

Humanitarian Practice Network

# HPN

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# Humanitarian Exchange

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### About HPN

The Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience. *The views and opinions expressed in HPN's publications do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or the Overseas Development Institute.*

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This edition of *Humanitarian Exchange* features articles on how the humanitarian system can more effectively address and respond to chronic vulnerability, with a focus on Malawi and Niger. Chronic vulnerability refers to an enduring susceptibility to the effects of external shocks on life and livelihoods – a susceptibility that is not acute or transient, but constant and cyclical. In Southern Africa and the Sahel, this vulnerability is shaped by a mixture of problems, including food insecurity, HIV/AIDS, climatic variability, weak governance systems and unremitting poverty. Combined, these factors mean that many households and individuals live permanently on the edge of crisis.

The articles in this issue illustrate how chronic vulnerability challenges the humanitarian system. In particular, it demands better information, so that appropriate responses are developed to mitigate and address the human consequences of emergencies. We have early-warning and vulnerability systems, but gaps need to be plugged if chronic vulnerability is not to lead to hidden crises. As one of our contributors argues, information and analysis are not a luxury, but a prerequisite.

One of the lessons that emerges from the articles published here is that understanding chronic vulnerability and preventing and responding to slow-onset emergencies requires humanitarian and development



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actors to work together more coherently and collaboratively. This means that agencies, donors and governments need to have a level of flexibility and responsiveness (as well as the political will) to adapt their long-term, developmental policies and interventions in a timely fashion to address immediate crises. At the same time, several authors point out that social protection entitlements and more sophisticated market interventions have a role to play in alleviating and preventing emergencies from occurring.

The first of this issue's policy and practice articles explores the implications of the international court in Sierra Leone for the relationship between humanitarians and human rights practitioners. Other contributors focus on issues of organisational learning and management; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programming within the context of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan; the peer review process adopted by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR); and the provision of post-disaster housing in Tamil Nadu. We hope you enjoy this issue, and as ever we welcome your feedback.



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private firms to meet their responsibilities. The way NGOs see their role in relation to the state and local society – and their need for funds – will largely determine how they answer that call.

MSF does not see itself as an agent of social or political change. Disagreements over these changes are often the root causes of conflicts, whether by pitting groups against each other or providing the justification for a foreign military intervention to bring about regime change. Therefore, to be a proponent or an implementing partner of such changes would be to take a stake in the ongoing conflict. For MSF, on principle, it does not that the political authority overseeing a process of reconstruction is a national one or an occupying power. It is not for MSF to judge the degree of legitimacy of a political authority, nor whether the services this authority is providing to the population under its rule are an exercise in sovereignty, or represent international legal obligations.

What matters is whether the dynamics of an open or underlying conflict leave parts of the civilian population unattended or exposed to harm, man-made or natural. Independence in answering these needs is necessary, though not always sufficient, to guard against being caught up in the logic of the war. Phases of relative normality or reconstruction taking place under occupation or in a lasting civil war often make it difficult for MSF to define its programmes in accordance with how it sees its role, as emergency, reconstruction and possibly development issues may be intertwined. NGOs that do not shy away from being active in social policies and governance issues certainly will not face similar operational

dilemmas. But it should matter to them that their activities take place under the overarching rule of an occupying power, whether they implement its policies or not. Over time, the resentment that often builds up within a population against foreign rule can lead to an equally violent rejection of all changes brought about by outside actors, their claimed neutrality notwithstanding.

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## Reflections on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in Sudan

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Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) is quickly assuming a lead role in 'post-conflict' theatres around the world. At one time the preserve of defence ministries and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), development donors and agencies are increasingly joining in. Since the early 1990s, the World Bank and other bilateral donors have supported over 20 demobilisation and reintegration programmes; the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has assisted more than 45 arms reduction initiatives over the same period. Funding has grown apace.

Despite growing enthusiasm for DDR within defence and development circles, there is a surprising lack of evidence as to whether or not it works. With the exception of a smattering of assessments, post-mortems and superficial indicators relating to the number of weapons collected and the number of ex-combatants demobilised, there is virtually no proof that such interventions strengthen 'human security'.

This article provides a critical overview of DDR ahead of a massive programme scheduled for southern Sudan as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in 2002. It urges programme planners to challenge the formulaic approaches that currently predominate, and argues that a sound diagnosis of the 'post-conflict' environment, along with flexible and proactive implementation, monitoring and evaluation, are crucial to achieving a 'successful' DDR.

### The challenges of DDR

A sizeable literature has emerged over the past two decades to describe lessons learned and best practices in DDR. This was spearheaded in large part by the World Bank following 'successful' DDR operations in Africa and Central America. By the late 1990s, DPKO had developed a Best Practices Unit, and with training and research institutes

around the world began preparing manuals on DDR. Following a two-year consultation period starting in 2003, UNDP and DPKO completed a set of guidelines, the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), to ensure improved coordination and coherence between UN agencies. While the importance of local context was acknowledged in early writings on the subject, DDR rapidly adopted a formulaic and conventional approach on the ground.

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This approach has a number of core characteristics. DDR is frequently mandated by UN Security Council resolutions, terms and timelines are determined by outside donors and the process is usually part of on-going peace operations. Thus by definition it is top-down. National commissions and enabling institutions are only established afterwards, with the intention of inculcating ‘national ownership’ and civilian oversight – though the precise dimensions of this ownership vary enormously from situation to situation. A list of beneficiaries, together with carefully prepared management information systems, are expected to ensure that DDR is targeting the right people. Incentives are often tailored to individuals, and specially designed programmes are introduced to address the ‘specific needs’ of female ex-combatants, children, the disabled and other ‘vulnerables’.

DDR seldom moves forward in the sequenced and linear fashion anticipated by donors and project planners. Instead, a host of problems frequently emerge, ranging from competing objectives amongst donors and parties to the DDR; the poor articulation of benchmarks; flawed selection criteria; limited assessed funding for reintegration; and the mishandling of expectations.

A repeated challenge in the preparation, planning and design of conventional DDR relates to the conflicting objectives of such programmes among military specialists, development practitioners and donors. Peacekeepers often advance a persistent disarmament bias that envisions DDR as a short-term strategy to neutralise ‘spoilers’, collect arms and canton ex-combatants. Development practitioners advocate a longer-term perspective, in which DDR is regarded as a means of expanding the livelihood opportunities of ex-combatants and their dependants, bolstering the absorption capacity of communities of ‘return’, promoting reconciliation activities and reconstructing public utilities and services. Finally, donors regard DDR as a ‘political’ or a ‘developmental’ solution to security threats. While these are all clearly important perspectives, they are seldom adequately reconciled in practice.

Because objectives are rarely agreed up-front, conventional DDR often lacks clear benchmarks or indicators of success. Instead, ‘process’ indicators are measured: the number of weapons collected and cantonment sites established, the range of ex-combatants processed and the funds disbursed. While these are important outcome markers, they do not account for ‘performance’. Real, tangible measurement of the outcomes of DDR – from reductions in fatal and non-fatal injuries in selected catchments to durable micro-enterprise development, restored livelihoods and income-generating opportunities – are either not established or poorly monitored across time and space. Performance indicators have been abandoned or watered down precisely because they are hard to meet. But such attitudes reveal a profound crisis of accountability at the heart of the DDR enterprise. With hundreds of millions of dollars currently being dispensed on these programmes – up to \$69 million in Sudan alone – a more robust determination of success and failure is urgently required.<sup>1</sup>

Another challenge relates to the effective targeting of ex-combatants and the absence of satisfactory selection criteria. Because erstwhile factions regularly overestimate their force strength, it is often difficult to target and budget for conventional DDR. Although peace agreements often include projections for armed forces and the police in newly constituted security forces, they seldom adequately reflect the number of combatants, guerrillas and militia factions on the payroll or under arms. The Sudanese government, for example, estimates the northern faction of the Sudanese People’s Defence Force (SPDF) at 43,000 men (and literally hundreds of thousands more in other factions), all of whom are expected to enter the disarmament and reintegration process envisaged under the CPA. The SPLM puts its strength at 260,000 armed recruits – including veterans. Both estimates are likely to be between two and ten times higher than the actual number. Without firm agreement on the number or characteristics of combatants, interventions will fail from the outset.

Reintegration represents perhaps the trickiest component of a demobilisation and reintegration programme. In post-conflict societies, where absorption capacities and employment opportunities are limited, reintegration is exceedingly challenging. It is also severely under-funded. Donors and DDR planners repeatedly privilege more visible activities such as the gathering of hardware at the expense of the more complex process of regenerating the capacities and capabilities of beneficiaries and communities.

### Alternative approaches

Although donors and policymakers continue to favour conventional DDR as described above, alternative approaches have emerged over the past two decades. These include ‘collective’, ‘area-based’ and ‘community-centred’ interventions. The core innovation of these three approaches is not necessarily in their specific institutional or even programmatic design, but rather the pragmatic acknowl-

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to generous support to DPKO, the UK Department for International Development, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence have together committed over £3 million to Sudan’s anticipated DDR since 2003.

edgement that they flow from a sound diagnosis of the context in which they operate.

Broadly speaking, *collective DDR* is premised on the expansion of the incentive structure and caseload beyond the individualised approach propounded by conventional DDR. An underlying assumption is that DDR will be more cost-effective and self-regulating if incentives are provided to groups of former combatants. Instead of pre-selecting candidates to enter a programme, assault rifles and ordnance are provided anonymously to implementing agencies through middlemen recruited from amongst the combatants themselves. Small groups of beneficiaries are provided with monetary or non-monetary incentives in successive 'stages' on the basis of carefully monitored progress. Former combatants from opposing sides have been known to begin trade networks and joint micro-enterprise projects, and the programme becomes self-regulating on account of the internal controls and stigmas associated with non-compliance and poor performance.

*Area-based DDR* is grounded in the expectation that, by targeting affected communities rather than individuals, particularly communities with large clusters of ex-combatants, more sustainable returns and reconciliation can be promoted. Implementing agencies seek to harness the labour of ex-combatants and unemployed civilians through quick-impact projects to rebuild public infrastructure. Reconciliation activities are thus indirectly stimulated through the creation and strengthening of a range of services, including marketing boards, schools and vocational institutes, transport and communication facilities and community policing. This represents a distinct shift away from rewarding returning combatants with individual monetary incentives.

*Community-centred DDR* is often undertaken following participatory consultations with communities of return. The programme is executed by civilian/combatant committees at the municipal level. The designation of beneficiaries is determined locally, incentives emerge democratically and the definition of priorities for advancing and measuring community security are context-specific. Implementing

agencies support 'peace agents' from within the community, and bolster existing social and customary norms that stigmatise arms misuse. The programme thus inculcates genuine ownership from below, as well as through national enabling mechanisms such as DDR Commissions.

## Conclusions

As Sudan prepares for its massive disarmament and reintegration programme, the international community would do well to consider the lessons of the past. As it currently stands, the CPA advances a conventional approach to DDR, which aims to contribute to 'creating an enabling environment for human security and to support post-peace-agreements social stabilization across the Sudan'. Guiding principles include national ownership through 'recognised' enabling mechanisms, including National Commissions for DDR in the north and south, coordination between the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and UNDP, the promotion of fairness, transparency and gender sensitivity in all programming, the equitable treatment of ex-combatants and a focus on children and family reunification.

While these are laudable objectives and must be encouraged, Sudan is a formidably complex environment with dozens of factions on both sides. Fortunately, the integrated UNMIS DDR unit has acknowledged the importance of evidence-based and bottom-up approaches towards promoting 'community security', and is actively preparing a disarmament and reintegration programme that builds on past experience. With more than 122 professional staff, the programme is expected to ensure linkages with longer-term security sector reform, prepare a 'community security fund' to identify and support security needs in a participatory manner, and fan out disarmament activities to non-combatants. Ultimately, active reflection and flexibility will be vital if human security is to be genuinely realised.

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