



LECTURE SERIES ON AFRICAN SECURITY

2008:7

DDR of Youth in Africa Theory, Standards and Practice

Irma Specht
Transition International

Introduction: DDR processes

The reason that we have Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes in almost every post-conflict country in the world is relatively simple to explain. During conflict, armies, rebel movements, and militia groups all try to achieve maximum strength by recruiting as many combatants as possible. This recruitment is carried out in various ways, such as by force, through campaigning for the good cause, exaggerating ethnic and religious differences, creating hatred, providing food, clothing and protection to those in need, etc. When the conflict is over and a settlement has been achieved to which the different parties agree, there is no longer a need for such large numbers of combatants, nor are the means available to maintain these large forces.

While DDR is only one element of peace-building, it is also one of the most crucial. First of all, it is crucial to disarm fighting forces in order to improve on security. Secondly, it is important to clearly send the message to combatants that they are no longer needed in this function and should become civilians again; in other words, demobilisation. Finally, the most challenging

The *Lecture Series on African Security* is a joint collaboration between the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) and the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI). The first round of lectures was conducted in 2008. The lectures revolve around core themes in African security studies and case studies from contemporary Africa, and they are presented by highly renowned international and national experts on Africa. While the primary audience is the analysts and researchers at FOI and NAI, a select number of participants are also invited from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), the Ministries for Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Swedish Rescue Services Agency (MSB), the Swedish Armed Forces (SwAF), the National Defence College (FHS), and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA).

part of DDR is to ensure that this group of people trained in combat, and who relied on combat as their source of livelihood, will find an alternative civilian occupation, home and network.

“The DDR of ex-combatants is considered a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian and socio-economic dimensions. The process aims at addressing the post-conflict security challenges that arise from ex-combatants being left without livelihoods and support networks, other than their former comrades, during the critical transition period from conflict to peace and development. DDR seeks to support the ex-combatants’ socio-economic reintegration so they become stakeholders in peace. While much of the DDR programme is focused on ex-combatants, the main beneficiaries of interventions supporting DDR should ultimately be the wider community.”¹

As highlighted by the definition above, the reintegration of ex-combatants cannot be achieved in isolation from the communities in which they will live. These communities might be their former villages or cities, new places in which they decide to settle, or possibly those communities where they have always lived, even during conflict. It is important to stress that the communities have generally also been heavily affected by the conflict and are not stable entities with healthy social structures and cohesion. It is in these conflict dynamics, and in politically sensitive periods of fragile peace, that DDR programmes are being implemented. As we will see, the impact is often more limited than we desire, or is sometimes even negative, but DDR is still a peace-building element we cannot do without.

Youth in conflict

The reality of today’s DDR processes is that in most countries, the majority of the combatants fall into the age category of youth.² This age group has specific characteristics in terms of needs, ambitions, agency, but also in the way they are affected by the conflict in the first place.

“Armed conflicts and other types of crises aggravate youth’s vulnerability. Young people are often the first to be laid off and the most unlikely to find work. They may become idle and frustrated and resort to subsistence work in the informal economy. Furthermore, crises lead to a breakdown of social support systems and guidance. Education and training programmes are sometimes disrupted for long periods. Moreover, family and community networks may have weakened. The accumulation of these factors risks pushing young people into the vicious

¹ IAWG (The Interagency Working Group), Operational Guide to the IDDRS (UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards), 2.10, 2006

² The UN defines youth as those between 15 and 24 years of age. However, this definition is linked to socio-cultural and economic factors that vary across countries. Social, economic and cultural systems define the age limits and roles and responsibilities of children, youth and adults. Conflicts and violence often force youth to assume adult roles such as being parents, breadwinners, or fighters.

circle of poverty and social exclusion and makes them vulnerable for recruitment into armed forces and gangs.

Yet youth frequently emerge as important social actors in crises. They are among the most visible members of society, often at the forefront of social movements, by denouncing injustices and demanding changes, they can be key representatives of society in crisis response. Also, they are potentially the strongest workforce. At the same time, if left unattended, they can become more radical and disruptive.”³

This double potential of youth should be the basis of DDR planning, reducing the risk of youth turning or returning to violence by mobilising and strengthening their positive potential and agency. The question is whether this is sufficiently done in current practice.

DDR of Youth

In DDR processes, there are normally separate programmes for adults and for children. Youth are part of both, as older children and younger adults. Youth fall into categories of both children and adults. The focus on adolescents must be stressed.

This age group accounts for the vast majority of adult combatants as well as for the majority of the world’s “child soldiers”. Youth was also identified by Graça Machel in the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, as being the most neglected age group. From a legal perspective, youth up to the age of 18 years are covered under the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and other protective frameworks such as ILO Convention 182 and the Optional Protocol of 2002.

For both boys and girls of this age group the past DDR approach has proven largely inappropriate. Those under 18 are regarded as child soldiers and are treated as children, not taking into account the extended responsibilities many of these young people have as providers, especially in Africa. Those just above the age of 18 are treated as adults in programmes with a “livelihood focus”, which neglects youth’s need for catch-up education and ambition for a career and a better future. In fact, the specific quality of this group is that they are neither children nor adults but have distinct characteristics as a result of their in-between status and the experiences they have been through.

The socio-economic reintegration of younger soldiers (14-25 years) has proven to be complicated. It must address a complexity of issues such as the need for general education, vocational training, and employment

³ Achio and Specht, *Youth in conflict*, in E. Date-Bah, *Jobs After War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2003, International Labour Office: Geneva. pg 153

but it must also consider the mental scars from conflict experiences that mark the character and personality of these young people. Many have joined armed groups at a very young age and have formed their world view (typically for early adolescents) while being armed and involved in drugs, killings, and rapes. It has also proven essential to involve the receiving communities in their reintegration as ex-combatants' social status is often highly negative. An element of lobbying with employers to recruit ex-combatants is crucial for many skilled youngsters not to be discriminated against due to their background.

Youth Unemployment

In the UNOWA study on Youth and Security it was highlighted that there is a direct correlation between youth unemployment and the involvement of youth in violence.

“Youth unemployment – and its corollary, under-employment – has become a central political-security issue in West Africa, in addition to being a socio-economic one. Its causes lie in both spheres, as do its effects. Youth who are able-bodied but un-skilled, jobless and alienated have been ready to take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money – together with the promise of recognition, loot and “wives” - and are more likely to be drawn into the influence of warring factions or criminal gangs to gain this “empowerment”. This unemployment fuels conflict and crime (...). Job creation, therefore, is a key tool for conflict prevention.”⁴

The relationship between youth unemployment and conflict is twofold: youth unemployment is a root-cause of armed conflict and is also worsened by it. Analyses and responses should therefore be based upon this dual relationship. Youth unemployment is a complex issue, which manifests itself in different ways and has multiple causes and effects. Estimates show that youth unemployment affects a broad spectrum of socio-economic groups, including both the less- and the well-educated youth, but also from educated youth who could not find employment; girls share an unfair burden. Youth with a past as combatants have additional difficulties in finding jobs, largely caused by the negative status in society, and among employers.

“There is increasing risk that, without gainful employment, youth will remain a factor of political destabilization (...). In many post-DDR countries, one visible consequence of youth unemployment is the rising crime rate, which, in a vicious circle, then further fuels unemployment through its effects on the economy and investor confidence. The attraction of young frustrated boys to sub-cultures, promoting violent action by an appeal to a sense of alienation and marginalization, is evident. This violent, gang culture that continues to prevail will further affect the

⁴ Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa, 2005, UN Office for West Africa, Dakar, pg 8

very fragile social fabrics of countries in conflict and threatens to spread into areas that are not yet in conflict. Finding suitable and long-term solutions to youth problems (...) is necessary for successful peace-building interventions and conflict prevention initiatives, and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes for militarized youth must address this issue in a systemic way.”⁵

Youth unemployment has increasingly been identified as a contributing factor in protracted or re-emerging conflict. Jobs and socio-economic opportunities are critical for building and consolidating peace. Given appealing opportunities, youth can however contribute to peace, stability and growth. Indeed, the end of a conflict can provide economic opportunities as the context is often open to economic, social and political changes. The process entails both short-term and long-term objectives. The challenge is to identify concrete initiatives and longer-term strategies for providing durable employment opportunities for energetic but under-utilized young people.

In post-conflict situations, there is a need to absorb unemployed youth to prevent their recruitment (or re-recruitment) into armed groups. Central to prevention strategies should be the search to involve youth in short-term employment until durable jobs can be found. Young men are clearly the most frequently recruited as combatants, either mobilized by their social marginalization or coerced. Hugely exploited in the informal economy, for cohorts of (...) young men, mercenary activity itself has become a conflict livelihood, migrating from interlinked conflict to conflict.

Peace and demobilization means an immediate loss of income and status for the combatants and their families. It is therefore essential that they rapidly receive assistance to make the transition from military to civilian life. The first priority for them is to find a job, allowing them to earn a decent livelihood and a place in their community. In the context of armed conflict, the reintegration of ex-combatants is especially relevant for young people.

“The challenge for governments, NGOs, and international organizations seeking to foster youth unemployment is to tap the dynamism of young people and build on their strong spirit of risk taking. The strategy for socio-economic reintegration of armed youth must be multifaceted: it must improve the employability of these ex-combatants and, at the same time, promote local economic development and job-creation in the war-torn economy.”⁶

⁵ I. Specht, *Juветud y Reincercion*, 2006, Fundacion Ideas Para la Paz

⁶ I. Specht, *Juветud y reincercion*, 2006, Fundacion Ideas Para la Paz

Different Groups of Youth

Youth as such is not a homogeneous group. Young people are recruited from poor, urban centres and isolated rural areas, but also from universities. They can be aged 15 or in their 20s. They are boys and girls, with or without disabilities, with or without education and previous work experiences. They might have joined for very different reasons, such as idealism, desperate poverty and hunger, or as part of their family duties. They might be single or have up to 10 dependents. These differences must be studied and understood, and assistance programmes should have different responses to the particular problems of these subgroups. All too often, DDR programmes fail to target the different sub-sets of challenges that are specific and vary according to: their life-stage, age, gender, ethnicity, social class, household size, education and training levels, disability, responsibilities etc.

What they share however is having been socialised in violent environments claim(ing) social space by intimidation and destruction, 'resocialis(ing)' youngsters in a self-centred enclave culture, and rearrange(ing) power relations and the social order. "Youth socialized in such 'cultures of violence' will remain an element of instability in any society trying to reconstitute itself in the post-conflict phase. Depending on the force of common values in the wider society, the presence of positive social incentives, and the legitimacy and efficacy of the political system upholding them, young people will not successfully 'return'." ⁷

Why they Choose to Fight

"Much of the explanation of why young people are drawn into armed conflict can be found in shared features of their environment, and parallels can be traced across the differences between countries, cultures and types of conflict." ⁸

What the research among youth in ten countries, as presented in the book, *Young Soldiers – Why They Choose to Fight*, identifies is "that there are not only various factors that lead to their involvement – always of course in combination – but also that these factors operate at different levels. Asked what leads to a child's participation in conflicts in Africa, those working in the field usually reply, "poverty" ⁹.

It is indeed true that most child soldiers come from impoverished circumstances, and not only in Africa. However, many poor children do not become child soldiers. Thus it is clear that although poverty may create a general vulnerability to military recruitment; it cannot be the only factor.

⁷ J. Abbink, *Being young in Africa: The politics of despair and renewal*, in: *Vanguards or Vandals. Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*, ed. By Jon Abbink and Ineke van Kessel. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2005, pp. 1-37, p. 25.

⁸ R. Brett and I. Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight*, 2004, Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. pg 3

⁹ See in particular, Brett and McCallin 1998 and Machel 2001

While there are such general environmental factors without which involvement is unlikely to occur, the final decision for a young person to join is often triggered by a specific event in his or her personal life, such as a sudden loss of parents, sudden lack of food or protection, feelings of revenge or simply an opportunity provided by the armed group to leave an undesired situation in which they currently live.

The short-coming of current DDR programmes for youth is that they hardly ever study these reasons for joining. Consequently, young people are disarmed, demobilised and sent back to where they came from, while the issues that made them join initially might not have changed. The result is that many young people continue to live with the same frustrations and therefore remain vulnerable to re-recruitment or engagement in criminal networks and activities.

Girls

One particular group of young soldiers are girls. They might have been active combatants, as were many in Liberia, or mainly operating in support roles for the armed groups as did most of the girls in Congo, or were recruited as sex-slaves as in North Uganda.

“Child soldiers have recently received extensive attention, as have women, but girls, who fall into both categories, have received precious little attention in DDR processes. They hardly ever figure as a target group in their own right in most programmes. Despite this, girls do form a substantial and increasing share of armed groups in many violent armed conflicts. Women are associated with fighting forces in a variety of roles and, from the evidence available, are thought typically to 10% and 33% of fighting forces (Bouta, Freks & Bannon 2005).”¹⁰

Whatever their role was, it is clear that girls also need DDR assistance, but that most programmes today do not succeed in providing this adequate and timely assistance to them. The problem starts with attracting them into disarmament and demobilisation processes. While significant progress has been made in terms of making demobilisation sites ‘woman friendly’, still many girls decide not to register for DDR.

In qualitative research tracing a group of girl combatants in Liberia, the report, *Red Shoes – Experiences of Girl Combatants in Liberia*, lists the following reasons girls gave for not entering the DDR process:

- Resistance to confrontation of their past as combatants;
- The fear of social exclusion or embarrassment;
- The opposition of male soldiers and commanders to demobilise the girls;

¹⁰ Specht, I. & Attree, L., *The reintegration of teenage girls and young women*, International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict, November 2006, Vol 4 No 3

- Reluctance to return home;
- Following the example of a commander;
- Distrust in the DDR process;
- Lack of access due to the fact they had no weapons and were not on commanders lists;
- Unwillingness to be in a camp;
- Reluctance to bring children to camps, or being teen mothers with childcare responsibilities;
- Unwillingness to await transport to camps alongside males;
- Avoiding separation from their commanders;
- Fear of separation from partners or husbands.

The failure of DDR programmes to address the issues above, and therefore the failure to assist girls, is problematic. The most important consequence is that girls who do not enter the DDR process will not be entitled to any reintegration assistance afterwards. This also relates to another problem in current DDR thinking and practice, which relates to the exclusive targeting of ex-combatants and the problems around defining who is and who is not a combatant.

Targeting principles

“Although the direct target groups of DDR programmes are the ex-combatants who need to find alternative employment, the ultimate beneficiaries are the war-torn societies as a whole, with all their institutions and organisations, and the communities into which the ex-combatants (re)integrate. In this regard, the basic question is whether it is appropriate to treat ex-combatants differently from other war-affected groups, such as civilian returnees, internally displaced persons, the war injured, conflict-affected families, female-headed households and communities, by giving them special support for their social and economic reintegration.”¹¹

A focus too exclusively on ex-combatants causes frustrations among other people and it does not stimulate identity change. Furthermore, we are seeing in countries like Congo and Liberia that the exclusive targeting of combatants actually creates a market for DDR. There are examples from Congo and Liberia of parents sending their children to register with an armed group in order to ensure their access to education and skills training in the future. DDR programmes are often the first ones to start and, if they target ex-combatants only, this means in practice that they fill all spaces available in services such as vocational training. Communities throughout the world express their anger and frustration at these targeting principles.

¹¹ I. Specht, *Jobs for Rebels and Soldiers*, in E. Date-Bah, *Jobs After War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2003, International Labour Office: Geneva pg 95

DDR programmes should learn from and take into account these experiences by enlarging the scope of the programmes and addressing the needs of ex-combatants together with those of other war-affected groups. This works particularly well in cases where essential characteristics are shared with other civilian conflict affected groups in terms of age, capacities, needs and preferences. "As experiences in the field of vocational training and employment promotion show, social and economic reintegration can already be at the project level. Targeting ex-combatants and other war-affected populations simultaneously in one project has been found to lessen distrust and increase tolerance between the different conflict affected groups and thus to support the reconciliation and reintegration process."¹²

There is a new school of thought in the DDR world trying to push for community-based reintegration, as promoted by Oxfam Novib in Congo.¹³

Integrated DDR Standards

"In the year 2006, the UN Secretary General issued a special report on DDR in order to prepare the launch of the integrated DDR standards, which had been developed jointly by over 15 UN Agencies, funds and programmes and other international partners based on their experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of DDR programmes worldwide since the end of the cold war.

The principles of the new policy on DDR were:

- People-centred approach, including the specific needs of DDR target groups and the particularities of the context
- Flexible, accountable and transparent approach for DDR programme planning and implementation which is fully centred on integration of the DDR process into the overall post-conflict recovery strategy
- Fostering of national/local ownership, encouraging the national and local stakeholders to take responsibility of the process while building capacity through provision of external expertise as appropriate

The UN Integrated DDR Standard (IDDRS), an over 800 page handbook, providing comprehensive guidance to DDR policy makers and practitioners was launched shortly after and complemented by an operational

¹² I. Specht, *Jobs for Rebels and Soldiers*, in E. Date-Bah, *Jobs After War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2003, International Labour Office: Geneva pg 96

¹³ *Community-based Reintegration in DDR – the case of Democratic Republic of Congo*, forthcoming 2008, Oxfam Novib

guide for field work in DDR and a policy note for senior DDR stakeholders.”¹⁴

While it is to be applauded that there finally is some common understanding of what DDR is and should be, the IDDRS has so far not been applied in the field to any significant extent. Two major problems arise. First of all, the IDDRS, with its extreme volume, makes it impossible to read for a DDR practitioner who is normally under time-pressure to deliver, while at the same time the IDDRS has been summarised and edited down to such an extent that some of the crucial details which make DDR fail or succeed are not explained in enough detail. The second issue is that especially for reintegration, it remains impossible to design a blue print for how it should be done. R can only be working if it is embedded in the local culture and is in fact designed from it. What can be identified as bad practice in one country could be the ultimate solution in another and vice versa.

In the IDDRS, DDR of Youth is guided in a separate module, defining youth as an age category, comprising young people from 15-24 years old. It does however provide a footnote explaining that the category of youth is determined differently in different cultures.¹⁵

Does DDR help?

Implementing DDR in the complex dynamics of post-war societies is a major challenge. While it is impossible to give an example of one extremely successful DDR programme, many programmes actually have major achievements. For example, while the DDR process in Liberia can and should be heavily criticised, it did contribute to the current state of stability in the country. The impact evaluation of the child DDR programme executed by UNICEF did highlight major successes, such as the inability of school teachers to distinguish former child soldiers from other children, the level of participation of former child soldiers in social activities and even the percentage of older children engaged in apprenticeships combined with evening education. For many beneficiaries, it did help.

“The majority of ex-CAFF (Children Associated with Fighting Forces) are in school and many of them combine skills training, apprenticeship and/or work with education, resulting in the fulfilling of their immediate needs while working towards a better future. The combination of vocational training/apprenticeships with education seems to be among the biggest successes of the programme, increasing the chance of a bet-

¹⁴ I. Specht, G. Boyer, S. Brezina, *Peace-building through DDR in Aceh: from Reinsertion to Reintegration*, forthcoming 2008, IOM and UNDP

¹⁵ Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration., *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*, 2006, United Nations, New York

ter future for children, while addressing the immediate needs for income. This positive impact on this new approach deserves replication in other DDR contexts.”¹⁶

However, another example from the same country tells the story of a computer course delivered by an NGO using carton boxes on which a computer keyboard was drawn. Three months of intensive typing on a carton board obviously did not increase the employability of these former combatants and it is indeed incredible that with all our standards, manuals, lessons learned, research, training courses, and even specialised PhD graduates in DDR, these things still happen.

Another bad example, which is probably more complicated to solve, is the case of Congo where the protracted DDR programme creates a constant incentive for people to register and reregister with armed groups in order to receive DDR assistance. Finally, the negative impact of targeted DDR programmes is probably the most worrisome. Ex-combatants cannot be reintegrated through further separation and prioritisation over other civilians. While it is essential to assist them in finding their way into civilian life, this must be done through mixing them with others who have similar difficulties. It is only by treating them as civilians that they can learn and realise how it is to work, live and function as such.

Summary of Weaknesses in Practice

Thus far, no DDR process in the last few years has produced optimal results, due to deficiencies in various areas, whether they be defective planning, implementations that have not focussed sufficient attention on the most vulnerable groups, or ineffective means for monitoring and evaluation.¹⁷

In summary, the following areas leave scope for improvement:

- Basing economic reintegration programmes on actual labour market information and involving the private sector;
- Understanding and addressing root causes of recruitment and youth willingness to be involved in violence;
- Attracting girls into DDR programmes from the beginning;
- Ensuring sustainability of services developed under DDR by working with and through national structures and actors;
- Making longer-term commitments to assist combatants that start new businesses over a longer period of time in order to reduce failure rates;

¹⁶ I. Specht and H. Tefferi, *Impact Evaluation of the Reintegration Programme of Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF) in Liberia, 2007*, UNICEF Pg 4

¹⁷ ‘DDR 2008: Analysis of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in the World during 2007’, 2008, Escola de Cultura de Pau, Spain, p.10. <http://www.escolapau.org/img/programas/desarme/ddr005i.pdf>

- Understanding that DDR is not only about security, but also has humanitarian and development concerns. Therefore, the current focus on young males with 'conflict carrying capacities'¹⁸ should be enlarged to also include vulnerable groups of youth with less potential for violence;
- Basing human resource policies of international actors in DDR more on competency and having a system of rewarding successes and punishing failures;
- Balancing national ownership with international assistance. Normally no DDR experience or expertise exists in the countries where we are implementing DDR for the simple reason that this might have been the first time to implement such a programme. However, international organisations should, more than they are currently, put emphasis on building capacities of local actors at all levels, and implement in name of the government instead of branding their interventions with stickers and logos. This will also contribute to the required building of trust between the government and the population in the aftermath of conflict;
- Avoiding paternalism in designing programmes for youth. Ensure their participation in all stages of DDR and ensure that the reintegration assistance is actually attractive to them so that it will indeed provide an alternative to participation in violence.

Conclusion

It must be concluded that, while stressed in the literature, the current practice of DDR mainly addresses youth as a security concern.

"Conflict response must therefore deal with youth as victims, as a potentially destabilising element in society and as a potentially important contributing group to reconstruction. Their energy and ability to mobilise themselves and other sections of society should be channelled towards recovery and peace-building. Youth must be integrated into the reconstruction, peace-building and long term development of post-conflict society. It is essential to involve them in all processes of planned assistance, as one of their main frustrations is often that they are not asked nor heard; yet they are supposed to be the future."¹⁹

DDR policy makers and implementers should recognise youth's resilience, coping strategies and distinct experiences in conflict situations. Young people can provide leadership and inspiration to their societies if they are given opportunities. It is important that the youngsters find a

¹⁸ Meta-Analysis: Vulnerability, Stability, Displacement and Reintegration: Issues Facing the Peace Process in Aceh, Indonesia, 2008, International Organisation for Migration

¹⁹ Achio and Specht, *Youth in conflict*, in E. Date-Bah, *Jobs After War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2003, International Labour Office: Geneva. pg 153

meaningful role in the post-conflict period that is equivalent in terms of responsibility and status to the role they played during conflict. It is important to stress that the value systems of armed factions do not need to be violent and neither that they are chaotic or anarchic. "They are rooted in the specific way a group manages restrictions and regulations. Rather than trying to break down these modalities during the demobilization process, they should be considered as valuable social capital that can be put to peaceful use in the right circumstances and environment."²⁰ They should have a stake in the post-conflict social order so that they support it rather than undermine it.

Furthermore, a peace agreement followed with a DDR process is not sufficient to assure a durable peace if the socio-economic situation is not improved, and youth are unable to find their place in society. In the peace process, the voices of the young are normally neglected, and their needs are rarely taken into account in the DDR and the reconstruction of the economy and society. As a result, the post-conflict period tends to remain highly unsatisfactory for these young people, pushing many of them into re-recruitment, criminality or prostitution and all of them into insecurity. Young soldiers are particularly vulnerable in this context: they are perpetrators and victims in conflict at the same time. "Their involvement often likens to a *marché de dupes*, with them being manipulated and used for the benefit of power claims and ambitions (political and economic) of a minority"²¹.

Furthermore, DDR programmes have the tendency to be implemented in isolation from the overall reconstruction and development efforts and without taking into serious account the socio-economic context of the countries. "This is partly due to the timing of DDR programmes that often start before serious economic inputs are provided, based upon assumptions that there needs to be some level of local security before development projects can commence."²²

In terms of addressing the needs and ambitions of Girls, "the failure of 'DD' to reach many of them is not only regrettable from a social perspective, but it may also put the peace process in jeopardy. Self-demobilisation is problematic, as it excludes girls from assistance given to participants in the formal disarmament and demobilisation process. Even more importantly, girls who were not formally demobilised automatically became ineligible for reintegration assistance."²³

²⁰ K. Peters, Reintegrating young ex-combatants in Sierra Leone: Accommodating indigenous and wartime value systems, pp. 267-296, p. 295.

²¹ Achio and Specht, *Youth in conflict*, in E. Date-Bah, *Jobs After War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2003, International Labour Office: Geneva. Pg 153-166.

²² I. Specht, *Jobs for Rebels and Soldiers*, in E. Date-Bah, *Jobs After War: A Critical Challenge in the Peace and Reconstruction Puzzle*, InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction, 2003, International Labour Office: Geneva, pg 94

²³ I. Specht *Red Shoes – Experiences of girl-combatants in Liberia*, 2006, ILO. pg 87

But most of all, DDR programmes should analyse and address the reasons why young people join armed forces. Understanding their motives must inform the type of reintegration assistance that would make them feel secure. In doing so, it is, of course, equally important to give these chances to those who, faced with similar circumstances, chose not to join armed forces. However, if DDR programmes address the critical issues that lead young people to join armed forces - like the lack of education and jobs - other young people would benefit as well.”²⁴

Ultimately, DDR programmes should provide young people with something to lose. Finding youth’ ambitions and dreams and assisting them on their path towards achieving those, is the only sustainable and effective way to assist young former combatants. Let’s pretend they start a war but nobody shows up!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Irma Specht is an anthropologist, and the Director of Transition International. She has a proven expertise in post-war transition, peace-building processes, conflict transformation, gender and DDR. She has worked in Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda, Mali, Liberia, Congo-Kinshasa, Congo-Brazzaville, Sierra Leone, Sudan, the Niger Delta and Zimbabwe.

²⁴ I. Specht, *Juветud y Reincercion*, 2006, Fundacion Ideas Para la Paz