



DDR+

Adapting Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Processes to New Conflict Realities

CHANGING NATURE OF ARMED CONFLICT

In recent years, a combination of factors such as – slow economic development, political instability and outbreak of a pandemic – have fomented the spread of violence in fragile states. This process has been associated with a clear transformation of conflict dynamics and its increasing complexity. Current intra-state conflicts are often characterized by numerous non-state armed groups with extremely diverse objectives, operational capacities and fluid affiliations.

The structures and modus operandi of armed actors have significantly changed throughout time. On one hand, gangs and local actors have managed to gradually consolidate military capacities, territorial control and transnational links. On the other hand, the fragmentation of armed actors into various factions has intensified intercommunal violence. In addition, the commission of human rights violations by state actors and the lack of basic services have undermined the legitimacy of state actors. In such contexts, reaching an all-inclusive, comprehensive peace agreement is often untenable. While a partial peace settlement is possible,

issues are exacerbated by limited national capacities, proliferation of weapons, pervasive illicit economy and diminishing international support. Moreover, ethnic grievances have been used to divide communities along economic, political and ideological goals and obtain local support for engaging in violence. Conflict-affected contexts have also experienced the establishment of numerous self-defense and militia groups, the surge of organized crime and the constant reconfiguration of armed groups and coalitions. Given the deterioration of security conditions across conflict settings, there is an increasing realization that military operations do not constitute a sustainable solution to conflict.



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The presence of extremist groups has created a series of new political, operational and programmatic challenges. The designation as a terrorist group has discouraged peace negotiations, even though national and international actors

may still – covertly or not - explore this option. In areas controlled by extremist groups, preventive and peacebuilding interventions have been targeted, especially if perceived as part of counterterrorism measures. Moreover, such groups have acted as spoilers and tried to undermine ongoing peace efforts. The widespread presence of extremist groups beyond national borders has brought light to the regional dimensions of current armed conflicts. Most importantly, the simultaneous presence of extremist groups and other armed actors has continuously overstretched national and international capacities, impeding the implementation of effective interventions. Despite military operations and numerous peacebuilding initiatives, the root causes of conflict often remain unaddressed, allowing groups to constantly regenerate and continue their attacks.

DDR AS AN INTEGRATED PROCESS

The implementation of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) activities is critical for mitigating the threat posed by non-state armed groups. Among other efforts, DDR contributes towards promoting security and stability and, therefore, is essential for the sustainability of peace efforts and the effective roll out of peacebuilding and development interventions. At the same time, as a multidimensional approach, the success of DDR ultimately depends on achieving progress in parallel processes. Understanding the interlinkage between DDR and other interventions (e.g. integration into security forces, power-

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sharing arrangements, accountability mechanisms, restoration of state authority and provision of basic services) allows explaining why DDR processes may be successfully implemented or suffer severe constraints.

Given the increasing complexity of armed conflicts, DDR has constantly evolved to address new security challenges. From its original focus on combatants, post-conflict scenarios and the fulfillment of certain pre-conditions, the 2nd Generation DDR promoted a whole-of-society approach by integrating flexible, bottom-up community-based initiatives, commonly known as Community Violence Reduction (CVR). Most recently, the 3rd generation DDR has been promoted, aiming at dealing with a wider range of armed actors (e.g. gangs, militias and extremist groups) across the peace continuum from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping, to peacebuilding and development. In the absence of a peace agreement, DDR has served to support the voluntary disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants.

The lessons learned and best practices accumulated over 30 years have served as the foundation for the revision of the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS). In line with the sustaining peace approach,

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integrated DDR processes contribute to the entire peace continuum in both mission and non-mission settings. Under this new paradigm, DDR is not confined to post-conflict scenarios. In accordance with Security Council decisions and upon request of national authorities, DDR processes have been implemented during conflict escalation as well as ongoing conflict. This represents a more pragmatic and realistic approach in which, instead of waiting for the fulfillment of pre-conditions, DDR processes are implemented as a means to create conditions for political, security and peacebuilding efforts. Overall, there is a consensus that the costs of inaction are far too great and, therefore, early support on DDR is paramount.

Given the evolution of conflict dynamics, the adaptation of DDR has entailed moving away from linear, sequenced DDR programmed to become an integrated process comprised of multiple interventions, which can be implemented even in the absence of a peace settlement. This conceptual change allows DDR practitioner to deliver activities according to the needs on the ground – at different stages of conflict - and reinforces complementary among approaches. For instance, the provision of mediation support is essential for the inclusion of realistic and implementable

DDR provisions in peace agreements. The development of CVR initiatives prevents the recruitment of youth into armed actors and builds community resilience, thus increasing capacity to absorb former combatants and creating conditions for other peacebuilding initiatives. Under this premise, CVR projects can support, complement and even replace DDR programmes. Similarly, the development of weapons and ammunition (WAM) initiatives is essential for reducing the circulation of arms, particularly in intractable conflicts.

NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

Given the diversity of armed groups across conflict-affected contexts, integrated DDR processes must be designed and implemented based on realities on the ground. This implies that there is “no one size fits all” approach to DDR. Indeed, numerous variables can influence the scope and type of DDR activities. For instance, the type of armed groups, lack of national capacities, level of international support and existence of clear legal and institutional frameworks, all these aspects determine how DDR activities can or cannot be implemented. Even in countries with historical expertise in DDR and international presence, each



Participants of a CVR Project developed in Sud-Kivu (Democratic Republic of Congo)

DDR process has been unique given the fact that demands and expectations from the parties to the conflict vary significantly across time. Moreover, the deterioration of security conditions as well as increasing political and economic instability can have a direct impact over the implementation of DDR. Combined, these factors can either prevent the start of DDR processes or undermine the effective implementation of ongoing interventions.

For years, national authorities have spearheaded the implementation of DDR processes in conflict-affected contexts. In contrast to past practices, DDR is not anymore circumscribed by activities conducted by peacekeeping operations and/or agencies, funds and programmes. In various contexts, national authorities have been able to fully operationalize DDR activities either as part of a collective process (peace agreement) or individualized approaches (voluntarily disengagement). It is important to remember that States have the prerogative to define applicable measures, including potential sanctions to former members of armed groups, as well as establishing clear eligibility criteria for participating in the DDR process. Given

the presence of numerous groups, national authorities have implemented parallel interventions, targeting specific groups. For instance, while DDR programmes have been implemented to support peace agreements, DDR-related tools have served to support individual disengagement.

In the absence of technical expertise and adequate resources among national counterparts, international actors have still played key roles in advancing DDR processes. However, support is always conditional to the availability of predictable funding and political support. While the disarmament and demobilization, including reinsertion, have been historically implemented by peace operations through assessed budget, the long-term reintegration has solely relied on voluntary contributions and implementation by UN agencies, funds and programmes. The separation of responsibilities and funding mechanisms often leads to operational gaps and delays in the provision of critical reintegration support. This can undermine the sustainability of DDR as a whole. To address this problem, missions have provided reinsertion support and implemented Community Violence Reduction (CVR) projects as transitional measures. Despite the devise of

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innovative tools and arrangements, operational and programmatic requirements on DDR have always far surpassed the capacities of any single entity.

Acknowledging challenges doesn't mean holding off interventions and waiting for conditions to be ripe. In fact, the benefits of early engagement and the adoption of preventive measures far exceed the potential drawbacks. For instance, in the absence of a peace agreement, DDR can serve to prevent the recruitment of youth at-risk, reduce the circulation of weapons, and support individuals who voluntarily leave armed groups. Drawing from the expertise from DDR and CVR programmes, rehabilitation and reintegration support can be provided to disengaged combatants, including children and women, in accordance with domestic laws. Ultimately, national authorities are responsible for creating the legal and policy frameworks which allow the implementation of DDR process in various contexts. Promoting national ownership entails respecting local dynamics and understanding suitability of measures aimed at ending conflict in line with public interest.

It is important to stress that DDR does not constitute an accountability mechanism. Neither participation in a DDR process

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should be interpreted as granting “blank” amnesty to any individual. National DDR frameworks should be based on clear legal and policy parameters which define applicable measures for those eligible as well as their responsibility to remain part of a DDR process. Considering these assumptions, DDR should be implemented as part of a broader Transitional Justice framework, which promotes the complementarity between judicial and non-judicial measures according to national norms and the public interest. While DDR may improve security conditions and serve as a guarantee of non-repetition, it must be coordinated with justice systems and accountability mechanisms such as prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, institutional reform, or a combination thereof.

DDR should be considered as a dynamic process, through which interventions are constantly improved based on previous efforts. Often times, excessive attention is given to the planning phases, aiming at getting everything right from the beginning. However, conditions in the field are volatile, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Under this premise, greater emphasis should be given to flexibility and risk-prone efforts, which

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allow monitoring and adjusting interventions based on lessons learned and existing opportunities. This might imply modifying institutional architectures, establishing new strategic partnerships, exploring funding mechanisms and promoting interventions which are fit for purpose in any given context.

The success of DDR also depends on shifting perceptions towards former combatants. As part of a DDR process, individuals should be perceived as subjects of rights as well as duties. While voluntary demobilization – whether individual or collective – carries expectations of receiving certain benefits, participants must be aware of their responsibilities, which goes beyond refraining from violent acts. Given the investment required, the reintegration back into civilian life depends on the real commitment to the DDR process. This entails effectively engaging in a wide range of community-based activities from formal education to productive projects as well as reconciliation and reparations. Combined, these efforts address stigmatization and allow reconstruction of the social fabric.

Ending conflict often requires interventions and resources that surpass capacities within DDR processes. Given limited funding, it is important to manage expectations regarding the objectives and results from DDR. For instance, DDR should never be considered as part of military and counterterrorism operations. Neither should it be perceived as the silver bullet to address structural issues (e.g. youth unemployment, political marginalization). Ultimately, doing DDR better means developing interventions which are context-specific and conflict-sensitive, while pragmatically coping with political and operational challenges. Establishing strategic partnerships and effective coordination mechanisms among and between national and international counterparts allows promoting synergies and conferring sustainability to interventions.

[1] United Nations (2019). Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS). Preconditions: the signing of a negotiated ceasefire and/or peace agreement that provides the framework for DDR; trust in the peace process; willingness of the parties to the armed conflict to engage in DDR; and a minimum guarantee of security

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