DDR

Disarmament, demobilisation & reintegration: The case of Angola

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants is a vital step in the transition from war to peace. No peace process can be successful when armed groups exist that pose a threat to fragile peace efforts. Comprehensive DDR programmes create a safe environment, enable people to earn adequate livings through constructive means, and assist in reconciliation processes by reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life and reuniting communities. However, DDR is a complicated process in a post-conflict environment where previously armed groups are divided by animosities and face a security dilemma when surrendering their arms, where societies are traumatised and not ready to receive ex-combatants, where government, judicial and civil society structures have crumbled, and where the economy has been destroyed by the conflict. Despite the many challenges involved in implementing a DDR programme, it is evident that no post-conflict peace building process is complete without it. This paper examines the important role that DDR plays in the peace building process, and briefly explores the DDR process in Angola as a case study.

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration – the concepts

DDR is a process and should be seen as circular, as the three phases are interconnected and the successful completion of each phase is vital to the success of the next phase. Although the three phases are distinguished by different goals, actors and functions, they should not be seen as isolated. Disarmament and demobilisation phases are usually completed fairly quickly by military personnel and are relatively easy to plan and implement as they involve a limited number of actors.

The reintegration phase is the most time-consuming, complex, long-term and costly phase, as it requires the co-ordination of a variety of actors to be successful. Many conflict management practitioners agree that for any DDR process to be successful the reintegration process must be sustainable and communities adequately prepared to receive former armed groups. Before a DDR process can begin, there need to be stable security arrangements to ensure a safe environment, a commitment by all the warring factions to the peace agreement, and the involvement of all stakeholders and actors in the design of the DDR programme; moreover, the programme should form part of national reconciliation efforts. In addition, the DDR programme should be clear and realistically outlined in the peace agreement, and sufficient funds should be allocated to the programme.

In terms of implementing the DDR programme, DDR staff need flexibility, mediation skills and confidence-building skills. The leading institution should be a civilian one that is neutral, specialised and administratively competent. The short-term goal is the restoration of security and stability through the disarmament of warring groups and their demobilisation. The long-term goal is the sustained social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants into a peaceful society. For DDR programmes to be sustainable, they must be integrated with other post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and social and economic development.[1]

Demobilisation

"Demobilisation is the formal disbanding of military formations and, at the individual level, is the process of releasing combatants from a mobilised state."[3] Demobilisation includes the assembly of ex-combatants, which ensures their participation in the DDR programme, orientation programmes, which offer viable alternative means of income other than fighting, and transportation to their communities or training areas for the new army. There are usually large logistical challenges at this stage, which need to be planned for at the outset. For example, finding assembly and reception areas that are neutral and do not advantage any one belligerent group can be difficult. Once the ex-combatants are registered and screened, they go through a survey process where their needs and preferences, in terms of jobs for example, are identified. When discharged, they are given reinsertion packages for reintegration and encouraged to return later for more benefits. Ex-combatants should spend at least three months in these areas to ensure that they are confident to leave.

Disarmament

Disarmament is defined by the United Nations as "the collection of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone".[2] Disarmament usually occurs in assembly areas where combatants are gathered together in camps. Weapons are confiscated and then either stored for the new national army or destroyed. Some ex-combatants are encouraged to disable their own weapons, which has a psychological benefit as it symbolises their transition to civilian life. At the disarmament sites, combatants usually have to undergo a test to verify their combatant status and they are then registered on the DDR system to gain access to benefits. They are given food aid, clothing, shelter, and medical attention, and are enrolled in basic skills and orientation programmes. At this phase, creating a transparent, secure environment is important, as surrendering arms can be traumatic for the combatants and this should therefore be used as a confidence-building exercise. At this collection phase, incentives are often used to encourage groups to disarm.

Reintegration

Reintegration has two phases, initial reinsertion and long-term reintegration. Reinsertion addresses the most immediate needs of ex-combatants in terms of relief, providing a safety net for their initial arrival into their communities. Cash allowances in installments (to prevent abuse) and/or reinsertion packages containing household goods, land, farming equipment and housing materials are handed out. Reintegration has the long-term focus of assisting the community and ex-combatant in the difficult transition into civilian life. Former fighters enter job placement services, participate in skills training, win scholarships, or enter reintegration programmes. This phase is usually run by civilians, and requires co-ordination between various national and international organisations. It is important that this stage is started soon after demobilisation, because if demobilised fighters have to wait to be reintegrated they may become frustrated and return to fighting. Reintegration typically includes 5 steps:

1 gathering information on the needs of ex-combatants;
2 conducting orientation briefing and counselling;
3 providing subsidies and benefits;
4 social reintegration or sensitisation campaigns; and
5 economic reintegration programmes.

The DDR process in the overall peace-building process

The presence of weapons in society makes peace-building a very difficult task, especially when there is wide availability and use of small arms in civil wars, and both combatants and civilians own weapons. Without the removal of arms and the demobilisation of armed groups, the potential for a return to conflict is very high. Therefore, the DDR process is a fundamental step in the peace-building process. Many international policymakers consider DDR to be one of the most vital elements in the entire peace process, and the World Bank has defined a successful DDR programme as "the key to an effective transition from war to peace".[4] The success of DDR after conflict also represents the 'moment of truth' for any peace-building process, therefore in order to build sustainable peace special attention has to be paid to the long-term prospects of the ex-combatants who are giving up their livelihood.

Peace-building is essentially about removing or weakening factors that breed or sustain conflict, and reinforcing factors that build positive relations and sustain peace. Since DDR aims to remove the means of violence, such as small arms, from society and aims to reintegrate ex-combatants into functioning communities, it contributes greatly to the overall aims and objectives of peace-building. DDR programmes also lay the foundations for reconciliation as they bring the communities and ex-combatants together in a constructive way through education programmes and community-building projects. Reintegration programmes often include projects that equip the ex-combatants with life and education skills to enable them to become contributing members of society. It must be emphasised that reintegration programmes also need to focus on communities and ensure that they are part of the process and take ownership of reintegration so that the transition is a smooth and mutually beneficial one.

Successful reintegration programmes are also important for peace-building as ex-combatants who do not find peaceful ways of earning an income are likely to return to conflict. Dissatisfied veterans can also play a large role in undermining reconciliation efforts and destabilising social order if there are not programmes for them to join.

The case of Angola

Since the signing in April 2002 of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Cessation of Hostilities, between the military leaders of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the civil war in Angola has been declared at an end. Angola is now faced with the challenging task of post-conflict peace-building in an unstable

social, economic and political environment, and in the midst of a severe humanitarian crisis.

A DDR process is underway in Angola as part of the peace-building effort. The MOU updated the military components of the Lusaka Protocol, governing the DDR of UNITA troops and the integration of the armed forces. The DDR process in Angola is unique in that its provisions are the result of a military victory and negotiations between the FAA and UNITA, there is a limited role for the international community and no provision for formal third party monitoring.[5] The DDR process in Angola is also unique in that the government has assumed the management and financing of the process. Two institutional structures were created for the process, the Joint Military Commission (JMC) to oversee the application of the MOU, and a Technical Group (TG) to assist the JMC in terms of drawing up timetables for the implementation of DDR activities. The MOU stated that ex-combatants were to receive benefits such as demobilisation cards, five months' salary, travel expenses, resettlement kits and vocational training. The MOU planned 80 days for the completion of the disarmament and demobilisation phases, but nearly double the anticipated number of UNITA soldiers arrived in the quartering areas, most of them with their families, which created enormous logistical problems for which the JMC and TG and humanitarian partners were unprepared. These structures were also not flexible or sensitive to the needs of the beneficiaries.[6]

The lack of adequate planning and unrealistic timetables resulted in huge numbers of ex-combatants not receiving the necessary supplies or attention, and an increase in criminal activity. Health problems and malnutrition further complicated the situation in the camps. The locations were not ideally located and in some instances were inaccessible to receiving aid. These challenges hampered and prolonged the disarmament and demobilisation process. The government declared the first phases complete in August 2002, but it was evident that the process was not complete by the fact that vast numbers of ex-combatants had not been registered and that many weapons had not been verified.[7] In addition, the dismantling of the JMC came about before the phase was adequately complete. This illustrates that the DDR process cannot be rushed; moving onto the reintegration

phase was fraught with complications because the previous phases were incomplete. The disarmament process was ad hoc and the government eager to close all quartering areas quickly. This has resulted in future problems for the overall DDR process. For example, ex-combatants' morale has been negatively affected and ex-combatants who were forced to leave the camps that were closing did not receive demobilisation cards and therefore cannot get the benefits owed to them.

Another reason why the DDR process is hampered with difficulties is the government's reluctance to significantly involve the UN, while the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were criticised for being slow to react because they had to secure government permission to enter the quartering areas. Related to this, there is limited co-ordination between the various actors. Although the FAA is responsible for assisting the ex-combatants, the World Food Programme (WFP) and NGOs and humanitarian agencies have supported family members and distributed food and non-food items, seeds and tools, and helped with family tracing.[8] The World Bank also disbursed financial aid to ex-combatants. Currently, the conditions have stabilised, although access to the quartering areas has not improved and vast amounts of funds are needed to implement reintegration programmes. There have also been complaints that the government has not gone far enough to assist the ex-combatants in terms of vocational training and handing out salaries. In addition, there is a concern

Angolan General Cruz Neto (C) promoting ex-Unita guerilla officers in order to integrate them into the Angolan national armed forces in Luanda in 2002

that the settlements are becoming permanent and that ex-combatants and their families are not being moved into reintegration quickly enough and do not want to move back to their communities. As a consequence of the war, communities are also traumatised and fragmented, and thus resistant to receiving the ex-combatants. This has caused communal conflict.

There are still up to 30 quartering areas open and just over 20 percent of the total disarmed and demobilised have been resettled, although 80 percent received demobilised documents and were ready to move to the next phase.[9] A related problem was that the cash benefits that were distributed were not properly marketed as they were disproportionate to local market salaries and prices, and ex-combatants spent them on non-essential goods such as alcohol. The delivery of resettlement kits was difficult during the rainy season and there were problems in procurement.[10] From the outset there was no clear framework for reintegration, and this caused enormous problems once the ex-combatants were demobilised. This illustrates the importance of planning for all three phases prior to the commencement of disarmament.

There was no provision made in the DDR programme to disarm civilians, and studies show that 10 percent of the uncollected arms are in the hands of civilians, posing a short-term security threat. The economic and security value of weapons in the hands of civilians and ex-combatants in the context of poverty, as in Angola, has to be taken into account when implementing DDR programmes.[11] Berdal notes that "disarmament and weapons-control measures have limited value unless those that are being disarmed are reasonably satisfied with security and economic incentives offered in return".[12]

Despite the many difficulties facing the DDR programme, a great advantage in Angola is the fact that the peace process is home-grown. In addition to this, due to the FAA's victory over UNITA, the belligerents fairy quickly agreed on a ceasefire and there was unhindered political will demonstrated in the completion of the Lusaka process.[13]

Conclusion

DDR has proved to be complex, time-consuming and expensive, but essential to sustaining lasting peace in post-conflict societies. National governments are usually directly involved in planning and implementing DDR programmes in partnership with international organisations, usually the UN, local NGOs and donors. It is therefore important that all DDR efforts are co-ordinated and well funded to be sustainable. The environment around DDR is fragile and communities can often strongly oppose the reintegration of ex-combatants and ex-combatants may enter into criminal or violent activities that threaten the process. All these challenges need to be considered and the DDR process well planned before implementation to avoid the pitfalls experienced recently in countries undergoing DDR. DDR practitioners also need to take note of lessons learned from programmes elsewhere, such as the one in Angola, when designing DDR programmes for countries making the difficult transition from war to peace.

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Endnotes

1   M. Fusato (2003). *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants.* University of Colorado; available online at www.beyondintractability.org/m/demobilisation.

2   Kofi Annan (2000). *Report of the Secretary-General on the Role of the United Nations Peacekeeping in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.* New York: UN, p. 2.

3   Mats Berdal (1996). *Disarmament and Demobilization After Civil Wars.* Adelphi Paper, 303. London: International Institute for Strategic Studies.

4   Nat Colletta, Marcus Kostner, and Ingo Wiederhofer (1996). *Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition: The Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-combatants in Ethiopia, Namibia, and Uganda.* Washington DC: World Bank.

5   G. Otieno (ed.) (2003). 'Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Angola', *African Security Review* 12 (1).

6   *Ibid.*

7   *Ibid.*

8   J. Gomes and I. Parsons (2003). *Sustaining the Peace in Angola: An Overview of Current Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration.* Pretoria: ISS Monograph no 83.

9   *Ibid.*

10   *Ibid.*

11   *Ibid.*

12   *Ibid.*

13   *Ibid.*