Incomplete DDRR: A Prescription for Prolonged Fragility in Liberia

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Nineteen years after the official end of Liberia's civil wars (1989-97; 1999-2003), peace remains fragile as violence and crime persist in the country. Many Liberians argue that "Zogos" currently pose the greatest threat to national security. The term "Zogo" is Liberian slang for thugs, addicts, and thieves. It is a derogatory term commonly used to refer to mainly young men[i] between the ages of 18 and 35[ii] who struggle with homelessness and drug addiction and create insecurity for the population.[iii] In January 2022, for instance, so-called "Zogos" robbed people during an open-air crusade in Monrovia's borough of New Kru Town, leading to a stampede in which 29 people died (Johnson, 2022a).

The concentration of young people at risk of poverty, crime, and violence in Liberia can be linked directly to the country's 14-years of civil wars, during which many of them were children that are now struggling to come to terms with their experiences and/or who lost their families and sources of livelihood, pointing to the effects of the civil war on present day Liberia. Compounded with structural inequality, the lack of educational, licit, and formal economic opportunities for all, this threatens peace and stability in Liberia by pushing some people into criminal and violent activities – often to feed their need for food, shelter, and drugs. As the journalist Johnson (2022b) explains: "The guns are silent in post-conflict Liberia following the end of the 14-years civil conflict, but the growing number of disadvantaged and vulnerable youth commonly known as "Zogos" across the country and particularly in Monrovia, remains an eminent threat to the peace and stability of the nation and its peaceful citizens and foreign residents."

Building on a review of the United Nations' (UN) engagement in Liberia through official documentation, many years of research on security in the country and personal experiences during and after the wars, this chapter traces the insecurity experienced by the Liberian population because of the growing number of "Zogos" and young people at risk of poverty, crime, and violence in the country to Liberia's civil wars and subsequent efforts at disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR). The chapter argues that many combatants were forgotten in an incomplete DDRR process that focused on easy to reach areas and left out people scattered around the countryside, where support for the fighting factions was strongest. Furthermore, few weapons were recovered in the DDRR process, the networks between ex-combatants largely remained intact, psychosocial support was weak and there were limited attempts at creating long term reintegration opportunities. This was coupled with the inability of the state to a provide socio-economic opportunities and address the historical legacies of the wars. This has created serious security, economic and societal challenges in Liberia that threaten peace and stability today, highlighting the need to revise DDRR programmes.

This chapter provides a brief background to Liberia's civil wars, honing in on the fighting forces. It then turns to the international intervention by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG, 1990-98), the Economic Community of West African States Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL, 2003), and the United Nations Mission in Liberia

(UNMIL, 2003-18), leading to and following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, 2003. This is followed by a discussion of the DDRR process, which is divided in two sections. Section one discusses the disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants, and section two focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives. The chapter assesses their merits and drawbacks and outlines the consequences of an incomplete DDRR process for Liberia: the persistence of violence and insecurity and an increase in organised crime. It concludes with a list of lessons learned from the incomplete DDRR process in Liberia.

Liberia: A Journey from War to Peace

Similar to other countries in the West African sub-region, Liberia degenerated into brutal civil wars which lasted 14 years and only came to an end in 2003. The First Civil War began on Christmas Eve in 1989, when Charles Ghankay Taylor and his rebel force of about 100 fighters entered the country from Côte d'Ivoire, garnering support from thousands of people identifying themselves as members of the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. People from these groups had faced persecution and exclusion during President Samuel Doe's presidency (1980-1990), which had fuelled resentments against the head of state and support for Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Doe responded to the incursion of the NPFL by deploying the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) to Nimba, where he received support from members of his ethnic group, the Krahns. Despite initial pushbacks by the AFL, Taylor and his forces soon made it to the capital city, Monrovia, and put the city under siege, prompting an international response (Human Rights Watch, 1993).

To end the fighting and prevent a spill-over into neighbouring states and building on its Protocol on Mutual Defence Assistance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed a military force known as ECOMOG to Liberia in August 1990 (Human Rights Watch, 1993). During his visit to the newly established ECOMOG headquarters in the Free Port of Monrovia in September 1990, Doe was captured and killed by the Independent National Patriotic Forces of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway faction of the NPFL. This prompted further fighting over Monrovia between Prince Yormie Johnson's INPFL, and Taylor's NPFL. A series of ECOWAS-led peace-making efforts followed, leading in 1990 to the instatement of the Interim Government of National Unity led by Dr. Amos Sawyer, supported through a strengthened ECOMOG force that was endorsed by Johnson but not Taylor (Huband, 1990).

To curb the fighting, the UN imposed an arms embargo on Liberia in 1992.[iv] This was followed by the Cotonou Peace Agreement (1993), subsequent to which the UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) was established in 1994. However, the peace was short-lived, leading to several attempts at ending the war with the Akosombo and Accra agreements (both 1994) and the Abuja Accord (1996). The latter paved the way for an election in which Charles Taylor was elected President of Liberia (1997-2003). The people of Liberia had hoped that the election of Taylor would bring an end to violence and destruction in the country and some of those who had been displaced returned to their homes hoping for the end of the war.

The Cotonou, Akosombo and Accra agreements and the Abuja Accord were accompanied by commitments by the belligerent factions to undertake the disarmament, encampment, and demobilisation of combatants.[v] Indeed, Taylor himself proposed a partial disarmament to leaders of ECOWAS, as he considered this key to the planned election. As an author narrates

in an editorial of *The Perspective* (1996) magazine, disarmament was to focus on Monrovia and other large towns. This meant that "guerrillas who are scattered in the interior, which was the bastion of Mr. Taylor's NPFL, would be untouched" (*The Perspective*, 1996). Disarmament thus received limited support in practice (also see David, 1997). From the perspective of ex-combatants, this was a moment to wait-and-see during which contacts with commanders and war networks were maintained in case the war would start again (Utas, 2005: 138–39).

After his electoral victory, Taylor ousted the ECOMOG troops from Liberia in February 1998. The security situation deteriorated as Taylor instituted a police state, persecuting those he was unable to capture during the war. In 1999, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a new rebel group that sought to oust Taylor from power, established its headquarters in Voinjama in Lofa county (Käihkö, 2015; Persson, 2012: 107–8), marking the beginning of what is commonly referred to as the Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003). LURD succeeded the then defunct United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy-K faction (ULIMO-K, 1991-94), which was a predominantly ethnic Mandingo or Muslim faction under the leadership of Alhaji G. V. Kromah, a former senior government official under Doe. Further opposition to Taylor's forces came from the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL, 2003), an ethnically Krahn-dominated group which entered Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire during the last year of the war (Käihkö, 2018).

The war officially ended with the Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (Accra, Ghana, 17 June 2003), which was followed by a Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia, LURD, MODEL, and other political parties (Accra, Ghana, 18 August 2003). The end of the war was facilitated by the exhaustion of combatants after 14 years of fighting and insecurity, increasingly vocal calls for international support to end the war by a larger number of citizens, and the military intervention led by the international community. Vorrath (2014: 11) suggests that the ceasefire and peace agreements were also partly brought about by the UN's embargos on exports of diamonds (UNSC 2001 Res. 1343), timber and timber products (UNSC 2003 Res. 1473) from Liberia, which removed important sources of income from fighting fractions. Their impact was limited, however, as embargos were circumvented by transporting goods to neighbouring countries Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, from where they were exported.

The Peace Agreement paved the way for the deployment of a second ECOWAS peacekeeping force (ECOMIL), of which about 3,600 troops from nine member states were integrated into the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in October 2003 (UNSC 2003 Res. 1509; UNMIL, 2015). UNMIL replaced the UN Peace-Building Support Office in Liberia (1997-2003). With a strength of 14,690 military personnel, 1,098 civilian police officers, 485 international civilians and 628 local civilians in 2004, it was the biggest peacekeeping force commissioned by the UN as of then (United Nations, 2005: 25). It was also the most expensive with an approved budget of USD 846.82 million in 2004/05 alone (United Nations, 2005: 25). Originally only mandated for 12 months, UNMIL stayed in Liberia for almost 18 years (UNSC 2006 Res. 2333), during which some of its troops were deployed to Sierra Leone (UNSC 2005 Res. 1626) and Côte d'Ivoire (UNSC 2006 Res. 1667).

UNMIL was mandated by the UN to observe and investigate ceasefire violations, provide humanitarian and human rights assistance, implement the peace process and security sector reforms. Furthermore, the peacekeeping forces were tasked to provide security at vital infrastructure and cantonment sites and to monitor and implement a disarmament,

demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation programme for all armed parties (UNSC 2003 Res. 1509, article 3).

Failures of the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Process

Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR; note that the UN includes repatriation instead of rehabilitation) were important elements of Liberia's post-war[vi] peacebuilding processes. During the wars, many small arms had entered the country and thousands of children, women and men had been recruited as soldiers and militia fighters by all parties involved in fighting.[vii] These armed combatants were perceived as potential spoilers of the fragile peace by the international community led by the UN, who saw them as posing a threat to both civilians and the weak state. They hoped to eliminate this threat by recovering and destroying weapons, breaking down command structures and reintegrating ex-combatants into society. This was considered "key to immediate post-conflict stability and reduced likelihood of conflict recurrence" (Brahimi Report, 2000: 7 Article 42). However, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration were deemed insufficient to address the deep-rooted conflicts in Liberia and turn combatants into civilians after 14 years of war. Therefore, the scope of the peacebuilding process was broadened to include Rehabilitation, a psycho-social component.

Whilst the development of DDRR programmes is normally led by nationals, local capacities were limited. Liberians, including many commanders of the fighting factions, were almost excluded from this process. An Action Plan, including special arrangements for women and children, was developed by several UN organisations (UNMIL; UN Development Programme (UNDP); UN Children's Fund (UNICEF); UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) [now UN Women]; UN High Commission for Refugees), the World Health Organisation, the World Food Programme, the World Bank; the United States Agency for International Development and non-governmental organisations (NGOs; UNMIL, 2003c: 5 Article 21).[viii] Under the Action Plan, oversight for the DDRR process and policy-decisions were allocated to the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental body set up under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2003 Article VI (8)).

The NCDDRR comprised representatives from relevant agencies of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), LURD, MODEL, ECOWAS, the UN, and the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL).[ix] The NCDDRR provided guidance to a Joint Implementation Unit responsible for executing the DDRR programme, comprising representatives from UNMIL, UNDP and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Bugnion et al., 2006: 6). UNMIL was mandated to coordinate the implementation of the DDRR process, mobilising resources, collecting information, preparing and providing security at cantonment sites, destroying weapons and demobilising combatants (UNMIL, 2003c: 7 Article 29). UNDP Liberia took the lead on Rehabilitation and Reintegration, directing 65.7 percent of its expenditure to this programme between 2004 and 2007 (Gawler, Yengbeh, and Tokpa, 2009: 14).

The limited involvement of Liberians in the development of the DDRR programme raises serious questions about the international organisations' understanding of ground realities and

local ownership in the DDRR process, which came back to bite UNMIL at the start of the Disarmament and Demobilisation (DD) process.

Disarmament and Demobilisation:

In Liberia, the disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants began less than two months after UNMIL was set up and ended in October 2004, lasting less than one year. [x] This left little time for analysis and planning. UNMIL estimated that about 40,000 combatants would have to be disarmed, while commanders suggested numbers ranging between 45,000 and 60,000 (UNMIL, 2003c: 5 Article 22). These numbers were deemed inflated by UNMIL. This was a big mistake which peacekeeping forces realised when 101,495 combatants turned up to join the DD programme (NCDDRR, 2005: 1).

Following the Action Plan, disarmament and demobilisation would involve a 30-day stay at cantonment sites (reduced to 3 weeks in the Joint Operation Plan), during which combatants would hand over weapons, undergo a basic orientation and interviews for reintegration in addition to being provided with a small stipend (UNMIL, 2003c: 6 Article 23). In practice, this stay was often shortened to five days, leaving little room for meaningful activities (Bugnion et al., 2006: 6, 9 Article 10).

The public was informed about the DD programme through a series of radio broadcasts and community activities in the capital Monrovia and its surroundings in November 2003 (UNMIL, 2003b), a couple of weeks ahead of the launch of the programme at Camp Schieffelin, just 35 miles outside Monrovia (UNMIL, 2003a). On the first day of the disarmament programme, UNMIL was already above capacity and misunderstandings around the benefits of the programme escalated into violence (Annan, 2003). This included shootings and looting by combatants, during which several civilians died and an UN peacekeeper was wounded (UNMIL, 2003c: 3 Article 9). This incident interrupted the disarmament process, prompted adjustments to the programme, and an upgrade of capacities. The DDRR information campaign was extended to the whole country and new cantonments sites were set up in Gbarnga, Buchanan, Tubmanburg and Monrovia (UNMIL, 2004a). These catered to different factions, including LURD (Gbarnga, Tubmanburg, Voinjama), MODEL (Buchanan, Kakata, Zwedru, Harper), and former government forces (Monrovia, Ganta), though other fighters were also processed at these sites.

The DD process was resumed in April 2004 (Klein, 2004) and ended in October of this year (UNMIL, 2004b), rendering carrying and using weapons illegal under Liberia's laws from December 2004. A total of 103,000 fighters had been disarmed, among them 22,456 women, 8,771 boys and 2,511 girls (NCDDRR, 2005: 1), many of which were not combatants but people who were after the benefits offered during the DDRR process. This reduces the number of people from the target group in the programme. 27,000 weapons had been confiscated, including rifles and semi-automatic machine guns, and 6,153,631 pieces of small arms ammunition and 29,794 pieces of heavy ammunition like mortars and Rocket Propelled Grenades had been collected (NCDDRR, 2005: 1). While the number of ammunition and weapons recovered is large compared to other disarmament programmes (Caramés, Fisas, and Sanz, 2007: 30) because handing in a part of a weapon or a piece of ammunition was considered sufficient to enter the DDRR programme, only 26 percent of those disarmed were carrying weapons according to these figures. This suggests that many arms were still in circulation after the end of the disarmament process.

To address this gap, UNMIL deployed mobile disarmament units to locations that were difficult to reach, such as Barclayville (Grand Kru County), Foya, Kolahun and Vahun (Lofa county), but ex-combatants were no longer eligible for entry into the rehabilitation and reintegration programme (UNMIL, 2004f: 5 Article 22). This effort was complemented by other actors like UNDP in Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Nimba and supported by the newly established National Commission on Small Arms (UNMIL, 2005c: 5 Article 27; 2005d: 8 Article 38), yet with limited success. Some weapons were smuggled abroad, others were dumped on site (UNMIL 2004d: 5), and again others were absorbed by criminal businesses (Vorrath, 2014: 8) and informal security groups in Liberia, which drew on the rebel networks that were never fully demobilised after the wars (Persson, 2012).

The incomplete recovery of weapons is partly due to challenges in cooperating with commanders of the armed factions on reaching combatants and partly due to the focus of the disarmament and demobilisation programmes on Monrovia and its environs, including other urban areas. The focus on the capital and major towns was justified by the international community with reference to logistical challenges in reaching so-called "inaccessible areas" in the "interior" (UNMIL, 2005b: 15). As most fighters were in the countryside, they were excluded from the disarmament and demobilisation programme.

The demobilisation component of the DD programme involved fewer people than the disarmament component despite the close links between them. 101,495 combatants, including 22,370 women, 8,523 boys and 2,440 girls were demobilised (NCDDRR, 2005: 1). Most disarmed and demobilised combatants identified as LURD (34,273 people), followed by Government of Liberia, paramilitary, and militia groups (15,595 people), MODEL (13,148 people) and the Armed Forces of Liberia (12,254 people), in addition to other fighters (27,749) (NCDDRR, 2005: 1).[xi]

The demobilisation component was significant for dismantling the well-established networks among fighters, but suffered from a lack of time. Without a proper demobilisation process, the chains of command and many rebel networks stayed intact at the end of the war (see also UNMIL, 2007b: 5 Paragraph 18), providing vital resources for informal security organisations, crime, and criminal business operations to flourish in the aftermath of the war.

Among those developments of concern was the increase in vigilante groups in the country. Such groups formed in the Duale market in Monrovia (UNMIL, 2005a: 4), but also outside the capital. In Voinjama, Lofa county, for instance, a community watch group of young ethnic Mandingo men and former LURD fighters patrolled the streets of their neighbourhoods in exchange for a small contribution from each family and the business community (Persson, 2012: 107–9). Persson (2012: 107–9) attributed these developments in Lofa to the slow pace of the DDRR programme and the lack of satisfactory rewards.

Combatants had lived on looting and the spoils of wars for many years, which ensured their survival and brought some to prosperity (see e.g. Gerdes, 2013; Vorrath, 2014). Ensuring a minimum income base or remunerative production activities or other sources of income were thus key to successful disarmament and demobilisation processes. More so when employment opportunities were principally absent throughout the country. The DD process, however, only provided small one-off payments of USD 300 (Bugnion et al., 2006: 6), which could not sustain ex-combatants for long. It is therefore not surprising that certain groups of ex-combatants ensured their control over vital resource sites after the end of the war.

LURD combatants established control over the Guthrie Rubber Plantation bordering Bomi and Grand Cape Mount (UNMIL, 2005c: 4). These plantations were wrestled from Charles Taylor's forces in July 2003, just before the end of the war, and remained in the hands of ex-combatants for the years to come. In July 2005, 60 of these estimated 3,200 ex-combatants were registered for reintegration opportunities, in addition to the development of community-based support structures for those who were unarmed and therefore not included in the DD component (UNMIL, 2005a: 5–6). This is a small number, suggesting that the DDRR process was perceived to offer few benefits by some ex-combatants.

Disarmament and demobilisation and peacekeeping forces slowly contributed to a decline in violence and increased physical security after the wars. However, these were only short-term measures that conceived of security narrowly as the absence of violence. They did not address the root causes of violence and insecurity nor people's main concerns for food, housing, health services and personal security, some of which the RR components sought to tackle.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration:

Rehabilitation and reintegration are crucial for moving from the absence of physical violence towards the establishment of a positive peace (Galtung, 2011). As such, reintegration was more broadly conceived by UNDP (2005: 10; see also UNMIL, 2014) as "a political, social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level," aimed at helping ex-combatants transition into civilian life and gaining sustainable employment and income. Yet, neither reintegration nor rehabilitation were defined in the context of Liberia (Bugnion et al., 2006: 8) and rehabilitation, understood here as a psycho-social process involving both the individual and the community, was almost fully disregarded.

In Liberia, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes were implemented from June 2004 to July 2009 and ran parallel to the latter phases of the DD process. They were designed and implemented by numerous UN agencies, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union, and several state and non-state actors, many of them Liberian organisations. UNICEF and other partners paid special attention to the needs of minors (UNMIL, 2005d: 9; 2007a: 7 Paragraph 25),[xii] while UNIFEM was nominated as a lead agency for women in the Action Plan and adopted this role during the DD phase, but not during the RR phase, during which women did not receive special attention (Bugnion et al., 2006: 9, 10, 48).

The common source of funding for many implementing agencies was the multi-donor DDRR Trust Fund managed by UNDP, followed by USAID and the European Commission (UNMIL, 2004c). Yet, from the beginning, there were serious funding challenges as pledges had been made for 20,035 disarmed and demobilised ex-combatants only, meaning that 47,025 ex-combatants were initially unable to enrol for RR programmes (UNMIL, 2004e). While further funds were provided, financial concerns remained central to UNMIL over the years, in part because completing the reintegration of all ex-combatants was central to UNMIL's exit strategy (UNMIL, 2007a: 7 Paragraph 25).

By the close of the DDRR process in July 2009, the Trust Fund had facilitated re-integration programmes for about 98,000 demobilised combatants (UNMIL Today, 2009: 1). While most combatants had expressed an interest in vocational skill training (50 percent), formal education (43 percent), agriculture (4 percent) and employment opportunities (3 percent) during the DD interviews, international donors preferred to use the Trust Fund to invest primarily in education

(46 percent; mainly in Montserrado), vocational training (29 percent) and agriculture (25 percent). This resulted in high drop-out rates in agriculture (Eriksson, 2008: 18), despite the majority of the population relying on it for subsistence.

Education was important to learn basic skills like reading and calculus, as many ex-combatants had never seen a school from the inside. However, education programmes faced significant challenges: apart from the quality of the learning environment and the abilities of teachers, ex-combatants were not accustomed to sit down and learn in a controlled classroom environment, many were unable to focus due to exposure to conflict-related violence, often turning this into an exercise in attendance (only 10 percent dropped out; Eriksson, 2008: 18) rather than learning. Moreover, most educational programmes were short-term and did not award degrees, nor were they linked to broader education or employment strategies.

Most skills training programmes included welding, auto mechanics, masonry, carpentry, electrical wiring, refrigerator repairs, general engine repairs and tailoring (Eriksson, 2008: 18), offering more variety to males than females. They aimed at enhancing employability and allowing ex-combatants to generate their own income through licit work opportunities. However, skills trainings had limited impact on people's livelihoods as they faced similar challenges to their education counterparts. As an evaluation in 2007 revealed, thousands of ex-combatants remained unemployed or are illegally exploiting natural resources, such as diamonds, gold and rubber (UNMIL, 2007b: 7) to make ends meet. This is partly because of the lack of employment opportunities.

The focus on skills training and employability reflects the international community's neo-liberal approach to reintegration, which did not leave much space for addressing the social and psychological needs of ex-combatants and the communities in which they were expected to re-integrate. As a survey revealed in 2008, there was inadequate access to health services after the war, 44 percent of those Liberians questioned presented with symptoms related to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 40 percent for major depressive disorder (MDD) (Johnson et al. 2008, 676). Of those surveyed, the symptoms of PTSD, MDD and suicidal thoughts were higher among ex-combatants than non-combatants and among those who had experienced sexual violence than those who had not (Johnson et al. 2008, 676), pointing to the significance of rehabilitation to the DDRR process.

In April 2005, the first referral and counselling office was opened in Monrovia (UNMIL, 2005c: 5–6), followed by further offices in Buchanan, Gbarnga, Harper, Zwedru and Voinjama. They registered former combatants for the upcoming school year and disseminated information about RR programs (UNMIL, 2005a: 5–6), but did not really offer psychosocial support. Rehabilitation was almost completely absent from RR programmes despite knowledge about the psychological impact of violence on the physical and mental health of all Liberians, and especially ex-combatants and those affected by sexual and gender-based violence, and its effect on society at large. By emphasising sustainable employment and income as key to the reintegration process (UNMIL, 2014), the international community missed important elements in the DDRR process, with long-term implications.

Impact of Incomplete DDRR on Stability and Peace in Liberia

The Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration process left much to be desired in Liberia. While DDRR is only a small part of a country's post-conflict recovery

process, the failures of Liberia's DDRR process have long-term implications for society at large because one cannot easily isolate the experiences of ex-combatants from those of the rest of the population. Today, Liberia faces serious security, economic and societal challenges that threaten peace and stability in the country. These are linked, at least partly, to the international communities' engagement in Liberia and an incomplete DDRR process.

The disarmament and demobilisation of combatants and the presence of UNMIL certainly contributed to a decrease in violence and enhanced physical security after Liberia's civil wars. However, an increase in violence and ever more organised criminal activities in the country today, can be linked partly to the limited recovery of weapons and failures to disband combatant networks.

Crime – sexual harassment, exploitation, rape, including of minors, abductions and forceful initiations into secret societies, ritualistic killings, murder, armed robbery, burglary, illicit mining, money laundering, mobile money theft, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the deliberate violation of the rule of law, the disparate application of justice – has risen to levels that many Liberians perceive to be higher than during the years of war. Such comparison is difficult to ascertain, as the vast documentation describes the Liberian wars as some of the most brutal. Yet, it highlights that crime and violence are widespread.

Today, state security providers are particularly concerned that crime is becoming increasingly organised (private conversations with key security actors). According to the Global Organized Crime Index (2021), more established criminal networks or gangs mostly operate in urban areas where they engage in armed robbery and the distribution of drugs, often building on relationships developed during Liberia's civil wars. Liberia is a big producer and consumer of cannabis, which is traded with neighbouring countries. The country is also an important transit route for cocaine and heroin from Latin American and Asian countries. Many former fighters good hooked during the war and are self-medicating through drugs in order to deal with their experiences and other marginalised young people have joined their ranks (they are commonly referred to as Zogos). This is exploited by drug traffickers, who are increasing their sphere of influence. Many families are concerned by drug dealers hanging around schools and universities, preying on the youth of the country.

The increase and growing organisation of crime point to a close nexus between criminal networks and state security forces. Such links already existed in the inter-war period, when state security actors provided the cover for youth to deal in marijuana and other drugs, stolen petrol and petty thievery in Monrovia at night during curfews (Utas, 2005: 142–43). They persisted after the end of the wars. Ex-combatants and serving personnel of police and military forces worked as couriers in the drug trade (Vorrath, 2014: 21, 24-25). Failures in the demobilisation of former combatants as well as limited rigour in security sector reforms (SSR) account for the persistence of this nexus between criminal state security and non-state actors today, in addition to the dire economic situation in the country (on SSR see e.g. Gerdes and Sayndee 2021).

Most education and skills training reintegration projects aimed at making ex-combatants employable, without providing the necessary employment opportunities or a broader economic strategy. Erstwhile one of the most developed and fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa, the 1980 coup d'état and 14 years of war had led to brain drain and the transfer of capital abroad and destroyed much of Liberia's infrastructure and economy. After the wars, efforts were made to strengthen the agricultural sector, and there was also an increase in rubber and

timber exports that contributed to growth rates (see also Gerdes 2013, 235–48). Yet, today, many of the most vulnerable people in society are worse off. From 2006 until 2021, the proportion of undernourished people has increased from 35.3 percent to 38.9 percent (Global Hunger Index 2021). Widespread hunger increases the propensity for petty crime and facilitates exploitation for criminal or political purposes. Many former combatants are preying on their communities, which is a key factor in the prolonged fragility of the country.

Liberian society is highly fragmented. This facilitates manipulation and pitting neighbour against neighbour or one group against another, as the Liberian civil wars demonstrated. Rehabilitation and reintegration projects have not adequately addressed this fragmentation. By singling out ex-combatants and not working sufficiently with communities to reintegrate former fighters into society, RR often further marginalised ex-combatants (see also Utas, 2003: 223–50; 2005). Thus, in line with Bøås and Hatløy (2008), we conclude that DDRR processes need to be revised to focus more directly on social cohesion and societal security. Today, short-term trainings for psychosocial counselling are mushrooming, with at least 33 organisations offering their services in this field (Private Conversation with Health Provider, August 2022). However, they are often short-term and implemented by personnel with limited training, thus repeating the mistakes of past projects.

Conclusion: Lessons Learnt

We end by highlighting some of the key lessons learnt from the DDRR process in Liberia, which of course benefits from retrospection. In this context, we acknowledge the work of 25 UN agencies in revising the UN's approach to DDR and completing the Integrated DDR Standards in 2019 (United Nations, n.d.).

We recognise that disarmament and demobilisation are emergency responses aimed at reducing violence and increasing physical security. They face resource constraints, are implemented with little time for planning which complicates cooperation among agencies, and involve limited local knowledge. Rehabilitation and reintegration, by contrast, need to be viewed as medium- to long-term responses that have time for planning and coordination in which short funding periods, however, limit medium- to long-term planning. This requires some rethinking based on lessons learnt during the Liberian DDRR process.

- **Include high-, medium- and low-level commanders of the fighting forces in the planning and implementation of the DD process, as they will be able to assemble and involve many of their fighters and manage their expectations:** The exclusion from key decisions in the DDRR process of commanders from the different fighting forces has meant that many fighters and weapons remained scattered throughout the country after the disarmament and demobilisation process because they were not reached by international efforts due to their limited knowledge of command structures and whereabouts of fighters and their focus on urban areas, especially Monrovia. As General John Hezekiah Bowen (1943-2010), Commander of the Armed Forces of Liberia, revealed to us at the time in a conversation aimed at bringing members of the warrying factions together: he could assemble all of his fighters within 72 hours if we guaranteed that other fighting factions would do the same. This suggests that involving the different command leaders in the process would have aided the DD process. It would have facilitated clear communication of the DD process and related benefits through existing

command structures, allowing international actors to avoid violent protests by disgruntled former fighters who waited to be integrated in the DDRR process.

- **Allocate the necessary time, qualified personnel and a well-thought through programme to the demobilisation process to disband combatant networks and facilitate former fighters' transition into civilian lives:** The absence of a proper demobilisation process has meant that many command structures and combatant networks stayed intact after the DD process. These could easily be used to set up private security companies, vigilante and community watch groups and to maintain and expand criminal networks. They often retain military discipline and organisational structures which give members a sense of direction and certainty, rendering these setups attractive to other marginalised people due to the uncertainties that are associated with the end of war. These groups threaten peace and stability through criminal activities, by extorting money from marketeers, community members and visitors in return for protection and because ex-combatants are more prone to using violence in pursuit of their interests due to being accustomed to using force over a 14-year war period. Demobilising ex-combatants' networks is thus paramount for creating physical security, reducing crime, including its organisational structures, and facilitating a transition to positive peace.
- **Prepare and involve community members in the DD phase in order to support the demobilisation and reintegration of former fighters:** Demobilisation is a medium-term process that cannot be completed in a controlled environment like a cantonment site within a matter of days, for it requires changing mindsets and altering the social circles of ex-combatants. As many former fighters are stigmatised and rejected by their families and society more broadly and in the absence of required functioning institutions, there is a need to work with communities to create a supportive environment that helps ex-combatants transition to civilian life. By exclusively focusing efforts on former fighters, DDRR programmes contribute to jealousy, incomprehension and anger by community members affected by violence and destruction perpetrated by ex-combatants, thereby widening the gap between ex-combatants and the communities in which they are expected to reintegrate. This is detrimental to social cohesion and can facilitate the resurgence of conflicts and their escalation into violence.
- **Offer socio-psychological support (rehabilitation) to former fighters and the communities in which they are expected to reintegrate:** Violence and destruction during long-term wars affect all members of society albeit in different ways, creating a collective trauma that can be transmitted from one generation to another. While many people learn to live with traumatic experiences, others develop longer-term symptoms that may warrant individual attention. In all cases, the social environment is a key contributing factor to peoples' ability to deal with their experiences. Thus, creating a safe space in which victims and perpetrators can live side by side and working towards social cohesion is key to a successful RR process.
- **Widen educational and employment opportunities (reintegration) to include those affected by former fighters' activities to facilitate social cohesion, reconciliation and development:** Ex- and non-combatants both missed out on education and skills training programmes over 14 years of war. Many former fighters had little motivation to participate in RR programmes, selling their spaces (and tools) to non-combatants. This highlights that a lot more preparatory work (demobilisation & rehabilitation) needs to happen before ex-

combatants are ready to benefit from educational and skill training programmes. Bringing ex- and non-combatants together in education and work settings, is likely to enhance the learning of both groups as well as understanding and social cohesion.

- **Link DDRR programmes with broader economic, educational, social and political strategies to facilitate long-term changes, development and positive peace.**

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[i] A survey conducted by the Liberian Government in 2019 concluded that 91 percent of those referred to as ‘Zogos’ are men (cited in Bondo 2021).

[ii] In the literature and common parlance, people between the ages of 18 and 35 are referred to as youth in Liberia. This terminology is used to describe people who occupy a low position in society, are unmarried, often poor, lack economic independence and emotional maturity – highlighting that the age-range can vary. By referring to young people as youth, they are not taken fully seriously by society even though they might see themselves as adults. Transitioning from youth to adulthood is complex, as traditional markers like membership in secret societies or becoming a warrior have changed due to urbanisation and increasing Western influence (Utas, 2005: 140 footnote 5, 141).

[iii] By using the term ‘Zogo’ as umbrella term for all those young people living in the streets, all are criminalised whether or not they engage in unlawful activities. In official parlance, people therefore often use the term disadvantaged or at-risk youth, which comes with its own challenges. Not all people who use drugs and live under precarious conditions are disadvantaged. Hence, by replacing the term ‘Zogo’ with disadvantaged youth the lines between criminals and others in the same age category becomes blurred.

[iv] See UNSC (1992) Res. 788 (articles 8 and 9), UNSC (1995) Res. 985 and UNSC (2001) Res. 1343. The arms embargo was partly lifted in UNSC resolution 1683 (2006).

[v] See UNSC (1993) Res. 866 (Articles 7 and 3b).

[vi] The term ‘post-war’ usually signifies the complete end of armed conflict and refers to a relatively fixed period. This definition is problematic in a context like Liberia, where the civil conflict can be deemed to have continued after the official end of the war, albeit by different means. We use the term to describe a transition period from war to peace.

[vii] On child combatants in Liberia see e.g. Achvarina and Reich (2006), Malan (2000), Utas (2011) and Verhey (2001).

[viii] The action plan was to be developed by UNMIL with the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC, established through the peace agreement to monitor the ceasefire), relevant international financial institutions and development organisations and donor states (UNSC 2003 Res. 1509, article 3f).

[ix] In 2002, the ICGL was set up comprising representatives from the UN, ECOWAS, the African Union, the World Bank, the United States, Ghana, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Sweden (African Union 2002).

[x]The demobilization of members of the former Armed Forces of Liberia was completed in December 2005 (UNMIL, 2006a: 6). It was closely linked to security sector reforms.

[xi] In its final report, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2009: 265 Article 11.5) identified the following groups as perpetrators: NPFL, LURD, Liberia Peace Council, Militia, ULIMO, MODEL, Armed Forces of Liberia, ULIMO-K, ULIMO-J, Anti-terrorist, ECOMOG, Vigilantes, Lofa Defense Force, Liberia National Police, Special Operation Unit, Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Special Anti-Terrorist Unit Special Security Unit, Special Security Service, Black Beret, National Security Agency, National Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Investigation Division, and Kamajors.

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