

FBA Brief 04/2016

DDR and community based integration – **how to mitigate stigmatisation of former combatants**

Since the early 1990s, DDR programmes (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of former combatants and other persons associated with armed forces or groups) have increasingly been part of peace support operations and peace building interventions around the world. This brief discusses the concept of community based integration and highlights the importance of putting the community itself in the driver seat for the integration process. Though not without serious challenges, such an approach to (re)integration in some contexts promise to decrease levels of recidivism.

By: Stefan Åström and Bengt Ljunggren

Page 1 (13)

Contact

For more information on the FBA's work on DDR or on this brief, please contact:

Hans Thorgren
Head of FBA's DDR Programme
hans.thorgren@fba.se

Stefan Åström
Project Manager
stefan.astrom@fba.se

SUMMARY

- › *DDR has over the last 20 years undergone a major and significant shift from being primarily a security oriented programme, to also aim at addressing root causes to conflict and hence contribute to state building efforts.*
- › *The considerable expansion of the integration dimension of DDR has not yet been matched with explicit guidelines on how to socially and politically reintegrate former combatants.*
- › *Actors involved in peace initiatives in conflict settings are increasingly focusing on activities at the local level in the aftermath of war, highlighting the social dimension and its importance for stability and development.*
- › *A community approach to integration would facilitate implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.*
- › *The community based integration concept aims at modifying current "one-size-fits-all" and "top-down" approaches to DDR and in that way contribute to reduce levels of recidivism.*
- › *The lead words are, among others, participative dialogue, Representative Focus Groups (RFG), common vision, organised collective action and community based revenue system and sustained formative assessments. All in order to avoid the intervention to be another quick fix without prolonged results.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 90s, more than 60 DDR programmes^{1 2} have been launched in post-conflict settings around the world. At least 21 programmes are currently running³, out of which more than two thirds are conducted in Africa. This clearly testifies that DDR has become an important part of most peace building efforts.

This brief will initially consider some commonly debated aspects of DDR; such as objectives, scope, impact and recent programming and policy developments. It will then turn to the additional need for doctrine and policy development, and what is known as social or community based (re)integration. The brief ends with a discussion on what such integration entails, how it should be implemented, and if such an approach will further increase the prospects for success.

Differences exist between those concerned with DDR, practitioners and academics, on exactly how important DDR is to the overall outcome of a specific peace building effort. Although most agree that some sort of DDR should be conducted in the aftermath of hostilities; the scope, duration and ultimate objectives of such programmes are still highly debated.

Page 2 (13)

The UN characterises demobilising combatants as the single most important factor determining the success of peace operations⁴, while other observers suggest that multilateral and bilateral agencies continue to prioritise governance and elections as the key to long-term stability⁵.

Whether or not DDR is the single most important feature of the peace building architecture, agreement on what to do with those who actually generate the violence; violence that both impedes social and political advancement and economic development, will certainly constitute a decisive input to achieve lasting peace.

A strong argument can also be made that a more community oriented approach to integration would increase prospects to assist and involve all population segments in a particular community after end of armed conflict – not only combatants – and hence facilitate the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

DDR has over the last 20 years undergone a major and significant shift from being a minimalist approach (chiefly a security-oriented programme) to a maximalist development enterprise dealing not only with the armed group itself; its commanders, combatants, weapons and other military equipment, but also aiming at addressing root causes to conflict and hence contribute to state building efforts with the ambition to prop up so called fragile states by returning the monopoly of use of force into the hands of the state.

1. Muggah 2009, 2010

2. Schulhofer and Sambanis (2010) have identified 49 DDR programmes that were externally-assisted between 1975 and 2009, in a total of 39 different countries, and in addition pointed out another 7 programmes in 6 different countries without any external assistance. That makes a total of 56 programmes in 41 different countries until December 2009. If you to that add DDR programmes and activities in Kosovo, Comoros and South Sudan it would end up with a total of 58 interventions in 44 countries.

3. Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Comoros, Kosovo, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Mali, Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda. It could be argued that disarmament and demobilisation (DD) activities are a bit less commonplace at the moment in comparison with any time since the end of the cold war era. Although disarmament is going on at the moment for instance in Afghanistan, Colombia, Ivory Coast and DRC, most activities scheduled for other DDR programmes and activities are more focalised on reintegration assistance; e.g. through the TDRP (Transitional Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme) funded by a multi-donor initiative and implemented by the World Bank and active in African Great Lakes region, but also for instance in Comoros and Somalia. UN missions mandated for DDR are MONUSCO, UNOCI and MINUSTAH. DDR is also planned for, or going on, in some conflict contexts without mayor external assistance, such as in Colombia and the Philippines.

4. UN General Assembly, 2004:61

5. Muggah 2009

It goes without saying that with such an ambitious agenda for DDR, finding the timely and exact combination of content and design for any DDR intervention creates a major test for policy-makers, DDR planners, practitioners and the wider international community.

DDR policy and programme developments over the last decade or so have basically remained intact when it comes to techniques and procedures on how to disarm and demobilise combatants. The considerable expansion of the reintegration dimension of DDR since the late 90s has not yet been matched when it comes to explicit guidelines on how to socially and politically integrate former combatants.

In 2006, after a multi-year process of extended consultations and analysis, the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR launched the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS)⁶, reflecting the agreed guidelines and procedures for UN on planning and implementing DDR programmes within its missions.

IDDRS include, among many other things, instructions on how to collect, register and dispose weapons, define eligibility criteria and screening methods for presumptive participants, build camps and cater for the specific needs of men and women, including children and war-wounded persons. It also indicates how to coordinate and link DDR to other post-conflict programmes like security sector reform and transitional justice.

Although the reintegration chapters recently have been updated and expanded, building on the latest insights, experiences and knowledge concerning reintegration practices, there is still a vivid debate going on about how to actually deal with fighters, both men, women and children and other persons associated with armed groups as well as with the receiving communities in the aftermath of war.

Similarly; although a debate still can be heard about how long or short time combatants should spend in camps before going to their home communities, or on what activities should be carried out while cantoned, those differences are nowadays seen as small in comparison with the tremendous challenges facing local war-affected communities receiving former combatants.

It is almost as DDR has been fractured into two different types of programmes: on one hand, the technical, military-oriented and quite straight-forward set of activities dealing with disarmament and demobilisation, and on the other hand the complex, differentiated, multi-dimensional process to socially, economically and politically build and rebuild the very fabric of community and civilian life.

Questions then arise if this situation is because of a lack of field-tested guidelines on what is working or not, and under which circumstances; or if it is a sign of ambivalence concerning if DDR actually should have this expanded and ambitious agenda in the first place.

A debate whether or not DDR, as it is understood today with its diversity of different types of activities and considerations, should be included in one or two or even several programmes, could be warranted. But what is sure, regardless of how you label and package DDR activities, is that the expansion and further development of field-tested guidelines on exactly how to integrate former combatants at the community level, are needed more than ever.

DDR – NO QUICK FIX

What is then the most important result of any DDR programme? Almost all involved in DDR in some way agree that the chief concern in post-conflict

6. <http://www.unddr.org/iddrs.aspx>

environments is preventing the resumption of armed hostilities⁷. By helping impede renewed armed conflict, successful DDR can pave the way or create necessary conditions for other post-conflict activities to prosper, such as elections, enhanced governance or increased economic development; activities that supposedly will achieve sustainable peace in the long run⁸. Connected to that main objective is a set of other expected outcomes of DDR processes, such as restraining violence and crime levels in society, reducing the availability and circulation of weapons and helping rebuild trust between former adversaries and the wider community at the local level, among several others.

Exactly how DDR, if at all, is contributing to all of this, is still not fully understood. But intuitively the idea shared by most is that by bringing armed groups, their weapons and other military equipment and resources necessary to wage war, out of the commanders and combatants control and possession, will at least make it harder to start fighting all over again.

In the same way, by breaking the social relations (command and control systems) between commanders and their subordinates, and ultimately, in a more physical sense geographically separate commanders and combatants from each other when the latter leave for home communities after being demobilised, the threshold will be raised to recommit to renewed armed conflict.

The theoretical underpinning that individuals are predominantly acting on more or less accurate and rational calculations is also behind the dramatic increase in scope and breath of reintegration assistance offered to former combatants in the last decade or so. By offering suitable and substantial economic incentives, the cost calculus done by individuals somehow change (e.g. by providing cash payments, vocational training schemes or job placement programmes), it is assumed that they will not go back to the hardship and risks associated with being part of an armed group.

But could combatants for the most part be seen as motivated by economic or material gains? Should former combatants primarily be seen as homo economicus actors alone? Is this simplified model of human beings, including former members of armed groups, as primarily governed by economic or material stimulus true, or is human agency also to a substantial part governed by other human desires, necessities, beliefs and values?

If it is true that being disarmed and demobilised for the most part can be considered as losing livelihood, then getting these individuals an alternative livelihood would constitute the best way to minimise the levels of recidivism of former combatants. Most of the reintegration assistance that has been offered to combatants over the last 20 years has had either the goal of making the individuals more employable, by providing different types of vocational training suitable to the demands of the local labour market, or making them self-sustained by setting up their own businesses or becoming farmers in resettlement areas.

The same underlying logic is also true for different types of schemes that try to enhance the scope of livelihood opportunities for former combatants in war-affected areas. Giving them competitive alternatives to be on the pay-roll of an armed group is thought to prevent most of them, if not all, to rearm.

7. Schulhofer and Sambanis (2010) have recorded "War Recurrence" with a binary indicator (yes, no) as the chief peacebuilding outcome of a total of 56 recorded conflicts in 41 countries as of 2010. In all these conflicts DDR of some sort has been part of the peacebuilding effort. Of those 41 countries listed, DDR has been completed without war recurrence until today (2015) in about 21 countries, or around 50%. In at least 12 countries DDR has never been completed, with or without war recurrence thereafter; such as in Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan.

8. Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis 2010

“But could combatants for the most part be seen as motivated by economic or material gains? Should former combatants primarily be seen as homo economicus actors alone?”

Recent research on motivations to join and defect from armed groups shows that although economic or material considerations may in many cases be of decisive importance, it does not tell the whole story⁹. Many insurgencies or armed groups that have had the capacity to wage war over protracted times and consequently recruit new combatants on a regular basis, do not even pay wages at all¹⁰.

If it is acknowledged that current reintegration assistance does not sufficiently contribute to keep levels of recidivism at bay in order to meet the objectives set up for DDR, then both DDR practitioners and researchers must look further what it is that makes men, women and children prone to enlist and stay in those armed groups.

WHICH FACTORS ARE IMPORTANT FOR SUCCESSFUL DDR?

In recent years, the research community has made a considerable effort to establish the factors, conditions and circumstances that explain most of the variation of outcomes of DDR programmes. Some programmes are seen as successful, while others are considered as more or less failures with renewed armed conflict as a consequence, or at least continued high levels of violence and crime, even after formal cessation of armed hostilities has occurred¹¹.

Page 5 (13)

Basically, the search for explanations of specific outcomes of DDR programmes should be done on three different levels. On the macro, or context, level, the chances of successful DDR will be increased if the country in question meets a certain economic criterion at the moment of initiating a DDR programme. A stronger economy would help generate higher capacity to actually absorb substantial numbers of returning former combatants and other persons associated with them, into local labour markets. The sheer range of livelihood opportunities would be higher in a country with strong economic performance than in a country totally devastated by war. Unfortunately for DDR initiatives – the latter is normally the case.

Likewise, stable political and administrative institutions on different levels are supposedly better off to actually fulfil economic and other promises done to former combatants in exchange for laying down their weapons. High levels of involvement in and responsibility for DDR, from national actors at different levels early on, are supposed to countervail the risk that DDR becomes just a quick fix whose potential positive results on security and development swiftly vanish once the international intervention is completed.

Other identified factors impacting prospects for DDR on the macro level could be both how the peace was achieved and also factors pertaining to the nature of the conflict and the armed groups themselves. It could be argued that DDR would have greater chances of meeting its objectives if contending parties, at the moment of a ceasefire or agreement, included binding provisions on DDR early on.

On the other hand, some armed groups may be formed essentially to enrich its leaders economically rather than as instruments for social and political change. If that is the case, avoiding renewed armed conflict and high levels of recidivism could be even more challenging.

9. Jonsson 2014

10. Jonsson (2014) notes that several large insurgencies such as FARC, PKK in Turkey and LITTE in Sri Lanka do not pay wages while exposing members to extreme physical hardships and danger, indicating that other elements than economic gains are in play while individuals choose to join armed insurgencies.

11. In a few countries completed DDR has generally been considered a major contribution to peace and stability, and hence seen as a success. In this group you may find countries such as Angola, Burundi, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Liberia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone.

At the other end of the spectrum are factors related to the individual characteristics of the former combatants themselves; conditions acquired through the experience of living within an armed group. These factors are impacting on both what kind of reintegration assistance to offer and also influencing the overall prospects of success in meeting defined DDR objectives set in peace agreements.

Men and women who are abducted, or joined willingly, at a young age or even born into armed groups have been identified as harder to integrate into societies as civilians than those less deeply socialised into armed violence. A manifold of circumstances, related to joining and being part of an armed group, shapes the individuals' trajectories and hence their possibilities, and indeed their motivations, to both disconnect from former peers and superiors and, on the other hand, re-engage with civilian and community life. Lately such factors have increasingly been identified and highlighted by DDR researchers as crucial for successful DDR¹².

A special challenge are members of armed groups who have been subjected to intense (political, social) indoctrination and formal and harsh military training. Activities such as pressuring combatants into hardship in order to create shared experiences and increase bonding between them, aims at raising animosity towards the outside world. Such individuals have less trust in state and civil society institutions and little will to participate in communal civilian life. Hence, they run the risk of being exposed to stigmatisation and exclusion from the communities to which they will return in the aftermath of conflict.

Furthermore, the way the hostilities were conducted tends to have an impact on the chances as well. Committing war atrocities against civilians and the enemy, including executing massacres, gender based violence, torturing or depriving civilians of food or other necessary goods and services, negatively affects the process of social reconciliation and reconstruction of the social fabric. As will be discussed later in this brief; individually built up "anti-social capital"¹³ would probably negatively influence the level of community acceptance of this key constituency for lasting peace. Frequent reports from countries such as DR Congo and Colombia, where it can be assumed that former combatants have built up substantial levels of anti-social capital during warfare, confirm this by pointing to matching levels of stigmatisation against them from receiving communities.

A final and third level is the design or composition of the DDR programme itself, and the way it is being implemented in a specific context. A substantial increase in capacity has taken place among both national actors and the international community to actually make accurate assessments, valid planning and design of DDR programmes over the last 20 years.

This professionalisation of the DDR field, hand in hand with the launching of IDDRS, has substantially improved the prospects for successful DDR programmes. Besides the particular and material outputs brought about by a programme, recent research also shows the importance of how the programme in itself is delivered¹⁴.

Alongside stated concrete programme outputs, such as the number of combatants participating in the programme from the various sides; the number and types of

12. Nussio 2013, 2014

13. The difference between social and anti-social capital could be understood as the difference between bridging and bonding. While bridging is outward looking and has a larger potential to stimulate increased society-wide trust among all its members, bonding is inward-looking and aims at exclude outsiders and generate goods and values enjoyed only by the group members. Anti-social capital can thus be defined as in-group bonding used to foster trust and cohesion within an (illicit) organisation and distance toward outgroups (Nussio 2014).

14. Söderström 2013

weapons and ammunition handed over and, e.g., vocational trainings organised, DDR programmes are also in a more tacit and intangible way conveying important additional resources for each participant, such as increased self-esteem, trust and new personal identities as civilians¹⁵.

If peace negotiations leading up to a final peace agreement include provisions on DDR, suggesting different types of benefits for former combatants, expectations on performance and delivery of the programme could rise considerably; and that from one of the key constituencies in the post-conflict landscape – the individuals with the relations, knowledge and capacity to throw the country back into the vicious circle of armed violence¹⁶.

If we to the above add that composition and implementation of a DDR programme could be one of the first major public policy programmes launched by an interim post-conflict government in the wake of upcoming elections, it is not hard to see that performance and delivery of this particular programme will have an important influence on which levels of trust and support to national institutions will be granted by both former combatants, and from the wider and general public in the post-conflict landscape.

Page 7 (13)

Still though, no matter how well designed and timely a DDR programme is, the risk of failure or renewed armed conflict is always around the corner. If there as a consequence of war is virtually no state presence left, no capacity to provide public services such as schools, health and human security, and a civil society shattered into pieces or totally absent; and if you to that add a group of individuals brutalised and traumatised by proper lived experiences during the war; the risk of failure could be imminent. Something that has been evident in several post-conflicts over the last decades.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

With the above as a backdrop for thinking about how to further enhance durable and sustained peace support interventions, and particularly improve prospects for successful DDR, promoters for peace and peaceful coexistence have increasingly turned their minds to what is going on at the local level, in the communities, in the aftermath of war. As a consequence, the social dimension and its importance for stability and development is increasingly highlighted. Although, as mentioned above, economic or material incentives certainly still would play an important role to achieve recovery and sustainable peace, it is more and more recognised that social aspects – such as a sense of belonging, meaning and identity – will have decisive impact on creating inclusive societies and peaceful co-existence.

Social integration could be understood as a process through which community members by dense social interaction or exchange increase their social capital; understood as the capacity for organised collective action in the common interest for all community members by internalising social norms and belief systems based on trust, predictability and civic culture. By re-socialising former combatants with high levels of anti-social capital, it may be possible to overcome earlier internalised belief-systems common in illegal armed groups. These are often based on hierarchical and vertical power structures, corruption and conflict resolution by means of use of violence, interpersonal distrust and individual self-enrichment as core values.

“Although, as mentioned above, economic or material incentives certainly still would play an important role to achieve recovery and sustainable peace, it is more and more recognised that social aspects – such as a sense of belonging, meaning and identity – will have decisive impact on creating inclusive societies and peaceful co-existence”

15. Söderström (2013) contends that besides concrete programme outputs, such as formal trainings and qualifications; or material assistance in form of different subsidies, former combatants could also through participation in the programme acquire new life skills and social competences; improved self-esteem and even a whole new outlook on the world, and in connection with that a new personal identity distinguished from the one as a member of an armed group; all of which are considered to be crucial in order to bridge anew with communities and post-conflict society.

16. Themnér 2011

Several researchers and observers have pointed to the decisive importance of high levels of civic culture and social capital for long term economic development and well-functioning democracy¹⁷.

More than ten years ago, leaders of the world gathered at the World Summit for Social Development agreed to address emerging economic and social challenges on a global scale. The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action established a new consensus on placing people at the centre of our concerns for peaceful development. Social integration was identified as one of the three overriding objectives of development, together with poverty eradication and employment creation. However, so far, social integration in relation to the other two themes has not yet gained the attention it deserves. That can be said to be true also within the field of DDR, as was shown earlier on.

At this summit, the member states made a commitment to promote social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant, and that respect diversity. Such a society must contain appropriate mechanisms that enables their citizens to participate in decision-making processes related to their lives and shape their common future. In this context, participatory dialogue is an important policy tool that can offer a range of practical means, and therefore should be considered as a central part of building cohesive and peaceful societies; this is especially needed in conflict and post-conflict societies.

It is argued that inclusion, participation and justice form the main ingredients of social integration; ideally bringing forth the active engagement of all citizens in building a common future. Dialogue is a necessary intervention to bring about engagement and represents the shape that such engagement needs to take. In other words, dialogue processes should be an integral part of a comprehensive strategy of interventions towards social integration, and dialogue should be the method of interaction used in relation to other interventions such as healing, reconciliation, mediation, education, and policies and mechanisms for equality and equity, among others.

It is evident that all stakeholders need to be taken into account and included and need to take active and complementary roles in building more cohesive societies – governments at all levels, international organisations, civil society, the private sector, different population segments e.g. with particular emphasis on participation of marginalised groups whose voices seldom are heard.

A consequence of the above is that social integration, and hence reintegration of former combatants, must be a community pursuit, not neglecting the importance of individual engagement and contributions, as well as national institutions, to the process.

In conflict and post-conflict societies, a corporate, or collaborative, vision for the common future is in many instances absent or in the best of cases vague. Such a vision, if developed, is the first step towards achieving such a collectively imagined common future in peaceful co-existence. In this respect it is important to bear in mind that what is needed is not a minor correction of the situation in the community prior to the conflict, but rather a major overhaul of society in order to get to terms with the root causes of the conflict.

It is therefore of outmost importance to cater for active participation in community business of returning populations in the aftermath of conflict; this is especially true concerning former combatants. When planning for DDR, and especially for reintegration assistance, considerations should accordingly be made to ensure

17. See i.e Putnam (1993). In this classical book the thesis is that social capital is key to high institutional performance and the maintenance of democracy.

active participation from the outset in the reintegration process. Former combatants and other individuals associated with armed groups should actively be part of the process of creating a common vision of future community life.

So how do you go about to achieve this active participation from former combatants and create a future vision of a community in peaceful co-existence, when we know that distrust, fear and stigmatisation is what those returning individuals in many cases will meet and also themselves contribute to by their built up “anti-social capital”, as earlier argued?

COMMUNITY BASED (RE)INTEGRATION

The ambition to modify current “one-size-fits-all” and “top-down” approaches to integration has come to be labelled community based (re)integration. Under this heading and definition there has been a variety of different approaches and activities being implemented in recent years. The common denominator, though, would be that the actual form and content of what is supposed to happen in one given community is designed and decided by that community itself. In that way, the formative direction is reversed and the interventions could take a variety of concrete expressions on the ground. In practice, this means that neighbouring communities could end up with fairly different types of activities due to the fact that identified needs and priorities are quite different over different communities.

On one extreme, community based integration could simply mean to add, to a more traditional or limited integration programme, a community “component”, or a sort of mandated community work; e.g. that former combatants must compensate or pay back to communities for damage and suffering caused during conflict; and doing so by a specific amount of work and support to the community in question.

In this case, community based integration would not qualify to be much more than a sort of reparation or repayment programme, benefiting the community in general and to a lesser degree compensate, rehabilitate or give some relief to victims for damage and loss suffered as a consequence of the conflict. In this scenario there is no active involvement of former combatants in community affairs and the community is in a very limited way influencing design and content of activities carried out. In short, no active dialogue is taking place in the community between different population segments under this modality.

A more promising approach would be what can be called reintegration with enlarged targeting^{18,19}. Instead of solely limiting assistance and support to former combatants and other persons directly associated with them through the armed group, benefits will in this approach be extended to other population segments in the community as well; such as youth with similar socio-economic profiles as former combatants, IDPs and other victims and vulnerable individuals with specific needs. Under this modality, there could be elements of dialogue and engagement, and hence participation from a broader spectrum of community members, including former combatants. Still though, involvement from communities, besides the obvious to participate in planned activities, is normally limited to be informed and consulted about interventions already designed and decided somewhere else outside the community.

A more far-reaching and ambitious form of community based integration would be one where the aspiration is to actually put the community itself in the driver seat for the integration process; one where the community or its representatives will be empowered to have ownership of the process and to identify needs to be

Page 9 (13)

“A more far-reaching and ambitious form of community based integration would be one where the aspiration is to actually put the community itself in the driver seat for the integration process”

18. Specht 2010

19. <http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/201009PracticeNote4SocioEconomicReintegration.pdf>

addressed. Experiences from several processes with these features enable us to distinguish a few key concepts, guidelines and steps to bear in mind and follow when embarking on this approach to integration.

First and foremost the overarching tools to integrate communities and to increase and build social capital are: participative dialogue in combination with creation of representative focus groups (RFGs) that repeatedly discuss issues and situations that are identified by the community itself as major obstacles to development and peaceful co-existence.

By providing communities with a safe space to seek mutual understanding and accommodation on pressing and dividing issues, such as security issues, power sharing and access and distribution of resources and other public goods; possibilities increase to overcome stigmatisation and distrust between former combatants and the wider population, and in that way find common ground and consensus for decision-making. A key feature of such a dialogue process would be to develop a common desired vision about how a peaceful community would look like in the future, and identify what projects and/or activities would lead to fulfil such a vision.

Page 10 (13)

The composition and set-up of the RFGs must be carefully crafted, both in terms of existing power structures within the community, and in the sense of giving representativity and influence to groups and individuals with limited or no power or influence in community business. This is an opportunity to include and make visible groups and individuals that previously have had a very limited voice in community affairs.

On the other hand, leaving out traditionally powerful individuals or factions could create legitimacy problems for the community process, and could also motivate some to act as spoilers, with the risk of making the whole process impossible to continue and manage, or in the worst of cases: instigate renewed armed conflict. By linking assets and funding to fulfil the vision directly to the democratic process, some of the risks could be reduced.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RFGS

Representative focus group (RFG) discussions has shown to be an important tool to achieve desired changes of social dynamics in communities. By repeatedly and over a prolonged period of time conduct focus group discussions, including training sessions and practical community work, participants will show increased open-mindedness, willingness to contribute, argue and criticise, which leads to better communication and mutual respect. Experiences from the Sichuan Province in Western China¹ regarding health and vulnerable populations resulted in increased team spirit, social bridging and trust between different population segments. It was shown to have a particular positive effect on women's participation and influence in community dealings. These findings suggests that RFG could constitute an important mechanism to overcome severe stigmatisation of former combatants in the aftermath of armed conflict.

It is suggested that end of conflict and hence return of former combatants and other persons associated with armed groups to communities, in combination with setting up of a community based integration programme, as described here, could constitute a unique moment and opportunity to initiate a major overhaul of existing social relations and power structures. Maybe, in some instances, it would even be possible to address, and transform, a few of the more deep-seated root causes and conflict dynamics present in the region.

However, it is important to keep in mind that an initial predisposition from all sides to make qualitative changes on values, beliefs and behaviour will probably vanish rapidly, and things will go back to previous modalities of acting and thinking if no tangible results could be shown quite early on in the process. Windows of opportunity tend to close quite promptly if not promised rewards materialise in daily life swiftly.

In this process, the active feedback and flow of information back and forward between the community and the representatives in the RFGs is crucial to develop ownership of the process and increase trust among the wider community in this approach to post-conflict integration.

The underlying assumption, or logic, believed to be in play is that if receiving communities feel and are convinced that they have had a considerable influence on the design and implementation of programmes and activities for former combatants, it will help to reduce stigmatisation and mutual fear. To create an arena where all population segments in a post-conflict community could, in a trans-

1. Ljunggren, Huang, Wang, Johansson (2010), "Promoting Community Empowerment among Rural Tibetans in China Using Focus Group Discussions".

parent way, meet and express their view points, feelings, fears and expectations without risks of retaliations or revenge could, if done in the right way, constitute a catalytic moment and break of vicious circles of hostility and resentment.

Likewise, in processes where high levels of stigmatisation and fear towards former returning combatants have been observed, it is also noted that benefits and assistance to those individuals in many cases have been granted without, or at least with very limited, previous consultations with the rest of the community.

Even more aggravating when it comes to feelings of stigma or levels of conflict and dispute between different population segments, is the fact that on some occasions no assistance whatsoever was given to the non-combatant populations, easily creating feelings of envy and even outright antagonism towards returning former combatants. The non-combatant population, also called the stay-behind population, knowing that returning former combatants may have committed abuses and atrocities towards civilians, but now, instead of being brought to justice or obliged to compensate for damage caused, will be subjected to substantial integration assistance, could create stark divisions in specific communities. In such situations the risk for recidivism and renewed armed conflict could be imminent.

Page 11 (13)

An even more provocative situation, which would certainly call for mechanisms and spaces for dialogue between community members, is where returning former combatants have committed atrocities, in some instances even war crimes, against civilians living in the very same community towards which they have chosen to return.

In order to be able to overcome these dynamics of severe stigmatisation and divisions referred to above as a consequence of prolonged armed conflict, it is normally not sufficient to create channels and arenas for verbal exchange and participative dialogue. To actually achieve a more long-term and sustainable reconciliation, a positive peace, and countervail built up anti-social capital acquired among former members of armed groups during conflict it is necessary to materialise those common visions achieved through participative dialogue by collective action.

By acting together, doing more than just talking, a process of re-socialisation has a chance to take place that would eventually induce changes in values and belief-systems among community members that would then allow for more inclusive, just, democratic and less corrupt, and henceforth peaceful communities.

The next step, to go from vision to action; to operationalise activities and projects identified through participative dialogue, is therefore key for reaching desired objectives. External support may initially be needed to assure that proposed activities actually will lead to changes and results sought after.

Although community based integration seeks to boost learning and inquiry among community members, knowledge about how to support DDR and/or former combatants could be low within receiving communities, but also sometimes underestimated. Both financial aspects and the need to address specific demands from former combatants will also further put some restrictions on what concrete activities could reasonably be proposed and achievable within the process.

Another constraining element would be what visions that could reasonably be carried out within a limited time frame. A developed plan needs at least 3 to 5 years of implementation in order to be able to achieve its strategic goals and have desired impact on community life in desired direction. Visions should therefore not be of such magnitude that fulfilment is impossible to achieve within a comparable timeframe.

On a more technical footing, facilitators need to assure sufficient capacity within the community to develop project documents that actually reflect visions, needs and activities conceded upon during the dialogue process. Normally those capacities need to be developed or at least improved.

Organised collective activities normally will take place within community based organisations. Sometimes communities are already fairly well organised, but most of the time when an intervention of this type will take place communities are devastated by the armed conflict and community organisation to fill this role must be created anew.

The ability to set up project funds or assets through community based revenue systems or fundraising from other possible sources, must be addressed early on during the intervention. Core groups and frequent and repeated information and learning sessions on various aspects of the process will be needed and also more hands-on training activities on, e.g. how to discuss and take common decisions, to organise participation and representability or to set up and run community based organisations; all this would require extensive, sustained and prolonged presence of external support in the community in question.

Page 12 (13)

If the lead words and concepts so far for a successful intervention under the label of community based integration have been participative dialogue, representative focus groups (RFGs), feed-back, common vision, operationalisation, organised collective action, community organisations, project documents, community based revenue system and fundraising; still there is one additional crucial element that must be sought for in order to avoid this to be another quick fix without any sustainable end results: continuous formative assessments.

Formative assessments²⁰ are intending not only to assure that stated project objectives will be met, but also to contribute to a learning process among participants and, influencing individuals' beliefs and values, and in the last instance their very sense of identity they hold as community members.

This approach to project monitoring and evaluation could be specially promising in relation to interventions seeking more profound and lasting conflict transformation, which is the case when it comes to community based integration.

CHALLENGES TO COMMUNITY BASED INTEGRATION

Reintegration assistance that historically has been provided to disarmed combatants and other persons associated with armed groups has mostly been of limited variation and content, and normally designed and implemented by organisations and officials far away from the actual community; and hence, with little or limited influence or participation from those most concerned. The reason for this is, of course, of an administrative/bureaucratic nature, but there are also some more policy-related reasons.

Even if a community based approach to integration has shown to be promising when it comes to possibilities to reduce high levels of stigmatisation and divisions in war torn communities and to achieve reconciliation and inclusiveness, and hence create conditions for reduced recidivism and lasting peace, there are still several serious challenges that have to be improved upon.

One major challenge is to find ways to implement and evaluate projects that could be substantially different between close neighbouring communities. How should that external, or third-party, implementing mechanism look like that can, at the same time, address all eligible participants from demobilised groups, including

20. See i.e. Black and William 2009

members from receiving communities, and still assure coherence and equity over different and various communities?

Another major challenge to success is the immense initial need of external assistance to start up a community process of this kind. If a community based integration or a demand-led approach will achieve its transformative effects on existing conflict dynamics there will be a need of prolonged presence of expertise in those communities. This will have financial implications.

The security situation and overall well-being of the villagers can also pose an almost overwhelming challenge to an intervention of this sort. In situations where former combatants have accumulated high and substantial levels of anti-social capital or behaviour, it can be impossible to introduce them to communities and civil society, as this quote by Kieran Milton (2009) regarding the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone shows:

“...the RUF represented a largely illiterate, politically and socially dislocated body of brutalised youth, who despite possessing a myriad of legitimate grievances, were ill equipped to return (or to be introduced) to civil society and channel these grievances through peaceful political discourse.”

Page 13 (13)

CONCLUSIONS

The social dimension and its importance for stability and development is increasingly recognised in the field of DDR and activities at the community level is ever more in focus. However, an expansion and further development of field-tested guidelines on exactly how to integrate former combatants at the community level are more needed than ever.

The community based integration process puts the community itself in the driver seat and would constitute an advancement to find solutions to high levels of stigmatisation and recidivism.

By planning and delivering (re)integration assistance with active participation from all population segments in the community to which former combatants return, prospects will increase to get to terms with some of the root causes to the conflict and help to reconcile and bridge between community members.

An approach to community based (re)integration as outlined above should constitute an important additional tool to consider for DDR planners and practitioners in order to keep recidivism as low as possible and hence create conditions for sustainable peace.