

# Meeting the unmet needs: women, gender and DDR:

## @PKO Now! No.109

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September 9, 2020

In many parts of the world, warfare, violence and arms are typically associated with masculinity. However, as seen in Nepal<sup>1</sup>, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, El Salvador<sup>2</sup> and other countries<sup>3</sup>, women have taken part in armed conflicts - even as front-line combatants. In fact, a study suggests that close to 40% of the civil conflicts that took place between 1979 to 2009 involved female combatants<sup>4</sup>. Despite their involvement, women's specific needs and inclusion in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)<sup>5</sup> measures as well as in the overall peace processes have been long overlooked. A conflict analysis claims that, while the contexts as to which conflicts erupt may differ, "the conflict scenarios were strikingly similar in one aspect - women were visible in conflict-making but invisible in peace-making"<sup>6</sup>.

In the recent decades, the international community has started to address the gender blindness of DDR programmes. Unanimously adopted in 2000, the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was a ground-breaking resolution that encourages "all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants"<sup>7</sup>. The UN has taken a number of initiatives, including the development of the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) and an operational guide. The IDDRS is a set of guidelines for policy makers and practitioners alike, which signifies the importance of a number of cross-cutting issues, including gender mainstreaming<sup>8</sup>.

The key purpose of DDR is to enhance security, reduce and control arms, set the environment for reconstruction and development, and prevent the re-emergence of a conflict<sup>9</sup>. To do so, DDR primarily aims to enable ex-combatants to embrace new social structure, learn skills to attain gainful employment, and ultimately reintegrate to the society as active agents of peace<sup>10</sup>. Principally, DDR includes three main phases – disarmament, demobilization and reintegration<sup>11</sup>. To put it simply, disarmament concerns the control and disposal of arms of combatants and, if applicable, of the civilian population. Demobilization refers to the formal discharge of combatants from armed forces or armed groups.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, reintegration is a long-term process, which concerns the socio-economic reintegration and acquirement of a civilian status<sup>13</sup>.

While traditional DDR has mainly targeted male ex-combatants, the IDDRS recommends to involve more women and mainstream gender<sup>14</sup>. Many of the conditions and considerations needed to integrate ex-combatants and other personnel associated with the armed forces and groups into DDR programmes are applicable for both men and women. However, there are additional, unique challenges and considerations when involving women<sup>15</sup>.

### **Women in warfare – who are they, what do they do, and what are their challenges?**

The success of DDR and overall peace processes depends on a number of contextual elements and there is no one-size-fits-all solution. At the same time, DDR programmes are known to gain effectiveness when various needs of men and women are addressed in the process<sup>16</sup>. Mainstreaming gender is an intricate, sensitive and a highly politicized matter. Addressing the current gaps in terms of engagement and inclusion of women, require a thorough understanding of, including but not limited to, the motivation behind women's engagements in conflict, the role they played, and the particular needs of women involved in armed conflict in post-conflict era.

There are various motivations and other background contexts as to why women engage in armed warfare. Some may join in support of political ideologies, while others may be enlisted through threat and abduction<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, as in the case of Nepal<sup>18</sup>, Peru<sup>19</sup> and

other armed groups in the African continent<sup>20</sup>, their promise of gender equality and freedom attracted local women<sup>21</sup>. For some women, participation in militancy symbolized a pathway to women's emancipation, abolishment of other forms of discrimination and inequality, and transition from oppressive, conventional gender norms<sup>22</sup>. In fact, women have acquired positions of command and authority as seen in the cases of Liberia and other civil wars in Africa<sup>23</sup>.

Women play diverse roles in armed forces and groups. There are the female combatants, who take on front-line combats and perform other tasks that are no different from men<sup>24</sup>. Other than the combatants, there are the female supporters or female associated with armed forces and groups (FAAFGs), who mainly perform supportive duties, such as logistics, translation, radio operation, camp management, cooking and nursing<sup>25</sup>. There are also the female dependants, who are financially and socially dependent on the combatants (e.g. wives, children, and siblings)<sup>26</sup>.

While women engaged in armed conflict may enjoy a certain level of status and power during wartime, they face numerous challenges in post-conflict context. Given the diverse ways in which they engage and experience war, their needs are far from unanimous. First, many women undergo a series of traumatic experiences by witnessing and/or directly engaging in extreme violence. While men are also at risk, women are more likely to fall victim to conflict-related sexual violence. This particular nature of being a perpetrator of violence as well as a victim<sup>27</sup>, results in a unique combination of physical, psychological and social needs<sup>28</sup>. Second, studies also note the issue of identity crisis. Women, who enjoyed an elevated position during war, may struggle to re-adapt to the conventional gender norms once the armed conflict is over. They may be disillusioned, finding themselves yet again in a subordinate position to men, confined in private spheres, and barred by legal and other structural discrimination<sup>29</sup>. Third, women may face a daunting range of social stigma, as they are seen to counter local, conservative ideals of femininity<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, women may face double standards. For example, in some contexts, while disabled male ex-combatants are hailed as heroes, disabled female ex-combatant are perceived as a burden to the local community as they cannot perform the duties expected of them<sup>31</sup>. Lastly, many women and men in armed conflict lack formal education and vocational training, and in

some cases, are illiterate. However, in most circumstances, women tend to have lower levels of education and training than men<sup>32</sup>. Yet, what profoundly distinguishes women from men is that women often shoulder the obligation and the burden to look after their children and family members<sup>33</sup>. This has an implication on women's access to training and capacity building opportunities, especially for those who have limited or no support from their partners (due to their absence, disability, missing, still in fighting or death) or family members. Given such contexts, options for women to access information on job market, acquire necessary education and training, utilize hard and soft skills earned during militancy, find gainful employment and access credit become severely limited compared to men<sup>34</sup>.

### **Challenges involving women, mainstreaming gender in DDR**

When it comes to inclusion of women in DDR, literature documents a parameter of challenges and shortcomings. To mention a few, women engaged in armed conflict may not prefer to be associated with the armed forces or groups in post-conflict setting for out of fear of social stigma and threat to personal security<sup>35</sup>. Hence, they may resist participating in DDR programmes. Second, while DDR programmes do not explicitly exclude women, they may unintentionally do so by narrowing their target to those who are armed<sup>36</sup>. Since women are less likely than men to be armed, they are often excluded from the target group<sup>37</sup>. Hence, FFAFGs and dependants, who may take on supportive, non-combat roles, are more likely to be disqualified from DDR programmes<sup>38</sup>. Lastly, it also does little justice, when ill-designed, formal reintegration programmes allow women to only participate in vocational trainings for professions that have been traditionally performed by women, for example, weaving, cooking and tailoring<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, there has been cases where female ex-combatants were trained in a vocation that had little market demand in the post-war economy<sup>40</sup>. Hence, understanding the post-conflict economy and gender context, roles of women in militancy, the challenges and stigmas they face, and the kind of skills and competencies they possess, would enhance the quality of DDR programmes<sup>41</sup>.

### **The IDDRS and mainstreaming gender in DDR programmes**

The IDDRS, aims to provide guidance to DDR activities based on the past interventions and

lessons learned. The IDDRS, a useful tool for both practitioners and policy makers, covers numerous topics, which one of them is gender mainstreaming. To depart from the conventional DDR programmes that focus almost only on male combatants, the IDDRS notes the necessity to meet the needs of the following five groups: male and female adult combatants; children associated with armed forces and groups; those working in non-combat roles (including women); ex-combatants with disabilities and chronic illnesses; and dependants<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore, the IDDRS recommends mainstreaming gender at every stage of the process. This starts from ensuring the needs of women and girls (whether combatants, female supports, FAFGs or dependants) are met and reflected during peace negotiations, conducting gender-sensitive needs assessment, defining the eligibility criteria for DDR, providing trainings and so forth. As for the eligibility criteria, the IDDRS encourages to go beyond the simplistic criteria of whether one is armed or not. Instead, it recommends considering, for example, whether the women have been trained to use a weapon, performed essential support functions, or whether she is economically dependent on a male ex-combatant. In doing so, a larger proportion of women would become eligible to all, combinations of, or at least one of the key phases of DDR programmes.

One may question the necessity to include the FAFGs and dependants in DDR programmes. The IDDRS notes that “even if they are not as much of a security risk as combatants, the DDR process by definition, will break down their social support systems through the demobilization of those on whom they relied to make a living”<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, ignoring their needs and excluding them would exacerbate their insecurities and overall vulnerability during their transition period from a military to a civilian lifestyle. Moreover, given that DDR is often one of the earliest interventions in post war, exclusion would result in delays in meeting their immediate needs.

One of the key aims of gender mainstreaming is to enhance the participation of women associated with conflict and responding to their needs. However, it is important to note that gender-sensitive DDR is also equally relevant and important for men as well. For example, male ex-combatants may face difficulties in securing gainful employment. As a result, they may feel frustration for not being able to fulfil the gender roles, which emotions can turn into violent behaviours<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, while women are more vulnerable to gender-based

violence and sexual violence, men are at a greater risk of other types of violence, such as homicide<sup>45</sup>. Hence, the IDDRS recommends that DDR combines both gender-sensitive interventions, as well as female-specific interventions<sup>46</sup>. By understanding how femininity and masculinity are defined in particular contexts, and how that shape stigmas, stress, and vulnerabilities, DDR programmes can better address the needs of both men and women.

## **The way forward**

Learning from the past experiences, DDR has evolved into a more comprehensive intervention, with links to a wide range of other interventions, for example, security sector reforms, cross-border population movement and food aid programmes<sup>47</sup>. Furthermore, a number of national actors heralds gender mainstreaming and inclusion of women and girls in DDR as one of their strategies in achieving the UNSCR 1325. For example, the Government of Japan signifies the importance of including gender perspectives into DDR interventions and responding to the needs of women and girls in their National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security<sup>48</sup>. However, given the current gaps, more work needs to be done. The early post-conflict period often provides a critical window of opportunity for women and men to redefine gender norms and promote gender equality<sup>49</sup>. As IDDRS notes, “leaving women out of the process underestimates the extent to which sustainable peace-building and security require them to participate equally in social transformation”<sup>50</sup>.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Dahal S. (2015) Challenging the Boundaries: The Narratives of the Female Ex-Combatants in Nepal. In *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

<sup>2</sup> de Watteville, N. (2002). Addressing Gender Issues in Demobilization and Reintegration Programs. Africa Region Working Paper Series, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> Other countries include, but not limited to, Liberia, Colombia, and other African countries.

<sup>4</sup> Braithwaite, A., & Ruiz, L. B. (2018). Female combatants, forced recruitment, and civil conflict outcomes. *Research & Politics*, 5(2), 1–7. doi: 10.1177/2053168018770559

<sup>5</sup> Depending on the programme, reintegration is sometimes replaced by rehabilitation or other terms, or both reintegration and rehabilitation are used (DDRR). In this column, the author follows the guidelines and definitions of IDDRS as well as the terminology used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.

<sup>6</sup> Shekhawat, S. (2015). Introduction: Women in conflict and peace-making. In *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace* (pp. 1-19). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>7</sup> S/RES/1325 (2000), page 3, item 13.

<sup>8</sup> For further information on IDDRS, refer to: UNDDR (<https://www.unddr.org/>)

<sup>9</sup> Modules 1.10 Introduction to the IDDRS of the following reference: UNDDR. (2014). *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*. Retrieved from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)

<sup>10</sup> Access United Nations Peacekeeping for further information: United Nations Peacekeeping (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>)

<sup>11</sup> Modules 1.10 Introduction to the IDDRS of the following reference: UNDDR. (2014). *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*. Retrieved from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)

<sup>12</sup> Depending on the needs and the budget, “reinsertion,” a short-term intervention is implemented as a part of demobilization. It aims to meet the basic needs (e.g. shelter, water, food etc.) of combatants and their families.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed definition, please refer to: UNDDR. (2014). *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*. Retrieved from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)

<sup>14</sup> Modules 5.10 Women, Gender and DDR of the following reference: UNDDR. (2006). *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*. Retrieved from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)

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- <sup>17</sup> Azmi, F. (2015). I Want My Wings Back to Fly in a New Sky: Stories of Female Ex-LTTE Combatants in Post-War Sri Lanka. In *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace* (pp. 200-215). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- <sup>18</sup> Dahal S. (2015).
- <sup>19</sup> Boutron C. (2015) Women at War, War on Women: Reconciliation and Patriarchy in Peru. In *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace* (pp.149-166). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- <sup>20</sup> Coulter, C., Persson, M., & Utas, M. (2008). Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences (Vol. 3). Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute
- <sup>21</sup> Multiple references: 1. Dahal S. (2015); 2. Shekhawat, S. (2015). Visible in Conflict, Invisible in Peace: Positioning Women in the Militancy in Kashmir. In *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace* (pp. 100-116). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
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- <sup>23</sup> Coulter, C., Persson, M., & Utas, M. (2008).
- <sup>24</sup> Modules 5.10 Women, Gender and DDR of the following reference: UNDDR. (2006). Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards. Retrieved from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Democratic Progress Institute (2015)
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Dahal S. (2015), pg. 186.
- <sup>30</sup> Colekessian, A. (2009). Reintegrating gender: a gendered analysis of the Nepali rehabilitation process. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women UN-INSTRAW.
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- <sup>32</sup> International Labour Organization. (2010). Socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants: guidelines. Retrieved from [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms\\_141276.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_141276.pdf)
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> de Watteville (2002)
- <sup>35</sup> United Nations (2010), pp. 1-283, Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <http://www.iddrtg.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Operational-Guide-REV-2010-WEB.pdf> .
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Democratic Progress Institute (2015)
- <sup>38</sup> United Nations (2010)
- <sup>39</sup> Ortega, L. M. D., & Maria, L. (2009). Transitional justice and female ex-combatants: Lessons learned from international experience. *Disarming the past: Transitional justice and ex-combatants*, 158-189.
- <sup>40</sup> Azmi, F. (2015).
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- <sup>43</sup> Modules 5.10 Women, Gender and DDR, pg 11, of the following reference: UNDDR. (2006). *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*. Retrieved from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)
- <sup>44</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR. (2012)
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> IDDRS-Framework (n.d.). Retrieved April 14, 2020, from UNDDR IDDRS Framework(<https://www.unddr.org/iddrs-framework.aspx>)
- <sup>48</sup> For more information on Japan's commitments to mainstreaming gender in DDR, please access the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. (2019, September 27). Retrieved April 15, 2020, from Ministry of Foreign Affairs open a new window([https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/pc/page1we\\_000095.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/pc/page1we_000095.html))
- <sup>49</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR. (2012)
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