

# Women in armed groups and fighting forces: lessons learned from gender-sensitive DDR programmes

By Elisa Tarnaala

## ■ Executive summary

Despite their involvement in strategic, material and logistical support and combat, women's roles as "soldiers" and "victims" are narrowly defined by post-conflict programmes. Most disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes are limited in the ways in which issues specific to female combatants are addressed. Gender-sensitive DDR programming must be linked into the entire peace process, from the peace negotiations through peacekeeping and subsequent peacebuilding activities. This process should include issues such as identifying women and setting the appropriate criteria for their entering DDR processes; understanding identity issues and obstacles facing women's post-conflict political participation; targeting women as larger units with their children and partners rather than merely as individuals; addressing female health and psychosocial needs; and sensitisation to the particular issues around the gender dimensions of violence and community acceptance. This report highlights lessons learned from gender and DDR processes and notes that with regard to territorial implementation, national DDR commissions should be encouraged to work closely with government entities in charge of gender and women's affairs, and – especially where governments are responsible for all or part of the DDR process – with women's peacebuilding networks that can serve as bridges in the transition to civilian life, and facilitate social, political and economic reintegration.

## Introduction

There is increasing awareness of the need to understand the roles that girls and women play around the world in conflict zones in general and fighting forces in particular. Throughout the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century women have been involved in both conventional and non-state armed groups in conflict zones in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua), Asia (Aceh, Myanmar, Nepal and Timor-Leste), and Africa (Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda), among others.

Females in armed groups and fighting forces typically perform non-combat tasks that are gender-stereotypical for women in their society, such as delivering messages; organising financial and intelligence work in communities; or preparing food, cooking, cleaning, and being porters in army camps. In many contexts women are used as "comfort women" or "wives" to provide sexual services, or are obliged to take on multiple roles simultaneously. Recently,

more emphasis has been placed on the fact that women have participated as fighters in most recorded armed conflicts.

Despite this involvement in strategic, material and logistical support and combat, the roles of "soldier" and "victim" are narrowly defined for women by post-conflict programmes. Most disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes are limited in the ways in which issues specific to female combatants are addressed. Even the titles given to many female soldiers, such as "females associated with the war", "dependants" or "camp followers" reveal the reluctance of reintegration agencies to identify women who participated in war as full members of armed groups.

However, a considerable number of normative guidelines on how to conduct a gender-sensitive DDR process that takes into account the different needs of women, men, boys and girls are already available, as well as theoretical studies on the gender dimensions of DDR processes. But

so far very few comparative studies or case studies exist that include gender-based analyses of the different DDR experiences of men and women who have been involved in military units.

Many accounts examining gender issues both in armed groups and during demobilisation and reintegration stress the physical and sexual vulnerability of females, particularly girls, in conflict zones. Recently, research has begun to specifically examine the issues of community and domestic violence facing girls and women in post-conflict situations. Gender-sensitive DDR programming must be integrated into the entire peace process, from the peace negotiations themselves to peacekeeping and subsequent peacebuilding activities. Such programming includes issues such as identifying women and establishing the criteria for their entering DDR processes; understanding identity issues and obstacles affecting women's post-conflict political participation; targeting women as being part of larger units comprising their children and partners (and sometimes parents) rather than merely as individuals; addressing female health and psychosocial needs; and sensitisation to the particular issues of discrimination/stigmatisation and the difficulties of community acceptance (Colekessian & Barr, 2010; De Watteville, 2002; Shekhawat, 2015).

While unqualified success stories do not exist, many processes can provide both positive and negative experiences from which to learn. This report highlights lessons learned from the inclusion of gender issues in DDR processes in terms of planning, capacity-building and implementation; identities and political participation; receiving communities; security and post-conflict violence; and psychosocial counselling, education and training.

## Planning, capacity-building and implementation

A review of the literature on gender and rehabilitation<sup>1</sup> emphasises the importance of involving women and gender experts early on in the peace process. This engagement should start by increasing the gender awareness of both male and female mediators before they begin their assignments. The inclusion of women in the peace process from the start of the peace negotiations, and the involvement of gender experts in the rehabilitation planning and implementation processes are essential to effective DDR programmes. Government institutions or departments with gender-related mandates should be included in the process and any related decision-making whenever possible.

In El Salvador during the 1990s, women were present at almost all the post-agreement negotiating tables, while six women and one man formed the Reinsertion Commission.

Perhaps as a consequence, female members of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front received one-third of land redistribution and reintegration packages either as combatants or collaborators (Luciak, 1999). In the South African transition, thanks to the strong presence of women in decision-making forums, including those dealing with defence reform, many women ex-combatants were appointed to the high-level Defence Secretariat, thus demonstrating the government's sincere commitment to integrating gender into South African defence policy (DCAF, 2009).

Many case studies reviewed for this report highlight the fact that gender experts often lack skills in and knowledge of DDR (and thus cannot efficiently support the drafting of DDR provisions in peace agreements), and that DDR specialists with military and security backgrounds often refuse to take gender issues seriously. The necessary guiding documents and roadmaps for institutional actors to design the DDR process from a gender perspective are key in the planning phase. The disaggregation of data by sex and gender is a starting point and can reveal essential information in all assessments. Furthermore, pre-programme assessments conducted by DDR programme specialists should include the socioeconomic profiling of programme participants and beneficiaries; evaluating the specific risk of exclusion and females' psychosocial needs; assessing participants' general skills and competencies; and understanding host communities' perceptions of returning ex-combatants.

Interviews with female ex-combatants in Liberia and Sierra Leone indicate that the main reasons for their low registration for DDR programmes related to lack of access to information; shame; and fear of stigmatisation, retaliation and social exclusion. The removal of their weapons by commanders as a symbolic and concrete exclusion from membership of the armed group was stated as a major reason not to register. Another factor that emerged through consultations with women ex-combatants was that women often shared guns when engaged in fighting. The fact that sometimes four or five women shared one gun became a challenge during the DDR process, when the handover of an individual gun was required for an individual to be considered eligible to participate in DDR programmes. Women who had escaped from armed groups and returned to their families also did not want to associate themselves again with these groups through the DDR programme. Similar shortcomings in the DDR programme in South Kivu in the DRC were identified in 2004. Women and girls associated with fighting forces had been both separated from their husbands and excluded from the benefits of the first two phases of DDR. The UN mission in the DRC, MONUC, later ensured that women and girls were included in the process. Despite these lessons, more recently the national DDR programme agreed in May 2015 in the

<sup>1</sup> Including Douglas et al. (2004); Farr (2007); UN DDRSC (2006); UN IAWG (2012a; 2012b); and UN INSTRAW (2010).

Central African Republic is also based on the “no weapon, no entry” criterion, so many female ex-combatants are at risk of being excluded.

In the implementation phase a focus on technical capacities should include cooperation with agencies (national and international) with experience and expertise in gender-related DDR issues. These actors can provide specialised attention to demobilised female combatants, develop gender expertise in transitional teams, and increase the capacities of local authorities. UN agencies, funds and programmes, such as the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and UN Department for Disarmament Affairs should be specifically consulted and included in planning processes, integrated task forces and training exercises (UN IAWG, 2012a). These agencies can provide DDR practitioners with the necessary knowledge, technical skills and tools, and can also help to respond to the gender dimensions of violence at any given stage in the DDR process.

An interesting case illustrating the coordination among various agencies is that of Burundi, where the UN played a leading role in a gender-sensitive DDR process and in conducting sensitisation training for the police and the army on gender issues. The After Action Review of the UN Integrated Office in Burundi reveals how, in designing phase II of the DDR process in 2009-10, the UN and its partners tried not to repeat the mistakes of the past, the main one of which was a non-collective approach to the sustainable socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants. Another important lesson was that defining the eligibility criteria for women to join the DDR process required a thorough understanding of the conflict. The process of reintegrating women associated with the former armed movement resulted in new categories being created that were not initially considered (such as very old women, mothers of combatants, etc.). “The process involving the women associated with the former armed movement is highly political and must be taken into account” (UN DPKO, 2010: 6).

Gender balance should be a priority among staff in assembly and cantonment sites. It is especially important that men see women in positions of authority in DDR processes. If women leaders (including field officers) are absent, men are unlikely to take seriously education efforts aimed at changing their attitudes and ideas about militarised, masculine power (Douglas et al., 2004). “There are too few trained women peacekeepers, civilian police and experts engaged in DDR processes. Donors should facilitate the establishment of a regionally balanced group of women and gender DDR experts” (Douglas et al., 2004: 6).

The experience of Liberia shows that women’s NGOs (national and local) who assisted the return to civilian life

of women combatants, supporters and dependants were crucial stakeholders in the peace process. They were considered to be participants in the process and their political roles were strengthened. In Liberia, however, one of the challenges during the DDR process was that not many women military observers were on hand to screen girl and women ex-combatants at cantonment sites.

It is important to provide information about the DDR programme and process to any subsidiary bodies or subcommittees that facilitate gender-oriented NGO inputs and investments in the peace process. If gender equality advocates and (women’s) civil society organisations are supported early in the process they can create a joint agenda and action plan for peacebuilding and reconstruction. This can be achieved, for example, by organising a national gender symposium in preparation for the donor conference. Women civil society leaders should participate in donor conferences and their priorities should be included in the respective outcome documents.

In the DRC the sensitisation process using radio, leaflets etc. included separate messages targeting women and children, together with specific messages on sexual violence developed by the Congolese Women Association. During pick-up and transportation to DDR transit camps, priority was given to women and children. On arrival there was separate accommodation for women and men, and DDR gender-related issues were included at various stages in the process. The DDR unit in Goma was provided with a gender focal point. Orientation trainings included a one-to-two-hour module on gender and reintegration presented by the gender unit. Much of the gender-sensitive work by the international community in the DRC was completed because of the lessons learned in previous processes (UN Women, 2013).

## **Identities, political participation and reintegration**

Women who entered armed groups and thus joined a militarised social-relational world as children or young adults – which is the experience of many females in armed conflict contexts – experience their entire socialisation in terms of the norms and values of that context. During demobilisation and reintegration they confront a world where the military constructs they have become accustomed to may no longer apply or be relevant. While their experience in an armed group may have been either empowering or oppressive or enslaving, it has transformed their identities and expectations in ways that conflict with the realities of the “outside world” and create challenges when that world is entered. Effective rehabilitation programming must acknowledge these redefined gender identities, because they have the potential to empower both ex-combatants and other women in their communities (Colekessian & Barr, 2010).

In many cases women and girls join armed groups as a way of escaping oppression and obtaining gender equality and a form of freedom. Returning to settings in which they no longer have the same equalities that they have struggled for can create tensions and lead to conflict. In Ethiopia, gender equality was seen as a central component of the political agenda of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front. Work – from cooking to combat – was shared equally between men and women, and sexual relations were disciplined, with non-consensual sex between men and women strictly forbidden (Veale, 2003). In terms of DDR, female ex-combatants refused to participate in anything that would be politically undermining of what they had fought or stood for. Similarly, during the national liberation struggle, women in Angola had worked as fighters, nurses and political activists. After liberation they held continual negotiations with the political leadership in order for women's issues to be considered by the government and other policymakers. In recognition of their efforts, the government made gender equality a constitutional provision (Vavra: 2005).

In both Ethiopia and Angola, it is possible to see the influence of demobilised women on the political context, and the impact of women's political and military participation on the political structures evolving in the post-conflict period. Although women felt frustrated personally, their ongoing resistance and questioning of the social and political system meant that society was "pushed" by them, as they were pushed by it. However, at the individual level the battle has been unequal, and women struggle economically and personally in their societies (see Veale, 2003).

Research shows that female combatants (weapons-carrying fighters) typically experience a greater degree of equality and higher status than other women associated with armed groups or fighting forces. Membership of the fighting forces thus ensures that female combatants gain more respect. Women who work in a range of support roles as wives or girlfriends of male combatants, or who are coerced into sexual relationships see fewer benefits, although for them membership of an armed group can still provide economic and social support, as well as some degree of physical protection. Women of a higher military rank or group standing may also experience greater equality in marriages or relationships with male combatants. For instance, female combatants in Liberia reported that the higher the military rank of a wife, the more equality she enjoyed in her marriage, while women who were not weapons-carrying fighters often experienced less equitable marriages. There were few women in high-ranking leadership positions, but they enjoyed more respect from all ranks, which may also explain the higher level of freedom within their marriages. A challenge was to create a sense of solidarity in the post-conflict period among these women.

In Ethiopia and Northern Ireland, considerable solidarity among women members of parliament (MPs) was found,

which kept the issues of women associated with armed movements and community tensions in the public eye. In Ethiopia, a woman MP posed the following question to the prime minister: "There were a large number of women in the liberation movement, but where are women in the army now? It appears they have been moved aside?" This indicated that ex-combatant women had been politically sidelined in the post-conflict context (Veale, 2003). In the case of Northern Ireland, women managed to secure a place in the peace process by forming the first women-dominated political party and winning some seats in the election. The Women's Coalition successfully built bridges between Catholics and Protestants and promoted reconciliation and the reintegration of political prisoners. It secured the inclusion of language on victims' rights in the peace agreement and argued that young people required special attention. Also, women acted as impartial delegates and facilitators that bridged the gaps between rival political parties through communication (Page et al., 2009). They emphasised integrated education, social inclusion and community development.

The environment in which DDR will occur should be assessed through a contextual analysis that addresses regional particularities; political, social and economic specifics; and cultural aspects. According to Kingma (2001), social reintegration is the process by which the ex-combatant and his/her family feel part of and are accepted by the community; political reintegration refers to the process by which the ex-combatant and his/her family become part of decision-making processes; and economic reintegration is the process by which the ex-combatant's household gains its livelihood. These processes are strongly intertwined and are successful only if governments take them seriously. In terms of territorial implementation, this is why national DDR commissions should be encouraged to work closely with government entities in charge of gender and women's affairs, and – especially where governments are responsible for all or part of the DDR process – with women's peacebuilding networks that can serve as bridges in the transition to civilian life and facilitate social, political and economic reintegration.

In Burundi, the contribution of women to the development of peace was encouraged to complement the multiple DDR processes in the Great Lakes region. This transnational strategy was designed to support local women's initiatives at the NGO, grassroots and government levels in order to develop a common platform for peace in the subregion. Women activists from different ethnic, social and political backgrounds engaged in peacebuilding focused on training and capacity-building, institutional development, supporting peace initiatives, research and networking, and advocacy. The programme encouraged and enabled dialogue and reconciliation among women from different ethnic and political groups; focused political attention and policymaking particularly on women's human rights; and strengthened the capacity of women to participate at all levels of decision-making and the peace negotiations. Finally, it

initiated action research on the practical experiences of women and peacebuilding processes, and raised regional policymakers' awareness of these issues (Vavra, 2005).

## Receiving communities

Without community input and perceived benefits, ex-combatants – especially women – may encounter threats to their security and lack of acceptance into the community. In monitoring such perceptions, it is imperative that a rehabilitation programme should identify community responses to returning combatants, with special regard to women and girls.

Often, female ex-combatants return to communities where high levels of stigma are to be found because of their involvement in an armed group. The highly masculinised institution of armed combat may facilitate the misconception of female combatants as either aggressive or highly sexual, or both. In this regard, existing local women's organisations and networks can act as mediators between the community and the rehabilitation programmers and ex-combatants. In Nepal, among the 136 female combatants interviewed by Saferworld, 80% feared rejection by their families and communities because of their changed gender role and community perceptions of Maoist female combatants as promiscuous and aggressive because of their role in the People's Liberation Army (Colekessian, 2009). In the Philippines, support groups formed by women in reintegration communities provided important bridges between civilians and ex-combatants. In cases such as Liberia or Sierra Leone, where fewer such groups existed, many female ex-combatants opted to relocate to different communities or urban centres rather than return to their own communities, in which they encountered stigma (Barth, 2003; Basini, 2013; MacKenzie, 2009).

On the other hand, disengagement from a radical political community can be very stressful, especially when it involves settling in local communities in which others, such as mothers and other elderly female relatives who act as moral gatekeepers, remain faithful to the "old feudal and gender-biased order". While the traditional moral order and hierarchical discriminatory systems were undermined in Nepal, change was painfully slow and piecemeal for the young women and men who, having dedicated most of their lives to militant struggle, considered themselves to be the vanguard of "a New Nepal". Neither the Maoist leadership nor the international agencies launched suitable life-skill programmes aimed at assisting radicalised militant youths to find a balance between confrontational revolutionary and reconciliatory attitudes. Such attitudinal changes and negotiation skills, if positively managed, could play very constructively into ongoing social, psychosocial and political reintegration processes (IRIN, 2010; Pathak & Upreti, 2010). In order to reach both female and male ex-combatants and contribute to the equality of the process, these skill sets should be designed and presented in a gender-sensitive way.

In Sierra Leone, local community efforts and informal networks and organisations – primarily led by women – provided critical support for former combatants (Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). In Mozambique, the Association of Demobilised Soldiers (AMODEG) suggested a civic education radio programme to sensitise people and increase public awareness of the need to reduce violence. Families with members who were demobilised soldiers could send in their questions and submit their problems. Questions were answered in a way that meant that the programme provided an excellent forum for discussion (Nakamura, 2004; Vavra, 2005).

Successful DDR programmes can develop capacities to manage disputes non-violently, and strengthen ties locally among ex-combatants, communities and the authorities. In general, strengthening ties between ex-combatants and communities, and building social cohesion through community-based projects identified by both men and women have proved effective in many contexts. Despite this knowledge of the importance of focusing on the regional context at the communal and neighbourhood levels, participation in local politics and the capacity to influence local economic power structures remain the weakest link. It can be easier for women to participate in national politics than to be successful in local politics. Employers have hesitated to employ ex-combatants – and female ex-combatants in particular.

In 1994 in Mozambique, the veterans' organisation, AMODEG, formed a women's branch in response to the fact that only men's issues were being addressed, and started to lobby for equal rights for female ex-combatants. With relative success, it focused on issues such as women's entitlement to resettlement allowances; the provision of proper clothing for women; psychological support for both women and men; specific economic reintegration courses for women; and the idea that former combatants should be considered as a heterogeneous group that included men, women, children and disabled combatants. These programmes sensitised the public to gender issues, coordinated with local women's organisations, and started to ensure that working conditions were gender favourable (childcare facilities were provided, and health services and food supplies were made available) (Nakamura, 2004; Vavra, 2005).

Many existing evaluations agree that childcare provisions should be made available to ensure that female ex-combatants who are mothers and child carers are able to participate in community activities and attend training programmes. Benefits such as childcare facilities, a family allowance (especially for single, financially unsupported mothers) and reproductive health provisions are integral to women's safety and help to avoid cases of demobilised combatants having to resort to crime or prostitution to make their living. Such programmes, however, must be extended to other community members in order to prevent resentment.

## Reinforcing security and preventing post-conflict violence

DDR programmes should help to create an enabling environment for political and peace processes by dealing with the security problem that arises when ex-combatants are trying to adjust to normal life during the vital transition period.

A mediation and facilitation strategy to support DDR implementation, with emphasis on local capacities for conflict resolution and an understanding of the issue of gender-based violence (GBV), should be in place before the programmes start and before problems arise. Partnerships with women's organisations, particularly those focusing on violence prevention and peacebuilding issues, have been found to be successful in enabling women to have a greater say in DDR programming. Women's potential influence – not only as wives, partners and mothers of ex-combatants, but also as community members – in preventing violence is often neglected and under-utilised.

Local mechanisms for security (linked to national monitoring), justice, governance and peacebuilding must be emphasised, because the final success of DDR processes is measured at the regional and local levels. At the community level, DDR programmes can develop capacities to manage disputes non-violently and improve safety and security, such as by implementing gun control laws, gun hand-in amnesties and gun buy-back initiatives. These can include measures to strengthen local governance, peacebuilding, security and justice institutions; address small arms and light weapons supply and demand; and improve the community environment. Linking DDR with security, police, justice and public sector reform initiatives is critical to developing a coherent approach at the national and local levels (UN IAWG, 2012a).

In Angola, OMA (the women's wing of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), established in 1962) introduced support centres that provided legal advice for men and women, and has fought for women's legal status and economic rights to be incorporated in mainstream policies. In the case of Guatemala, women were largely excluded from the peace and DDR processes, but civil society organisations, including organisations formed by female combatants and indigenous Maya women, developed as important agents in fighting impunity and demanding security and an end to GBV.

Unlike its concern for child soldiers, it has been observed that the international community has been reluctant to engage on the issues of GBV and the integration of women ex-combatants into security forces and civilian life. Some post-conflict countries, however, are exceptions to this practice.

In South Africa, women have made significant contributions to defence reform. Women parliamentarians formed a subcommittee and initiated a defence review consultation process with women's organisations from the grassroots to the national level on the issues of land seized for military use and sexual harassment by military personnel. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has developed policies to increase the levels of women's recruitment, promote women to all levels and in every structure, provide joint and equal training for both men and women, provide gender education and training, standardise shoulder insignia, eliminate pregnancy as grounds for dismissal and allow promotions for women on maternity leave. The Defence Act (2002) classifies sexual harassment and discrimination as criminal offences. The various defence reform initiatives resulted in the appointment of a woman to the post of deputy defence minister from 1999 to 2004 (DCAF, 2009; Hendricks, 2008).

The South African Ministry of Defence has created a number of mechanisms for gender integration, including the establishment of a gender focal point in the Equal Opportunities Directorate, a Gender Forum to implement gender policies, a hotline to report cases of sexual harassment and GBV, and gender sensitisation programmes to raise awareness and understanding of gender policies. As a result of these policies and mechanisms, women – including ex-combatants – comprise 22.8% of the SANDF, of whom 11.6% were in top management structures in March 2006 (DCAF, 2009; Hendricks, 2008).

High levels of violence often persist in post-conflict settings, and GBV, criminal and gang activities, and self-directed violence through alcohol and substance abuse are especially common, on occasion reaching higher levels than in wartime. In some instances deaths due to armed violence in post-conflict settings even exceed levels of violence in countries at war.<sup>2</sup> Given the well-established links between post-traumatic stress disorder and intimate partner violence, DDR programmes should explore ways to support ex-combatants and their families in order to prevent domestic violence (Saferworld, 2014). In a post-conflict situation, violence by men against women and women against children increases. An initial investment by UN entities and national counterparts in identifying appropriate men's groups and forums, and developing their capacity to engage on issues of GBV may be required.

## Psychosocial counselling, education and training

The conditions of war leave deep scars on both women's and men's psyches. Although ways to cope with trauma caused by separation from loved ones, extreme violence, sexual abuse and starvation may be more individual- than gender-based, certain issues are highly gender specific.

<sup>2</sup> Higher levels of rape and intimate partner violence have been reported in many post-conflict contexts, including Afghanistan, Burundi, the DRC, Guatemala, Liberia, Nicaragua, Peru and the former Yugoslavia (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008: 49-57).

For example, leaving children born to mothers who are members of armed groups to be raised by others has deeply traumatic consequences for many women combatants. The importance of gender-specific psychosocial counselling has been recognised in the aftermath of many conflicts. Vocational counselling and training provide an entry point for addressing the social and psychological needs of ex-combatants, as well as their economic needs, including the introduction of gender norms in the workplace. Experience has shown that programmes that provide counselling and develop life skills together with vocational skills are particularly effective

Psychosocial support was offered in Nepal at each of the career centres by female counsellors drawn from national child-focused NGOs, who were trained and contracted by UNICEF to enable women (and men) to confront conflict trauma such as sexual and gender-based violence. On discharge, ex-combatants were also provided with the option of transitional housing outside cantonments before joining communities, as a way of confronting psychosocial issues. While combatants first expressed opposition to psychosocial support because they perceived it as a form of indoctrination, its availability was vital to address post-conflict traumas (Goswami 2015; Toda 2010).

In Liberia, it was found that ex-combatants, their partners and dependants, as well as receiving families and communities, should be sensitised to the difficulties of readjustment to civilian life experienced by people associated with armed groups. As a way of acknowledging traumatic events, the Truth Commission found that messages of reconciliation should also address the plight of women and girls who suffered abuse when they were members of armed groups or forces (Douglas et al., 2004; Basini, 2013).

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee reports that in Colombia, many male and female DDR participants had been socialised to violence before joining illegal armed groups. They were already familiar with or had experienced societal problems such as sexual and gender-based violence, the status gained through bearing arms and carrying out illegal activities, prostitution, and social exclusion. In response, the Colombian reintegration programme developed a psychosocial support component that aimed to “develop, strengthen and re-orient the competencies of the DDR participant and his/her family”. Reports from psychosocial professionals indicated that gender activities in particular were appreciated by DDR participants. Additionally, female dependants reported that they valued the home visits made by psychosocial professionals, which were effective in identifying family dysfunctions (IAWG, 2012b).

In Liberia, ad-hoc group counselling was provided to women in cantonment sites, but funding for psychosocial support only amounted to 3% of the budget and was not sustained during the reintegration phase (Basini, 2013). OMA (the MPLA’s women’s wing in Angola) established

support centres that provided legal advice for men and women, and fought for women’s legal status and economic rights to be incorporated into mainstream policies. In Sudan, a research institution focusing on women offers training courses on conflict resolution and carries out research on the role of women in resolving conflicts, particularly in terms of their traditional conflict resolution strategies.

In Nepal, to address the issue of minors in cantonment camps, a UN working team of 70 individuals from UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Mission in Nepal was mobilised to manage technical discharge, protection- and gender-related issues, UN monitoring, logistics, coordination, and communications. The approach employed the good practice of consulting with beneficiaries. As a package, the programme integrated a gender approach, psychosocial support, and real-time dynamic monitoring and evaluation. The rehabilitation programme allowed demobilised personnel to choose from among four training/education packages that provided: (1) formal educational support, (2) financing for a micro-enterprise, (3) vocational skills training, and (4) training and formal education for jobs in the health sector (Colekessian, 2009).

Market surveys, including of the local economy’s absorption capacity and the identification of job opportunities, are essential for appropriate education and training programmes. The stigmatisation of typically male or female jobs should be avoided. In Nepal, the Maoist leadership refused to include agricultural support as an educational option, viewing it as low-status labour in the fields. Although a key component of effective (gender-sensitive) rehabilitation might have been missed in this case, this negative attitude to such labour applied to both men and women. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF and development agencies worked with local groups to reach former combatants excluded from national programmes. UNICEF created a model programme to provide resources to schools that accept former child combatants. A number of programmes combined vocational training with basic literacy and numeracy skills. Non-traditional trades such as welding, carpentry and house building are among those taught to women. Participants stated that this kind of training, together with wider education, is critical in facilitating their adjustment to civilian life.

Training on gender-sensitive DDR processes and programmatic approaches should be provided to both DDR managers and gender focal points in order to ensure that a sufficient number of qualified specialists are available. Educating women and girls and including them prominently in disarmament activities can strengthen their profile and leadership roles in the public sphere.

## Recommendations

Recommendations for linking DDR and gender to the wider peace process in Colombia include the following:

- Develop a mediation and facilitation strategy as early as possible – ideally before the programmes start and problems arise – to support DDR implementation; this strategy should emphasise local capacity for conflict resolution and an understanding of GBV issues.
  - Continue mediation throughout the reinsertion process: listen to the views of demobilised ex-combatants, local authorities and communities on threats of violence linked to vengeance, rearmament, or the political participation of women.
  - Develop regionalisation strategies that take local contexts and conflict dynamics and how these impact women into account; for example, patterns of violence in drug production zones are different from those in transit zones.
  - Differentiate the needs of rural and urban areas in gender programming, as well as in terms of security risks from the activities of criminal groups and armed gangs.
  - Educate the public and the media through strategic communications on DDR and gender.
  - Train local authorities, including decision-makers in city councils and local administrations, to understand the DDR process from a gender perspective.
  - Utilise previous and existing domestic academic (gender studies, Commission of Historical Memory), technical (the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation and the Colombian Agency for Reintegration), governmental (Office of the Presidency for Equality), and civil society (women's rights NGOs) knowledge and combine it with international expertise, and adapt earlier experiences of DDR programmes for the demobilisation of the paramilitaries and guerilla groups.
  - Link women's new expertise in disarmament to the promotion of their broader political participation.
- General recommendations for linking gender to DDR programming:
- Ensure adequate gender expertise in assessment teams by including international and national gender experts.
  - Define carefully the criteria for women to enter DDR programmes: who is eligible is highly political, and not only armed combatants should qualify, but also militias, logistical support personnel, etc.
  - Encourage DDR experts to work together with gender specialists.
  - Develop strategic operational guidelines that address gender-specific needs from the start of DDR programmes, including the monitoring of progress.
  - Train statement takers and information gatherers on gender concepts and gender-specific methodology.
  - Involve international, national, and local experts and practitioners working on gender equality and women's empowerment by sharing key information with them, and encourage validation sessions with stakeholders.
  - Encourage all partners, donors, and other stakeholders to dedicate human and economic resources (as well as political leverage) to achieving gender inclusivity in all phases of DDR.
  - Assist gender equality advocates and (women's) civil society organisations to create a joint agenda and action plan for DDR and reconciliation.
  - Do not leave the specifics of gender DDR programming exclusively to international NGOs. Gender mainstreaming by external actors may result in key state actors not taking responsibility for including gender-related issues in DDR programming.

## References

Barth, E. F. 2003. *Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa*. Oslo: PRIO. <<http://www.prio.no/Research-and-Publications/Publication/?oid=54806>>

Basini, H. S. A. 2013. "Gender mainstreaming unraveled: the case of DDR in Liberia." *International Interactions*, 39(4): 535-57.

Colekessian, A. 2009. "Reintegrating gender: a gendered analysis of the Nepali rehabilitation process." Gender, Peace and Security Series Working Paper. New York: UN INSTRAW.

Colekessian, A. & C. Barr. 2010. *Reintegrating Female Ex-combatants: Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Women and Girls*. Gender, Peace and Security Virtual Discussion Final Report (Dominican Republic). New York: UN INSTRAW. <[http://www.un-instraw.org/media/documents/GPS/GDDR\\_VD\\_Final\\_Summary2.pdf](http://www.un-instraw.org/media/documents/GPS/GDDR_VD_Final_Summary2.pdf)>

DCAF (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces). 2009. *Integration of Gender into Defence Policies in South Africa: Gender and Security Sector Reform Training Resource Package*. Geneva: DCAF.

De Watteville, N. 2002. "Addressing gender issues in demobilization and reintegration programs." Africa Region

Working Paper Series, Africa Region. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Douglas, S. et al. 2004. *Getting It Right, Doing It Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*. New York: UNIFEM. <[http://www.poa-iss.org/CASAUpload/Members/Documents/15@Getting\\_it\\_Right\\_Doing\\_it\\_Right.pdf](http://www.poa-iss.org/CASAUpload/Members/Documents/15@Getting_it_Right_Doing_it_Right.pdf)>

Farr, V. A. 2007. *Gender-aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): A Checklist*. New York: UNIFEM. <<http://www.poa-iss.org/CASAUpload/Members/Documents/15@UNIFEM-Documents%20-%20A%20Checklist.pdf>>

Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2008. *Global Burden of Armed Violence*. Geneva: Geneva Declaration Secretariat.

Goswami, R. 2015. "UNSCR 1325 and female ex-combatants: case study of the Maoist women of Nepal." May.

Hendricks, C. 2008. *Expert Meeting on the Future of DDR Programming in Africa: Links with SSR and Peacebuilding*. Workshop Report. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

IRIN. 2010. "Nepal: reintegration challenges for Maoist female ex-combatants." April 14th. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=88806>>

Kingma, K. 2001. *Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-combatants in Post-war and Transition Countries*. Eschborn: GTZ. <<http://www.bicc.de/index.php/gtz-study-dd-r>>

Luciak, A. I. 1999. "Gender equality in the Salvadoran transition." *Latin American Perspectives*, 26(2): 108-28.

MacKenzie, M. 2009. "Securitization and desecuritization: female soldiers and the reconstruction of women in post-conflict Sierra Leone." *Security Studies*, 18(2): 241-61.

Mazurana, D. & K. Carlson. 2004. *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Policy Commission for the Women Waging Peace Program of Hunt Alternatives Fund. <<http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/SierraLeoneFullCaseStudy.pdf>>

Nakamura, F. 2004. *Gender and Armed Conflict in Africa: Challenges to Gender Roles, Relations and Identities in the Case of Mozambique*. Monterey: Monterey Institute of International Studies, Security and Development. <[http://sand.miis.edu/research/student\\_research/2004%20Student%20Work/04Nakamura\\_Gender&Armed\\_Conflict.pdf](http://sand.miis.edu/research/student_research/2004%20Student%20Work/04Nakamura_Gender&Armed_Conflict.pdf)>

Page, M., T. Whitman & C. Anderson. 2009. *Strategies for Policymakers: Bringing Women into Peace Negotiations*. Washington, DC: Institute for Inclusive Security.

Pathak, B. & D. Uprety. 2010. *Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration and Security Sector Reform in Nepal: A*

*Preliminary Sociological Observation*. Kathmandu: CS Center. <[http://www.cscenter.org.np/uploads/doc/100524045308\\_Situation%20update%2090%20SSR-DDR.pdf](http://www.cscenter.org.np/uploads/doc/100524045308_Situation%20update%2090%20SSR-DDR.pdf)>

Saferworld. 2014. *Masculinities, Conflict and Peacebuilding: Perspectives on Men through a Gender Lens*. London: Saferworld.

Shekhawat, S., ed. 2015. *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace: Challenging Gender in Violence and Post-conflict Reintegration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Toda, J. 2010. "Girls on the front lines: perspectives from Nepal." *OPSCEN Take*. Special edition on gender and emergencies, April/May.

UN DDRSC (United Nations Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Resource Centre). 2006. *Women, Gender and DDR: An Operational Guide to Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*. New York: UNDDRSC. <<http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/05>>

UN DPKO (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations). 2010. *After Action Review: Disengagement of Men and Women Associated with the Ex-armed Movement in Burundi. An Innovative Approach beyond DDR*. New York: UN DPKO. February.

UN IAWG (United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration). 2012a. *Blame It on the War? The Gender Dimensions of Violence in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Report and Recommendations for Action*. New York: UN IAWG.

UN IAWG. 2012b. *How to Guide: Gender-responsive Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*. New York: UN IAWG.

UN INSTRAW (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women). 2010. *New Virtual Dialogue on Gender and DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration)*. <<http://www.peacewomen.org/content/new-virtual-dialogue-gender-and-ddr-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>>

UN WOMEN (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women). 2013. *Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in United Nations Peacekeeping Activities (MONUC/MONUSCO) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. New York: UN WOMEN.

Vavra, J. 2005. *Gender and Conflict in Africa: Best Practices*. Washington, DC: USAID. August.

Veale, A. 2003. "Ethiopian female ex-combatants: recruitment, demobilization and reintegration." In Institute for Security Studies. *Child Soldier to Ex-fighter: Female Fighters, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Ethiopia*. ISS Monograph no. 85. Pretoria: ISS. April.

## ■ THE AUTHOR

**Elisa Tarnaala** is an adviser at CMI, the Martti Ahtisaari Centre. Her current work focuses on peace and transitional processes in West and Central Africa, as well as Colombia in South America. She is a social historian who holds a PhD in political science and history from the New School for Social Research, New York.

### **Disclaimer**

The content of this publication is presented as is. The stated points of view are those of the author and do not reflect those of the organisation for which she works or NOREF. NOREF does not give any warranties, either expressed or implied, concerning the content.



- **The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre**
- **Norsk ressurscenter for fredsbygging**

*The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) is a resource centre integrating knowledge and experience to strengthen peacebuilding policy and practice. Established in 2008, it collaborates and promotes collaboration with a wide network of researchers, policymakers and practitioners in Norway and abroad.*

Read NOREF's publications on [www.peacebuilding.no](http://www.peacebuilding.no) and sign up for notifications.

Connect with NOREF on Facebook or @PeacebuildingNO on Twitter

Email: [info@peacebuilding.no](mailto:info@peacebuilding.no) - Phone: +47 22 08 79 32