiences of corruption, feeding rumours of what happened to the Liberian money.

In terms of socioeconomic and governance issues, the discussion needs to move beyond market analyses to consider the priorities and how can they best be achieved in view of the political, economic, security and time constraints and existing

capacity in local institutions. The extent to which local ownership is operationalized should also be flexible: donors should be guided by realities on the ground rather than blind devotion to principle when determining ownership.

Finally, the international community should staunch the ongoing proliferation of 'Rs'. Subsuming difficult, specialist tasks such as rehabilitation or resettlement – which should be done in their own right, using dedicated resources – into a larger, often ad hoc and time-limited programme does a disservice to both practitioners and recipients. The mere addition of another task does not automatically make it happen. On the contrary, by creating inflated expectations, the international community damages its credibility with those it is attempting to help, to the detriment of both beneficiaries and, potentially, the overall security environment in a vulnerable post-conflict area. Setting realistic expectations and managing them is a key; promising without fulfilling is ethically and operationally problematic.

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NOTES

1. Senior advisor to the Department for International Development, United Kingdom, 'How are SALW and ERW situated within development, humanitarian action and peacebuilding?', Panel discussion at the Conference on Strengthening European Action on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament – How Can Community Instruments Contribute?, Brussels, 7 Dec. 2005. At least 14 UN peacekeeping operations have included DDR since 1989.
2. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, 'Disentangling the Determinants of Successful Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration', unpublished manuscript, Feb. 2005, pp.1–4.
3. Fieldwork was conducted in Red Light, Paynesville, Monrovia and Duala Market, Bushrod Island, Monrovia, 4–21 November 2005, in cooperation with the Liberian Institute for Statistics and Geo-Information Services. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used. For analysis of quantitative material, see Morten Bøås and Anne Hatløy, 'Getting in, Getting out: Militia Members and Reintegration in Post-war Liberia', unpublished manuscript, July 2006. Quotes from informants are from field notes transcribed during or immediately after interviews; tape recorders were not used owing to the sensitivity of the issues raised. All direct quotes come from interviews or focus group discussions conducted by the author. Over 40 open-ended, often repeated, interviews were conducted, along with almost 20 focus group discussions, ranging from 2 to 8 participants per discussion. Informal conversations with ex-combatants in or around the field sites were also informative. These conversations were treated as background material and have not been used for citation.
4. A small number of former members of the Movement for Democracy in Liberia participated in the quantitative component of the survey, but none interviewed in the qualitative component. Bøås and Hatløy (see n.3 above).
5. Liberia's civil war lasted from 1989 to 2003, but was not continuous: a lull prevailed in most of the country from 1997 to 2000, after a peace agreement that led to democratic elections and Charles Taylor's landslide presidential victory. Taylor's exile to Nigeria in August 2003 ended the war. For detailed analyses, see: Morten Bøås, 'The Liberian Civil War: New War/Old

War?', *Global Society*, Vol.19, No.1, 2005, pp.73–88; Morten Bøås, 'Liberia and Sierra Leone: Dead Ringers? The Logic of Neopatrimonial Rule', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.22, No.5, 2001, pp.697–723; Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, London: Hurst, 1999; Mats Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War*, Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, 2003; William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

6. Morten Bøås, 'Rebuilding Liberia: Understanding the Past in Order to Prepare for the Future', presentation at the seminar on Human Rights Challenges in Post-Election Liberia, Oslo, 9 Mar. 2006.
7. Author conversation with Aloysius Toe, Director, Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (Monrovia) at the Norwegian Human Rights Fund, Oslo, 9 Mar. 2006.
8. The CPA established the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration. DDR assistance was included in UNMIL's mandate. Most planning and control was (and is) under UNMIL's Joint Implementation Unit (JIU). See Wolf-Christian Paes, 'Eyewitness: The Challenges of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Liberia', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.12, No.2, summer 2005, pp.253–61.
9. UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment: Principles and Guidelines*, New York: United Nations, 2000. Subsequent 'Rs' are newer and varying additions: 'rehabilitation' in Liberia, 'repatriation' and 'resettlement' in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The expansion of 'Rs' indicates how the concept has grown to suit donor imperatives.
10. Because the article does not address rehabilitation, and to avoid the confusion of multiple acronyms, this article uses 'DDR' to refer to both the generic practice and the Liberian programme.
11. On security arguments, see Humphreys and Weinstein (see n.2 above), pp.5–6. On development arguments, see Colin Gleichmann, Michael Odenwald, Kees Steenken and Adrian Wilkinson, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: A Practical Field and Classroom Guide*, Frankfurt: GTZ, 2004; Dirk Salomons, 'Security: An Absolute Prerequisite', in Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren (eds) *Postconflict Development: Meeting New Challenges*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005, pp.19–42.
12. Festus Aboagye and Alhaji M.S. Bah, *Liberia at a Crossroads: A Preliminary Look at the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Protection of Civilians*, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, Paper No.95, 2004.
13. See Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the US Army, *Play to Win: Final Report of the Bi-partisan Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction*, Jan. 2003, accessed at www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/playtowin.pdf.
14. Today an estimated 65 per cent of the population in West Africa is under the age of 30. UN Office for West Africa, *Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa*, Dec. 2005, accessed at www.un.org/unowa/unowa/studies/unemployment-insecurity.pdf.
15. Informant's name is changed.
16. The 'you' in Joseph's statements seemingly referred to the international community rather than 'me' specifically, but this was ambiguous. Although I emphasized to Joseph before and during the interview that I am a researcher (i.e. not someone that could directly provide money or bring change to his situation), it would of course be logical for him to treat me as a member of the international community with more power than I claimed.
17. A 2006 public opinion survey made a similar finding about Liberians' expectations of UNMIL: survey respondents 'articulated some confusion about the UN mandate in Liberia. Some interviewees felt that UNMIL should be providing jobs, building infrastructure and constructing clinics and hospitals'. Jean Krasno, *Public Opinion Survey of UNMIL's Work in Liberia*, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Best Practices Unit, March 2006, p.7, accessed at http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/Liberia_POS_final_report_Mar_29.pdf.
18. Refugees International, 'DDRR in Liberia: Do it Quickly – But Do It Right!', 3 Dec. 2003, accessed at www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/922. See also Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, *Lessons Learned Study on the Start-up Phase of the United Nations Mission in Liberia*, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Apr. 2004, accessed at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons/.
19. Integrated Regional Information Network, 'Former fighters in second day of riots, UNMIL offers initial payment', 9 Dec. 2003, accessed at www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=38318.
20. Refugees International (see n.18 above); Paes (see n.8 above), p.259.
21. Paes (see n.8 above), p.260, n.4. Yet, 'Many of the women are considered to be "camp followers" but were actually fighters who should receive similar benefits to the male combatants'. Refugees International (see n.18 above).

22. National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation Joint Implementation Unit, *DDRR Consolidated Report*, 24 Nov. 2004, accessed at www.humanitarianinfo.org/liberia/coordination/sectoral/DDR/doc/Forthnightly%20Report_24112004.pdf.
23. See also Ryan Nichols, 'Disarming Liberia: Progress and Pitfalls', in Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman (eds), *Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2005, pp.108–43.
24. Integrated Regional Information Network, 'Warring factions walk out of disarmament talks', 27 Nov. 2003, accessed at www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID = 38138; Integrated Regional Information Network, 'NGO warns UN not to rush disarmament', 4 Dec. 2003, accessed at www. irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID = 38242; Paes (see n.8 above); Integrated Regional Information Network, 'Money runs out to train, rehabilitate disarmed fighters', 2 Dec. 2004, accessed at www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID = 44494.
25. Paes (see n.8 above), p.253.
26. Here 'cheating' is strictly descriptive, as used by informants. Acquiring weapons or ammunitions to access DDR in Liberia has been described elsewhere; see Paes (see n.8 above), pp.255–56; and Corinne Dufka, 'Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors', Human Rights Watch, Vol.17, No.5 (A), Mar. 2005, accessed at www.hrw.org/reports/2005/westafrica0405/.
27. See also Dufka, ibid., p.45.
28. See, e.g., Utas (see n.5 above); Paul Richards, Steven Archibald, Beverlee Bruce, Watta Modad, Edward Mulbah, Tornorlah Varpilah and James Vincent, 'Community Cohesion in Liberia: A Post-War Rapid Social Assessment', World Bank, paper No.21, Jan. 2005, accessed at www.wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDS_IBank_Servlet?pcont=details&eid=000009486_20050128102506.
29. Richards et al., ibid., p.4.
30. Utas (see n.5 above), p.230.
31. David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
32. For more on this point, see Kathleen Jennings, 'Unclear Ends, Unclear Means: Questioning Reintegration in Post-war Societies', manuscript under review, 2006.
33. On 'victimcy', see Utas (see n.5 above), pp.22–4. Conversely, some informants would boast of gruesome exploits, then later back away from or deny earlier claims.
34. This assumption is necessitated by a lack of verifiable information on combatant numbers before DDR began. For more on adapting DDR project design and planning to available information, see Jennings (see n.32 above).
35. This goal was undermined by accepting ammunition instead of a weapon, thus diminishing security benefits while complicating reintegration.
36. Here a 'tight' entry requirement sets a high barrier of proof that one is an ex-combatant, whereas a 'lax' requirement is less concerned with proof of status and more with possession of a weapon.
37. Salomons (see n.11 above), p.28.
38. See Krasno (see n.17 above), p.7.
39. See Morten Bøås and Kathleen Jennings, 'Insecurity and Development: The Rhetoric of the "Failed State"', *European Journal of Development Research*, Vol.17, No.3, Sept. 2005, pp.385–95.
40. Paul Collier, V.L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynol-Querol and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003, p.156.
41. Arne Strand, 'Transforming Local Relationships: Reintegration of Combatants Through Mine Action in Afghanistan', in Kristian Berg Harpviken and Rebecca Roberts (eds), *Preparing the Ground for Peace: Mine Action in Support of Peacebuilding*, Nairobi: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2004, pp.39–54.
42. Mats R. Berdal, *Disarmament and Demobilisation after Civil Wars*, Adelphi Paper 303, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.9–23.