Helpdesk Research Report: Reintegration Best Practice and Guidance
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Query: Please provide authoritative resources on best practice / lessons learned from reintegration programmes (resources focusing on countries in conflict other than Afghanistan would be particularly useful).

Enquirer: DFID

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1. Overview

There is a wealth of information available on best practice in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. This Helpdesk Research Report focuses on the most recent literature (mainly post-2004) from authoritative sources that focus on reintegration processes and operations.

Unfortunately, DDR programmes have often been judged as largely unsuccessful and several of the resources below emphasise that they are not suitable for every context. The following ‘lessons learned’ in relation to reintegration are repeated across the literature:

- Reintegration is a long process and programmes must be part of a wider security sector reform strategy.
- Reintegration should be nationally led and take a participatory approach, including various stakeholders.
- Planning for reintegration should begin early.
- Clear selection criteria should be established from the outset.
- Reintegration programmes should have a clear end date and move quickly into broader development programmes that incorporate the needs of ex-combatants.
- Programmes should not solely benefit ex-combatants to reduce the likelihood of resentment in the community.
- Programmes should be tailored to the local context.
- Reintegration is most likely to be successful if carried out in a context of strong political will and local community level support.
- Reintegration programmes must be well resourced.
- Vocational training has been shown to have limited success. Education and training should always be matched to the market dynamics of the community to increase chances of long-term employment. Apprenticeships have shown promise.
- Ex-combatants should not be treated as a homogenous group. In particular, the needs of women and children must be taken into account.
- Reintegration should take a gender-sensitive approach where the needs and concerns of women are deliberately canvassed and included.
Reintegration of children is a complex process that should be dealt with separately from adult DDR.

No resources were found that specifically discuss reintegration in countries that are ‘in-conflict’. Instead, several resources emphasise that reintegration must be part of an ongoing peace process and is most likely to be successful where there is generally a high commitment to peace and where ex-combatants do not perceive threats to their personal security. However, a number of the resources recognise that ‘post-conflict’ environments generally experience insecurity and consider the impact of high insecurity on reintegration programmes.

2. UN resources


The IDDRS are a comprehensive set of policies, guidelines and procedures developed by the UN covering all areas of DDR. The IDDRS consolidate policy guidance on DDR, providing a United Nations integrated approach on the planning, management and implementation of DDR processes. They are also the most complete repository and best practices drawn from the experience of all United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes involved in DDR.

Several sections are relevant to this query, in particular part 4.3: http://www.untdr.org/iddrs/04/30.php on Social and Economic Reintegration. The following ‘guiding principles’ are outlined:

- Clarify objectives and expected results with all parties
- Start planning for reintegration as soon as possible
- Ensure national ownership
- Ensure community participation
- Develop national capacity
- Consider regional implications
- Engage donors
- Engage potential spoilers
- Make reintegration part of a wider recovery strategy
- Balance equity with security
- Ensure a timely transition from supporting individuals to supporting communities
- Be ‘people-centred’


This handbook aims to guide UNHCR and partner staff in working on reintegration issues. Part B is the most relevant to this query, as it gives detailed guidance on planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating repatriation and reintegration operations. In particular, the authors:

- emphasise the need to begin planning early
- advocate an integrated, area-based and participatory approach and
- highlight the need to work in partnership with all the relevant stakeholder communities, including beneficiary communities, governments, donors, UN agencies, civil society groups and the private sector.
Part B contains some guidance specific to UNHCR staff. Part A discusses the broader context of reintegration, using UNHCR’s 4Rs framework (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction). Part C outlines institutional support mechanisms for UNHCR and other UN staff.


This Practice Note shares lessons learned from UNDP DDR programmes. It is aimed at UNDP staff but does identify a number of more general lessons for reintegration design and implementation:

- To achieve security objectives, support should be given to achieve full initial socio-economic reintegration, but to reduce the likelihood of resentment amongst civilian populations, programmes should move quickly from specifically targeting ex-combatants to broader community based and national development programmes.
- DDR programmes should be context specific and tailored to the nature and causes of the conflict. State capacity and the security context should also be taken into account.
- Strong political will, local commitment and sustained international support are all critical. DDR programmes are built on multiple partnerships.
- Significant time and resources must be invested in assessing, planning and designing programmes.
- Clear, unambiguous selection criteria should be established from the start.
- Sustained funding for the programme duration is important.
- The note emphasises that DDR must be part of a wider recovery strategy.


This short note presents a few short case studies and lists lessons learned from UNDP’s experiences of reintegration activities. It emphasises that reintegration is a long complex process and that it is difficult to ensure that the living standards of ex-combatants equals those of poorer segments of the civilian population. The authors argue that vocational training and skills development, which have tended to be a core element of UNDP reintegration strategies, have had limited success, mainly because of limited economic or employment opportunities in the areas where they have taken place. Some general lessons learned are identified:

- Programmes should have an end date and efforts should be made to avoid long-term dependency.
- Avoid large-scale absorption of ex-combatants in public services and parastatals.
- Advance planning is critical.
- Voluntary demobilisation is most likely to be successful.
- Combatants are a diverse group and should not be homogenised.
- Officers’ leadership and organizational experience can be useful in reconstruction efforts but their skills can also be applied to military or criminal activities. There is debate over whether benefits should be equitable to all, or whether officers should receive greater benefits.
- Any training should be relevant to the private sector job market to which the trainee will be returning.
When downsizing the government army, care should be taken to not exacerbate ethnic imbalances.

Initiatives to integrate disabled ex-combatants into normal life have been more effective than large-scale institutional care.

3. World Bank


The Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) is a multi-agency effort that operated from 2002 to 2009 to support demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, including Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. MDRP is financed by the World Bank and 13 donors: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK and the EC.

This paper makes a number of suggestions for the design of reintegration programmes. A mix of cash and in-kind entitlements and services (reinsertion support) is an important first element of reintegration but should be limited to between 6 and 12 months after demobilisation. Medium term reintegration programmes should then take over, assisting ex-combatants to develop livelihood skills. This is important as income and earning capacity are the most important factors in ex-combatants’ perceptions of reintegration success. All skills training should be relevant to the socio-economic profile of the ex-combatant and to the local economic trends and employment opportunities. Best practice in reintegration program design includes:

- Planning of pilot activities for reintegration support at the start of the DDR process
- Investing in regular communications and outreach with ex-combatants, communities and other stakeholders
- Ensuring specialized services and program adaptations for vulnerable groups of ex-combatants including children, women and the disabled
- Building broad-based partnerships that facilitate the evolution of reintegration activities into wider development programming.

The report argues that institutional structures and arrangements governing DDR and reintegration programmes can have a significant impact on effectiveness. “Minimum institutional features of particular relevance include: strong national ownership; the separation of political oversight and technical implementation bodies; decentralized programme structures; timely and regular monitoring and evaluation; rigorous financial systems and controls; and a clear exit strategy” (pii).


This paper specifically focuses on children and youth affected by conflict and has a section on demobilisation and reintegration. The authors advise that young ex-combatants can benefit more from psychosocial support provided through the family and local community than from institutionalised trauma programmes. Young ex-combatants often wish to resume
formal education but also face economic responsibility and therefore require tailored education programmes. Traditional vocational programmes have had mixed results. Instead, ‘second-chance’ education opportunities for over-age and working youth and apprenticeship programmes have had more success. The following 'lessons learned' in relation to reintegration are identified:

- Reintegration programmes tend to be male-dominated.
- Family tracing and community-based support should be central to reintegration, and should emphasise psychosocial support, education, and economic opportunities.
- Reintegration programmes must ensure a balance between the need to resume education and earn income.
- The limitations of straightforward vocational training must be understood.

### 4. UK Government

Stabilisation Unit, 2006, ‘Post-Conflict Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: A UK View’, Stabilisation Unit, UK

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This short Issues Note sets out UK guidance on DDR programming:

- Any adult DDR programme must be part of a peace settlement (child programmes can start earlier) and should be a state-led process.
- DDR is not appropriate everywhere and has sometimes, despite huge expense, been unsuccessful.
- DDR should be part of a wider recovery package.
- DDR is a long-term process, taking a minimum of 2-3 years. It should be done in conjunction with broader community based development activities.
- Planning for reintegration should start early, even before disarmament and demobilisation starts. Adequate resourcing is critical.
- Establish clear eligibility criteria.
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 requires that DDR programmes take into account the different needs of male and female ex-combatants. To facilitate this, women should be involved in the planning and design of DDR programmes.
- Parallel child and adult DDR programmes should be harmonised. Children should be separated from the command structure of the armed group as soon as possible. Attention should be paid to children’s particular needs including family tracing and reunification. Child DDR should follow the UN Paris Principles.

The note also highlights a number of ‘dilemmas and decisions’ that must be taken into account when planning DDR:

- It should be recognised that few DDR programmes have been wholly successful.
- Programmes must take account of the local context.
- DDR planning should commence during peace negotiations and be incorporated into peace settlements.
- DDR should be led by national actors including the government, the former armed opposition and civil society.
DDR is likely to fail if it is being implemented in an environment where target groups feel physically insecure. DDR should therefore only be undertaken as part of a wider Security Sector Reform (SSR) strategy.

Incorporating ex-combatants into national forces is complex and should only be used as a temporary measure.

DDR should be linked with transitional justice processes.

Cash packages are controversial and have not always had positive results.

Avoid time delays between disarmament / demobilisation and reintegration support.

5. Other sources

Nilsson, A., 2005, 'Reintegrating Ex-Combatants in Post-Conflict Societies', Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University


Chapter 11 of this SIDA paper makes a number of practical recommendations to guide the design and implementation of reintegration programmes:

Reintegration support should only be given if ex-combatants constitute a security threat, atrocities they may have committed could exacerbate conflict in society or if they are unable to support themselves due to social, economic and political marginalization.

Reintegration support should be avoided where there is no operational peace agreement, there is no political will to abide by the peace accord or where there is continued high level of violence so that combatants may fear for their security as they become civilians.

Ex-combatants physical security must be ensured through comprehensive security sector reform.

Reintegration programmes should focus on ensuring the economic security of ex-combatants via training. Apprenticeships and on-the-job training have proved most effective and creating employment opportunities in construction or infrastructure is also recommended.

Ex-combatants must be able to influence decisions affecting them and should be involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of reintegration programmes.

It is preferable if ex-combatants do not lose the societal prestige they gained during the conflict, although this can be difficult to ensure.

Attention should be paid to ‘healing the wounds of war’ at both an individual and community level.

Avoid reintegration assistance that only benefits ex-combatants to reduce the likelihood of resentment in the local population. Assistance to ex-combatants should ideally be incorporated into wider development projects.

Do not treat ex-combatants as a homogeneous group.

Reintegration in rural environments is easier and so ex-combatants with a rural origin should be encouraged to return. Assistance in rural locations should focus on providing access to land, and in urban environments focus on providing training and education.

To ensure cost-efficiency, recognize that much work can be done at a local level without external support and that preference should be given to demand-driven programmes that are based on proper market studies and address several problems simultaneously.

Be aware of contextual factors that complicate reintegration e.g. spoilers, access to natural resources, availability of arms and security vacuums.

Don’t equate national ownership with government ownership.
Have a clear exit strategy. Reintegration programmes should be as short term as possible and be quickly integrated into broader development strategies.


Traditional reintegration programming focuses on ex-combatants. This document discusses the alternative ‘community-focused reintegration’ (CFR) approach, which acknowledges the “greater breadth of vulnerable, war-affected population segments in need of such training, while seeking to promote reintegration by creating a safe environment in which elements of divided communities could interact” (p. 5). CFR programs have also provided spaces for dialogue; provided basic health and education training; and sought to develop practical skills in leadership, communication and conflict resolution. The training programmes are typically followed by small grants for community projects. Short-term evaluations of CFR programs in Burundi, the DRC and Liberia have demonstrated positive effects: there have been changes in community interactions and greater civic activism. The document stresses that these programmes can provide a platform for a broad range of other development interventions.


Section V of this paper highlights a number of ‘guiding principles’:

- DDR processes should be built on national leadership and ownership.
- DDR should be approached as a process, not a programme.
- DDR should be viewed as part of a wider security, stabilization and recovery strategy.
- DDR efforts should aim to build on previous experience and lessons learned.

The paper also sets out ‘guiding questions’ to shape the design of reintegration programmes.


This paper aims to inform Dutch policy-making on gender and DDR. It suggests the following best practice in relation to gender-sensitive reintegration programming:

- Target all men and women in armies with assistance, whether combatants or not, e.g. women support workers or women dependents.
- Respond to male and female combatants different economic, social and psychological reintegration needs.
- Trace and reach women before the start of the DDR programme
- Refer women to appropriate development assistance programmes and urge development organisations to prepare women adequately for their reintegration e.g. use of trauma counselling.
- Ensure the physical protection of women and consider relocating women where necessary.
- Reintegration programmes should target not just ex-combatants, but also their families and host communities, and be linked with broader development programmes.
Adapt economic reintegration activities to the different needs and opportunities of male and female beneficiaries.

Facilitate the social reintegration of female and male ex-combatants equally.

Use and support existing informal community efforts to support social reintegration.

Provide psychological counselling to female and male ex-combatants.

The report also contains a ‘Donor Checklist on Gender and DDR’.


This guidebook provides a comprehensive overview of all aspects of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. In-depth material on reintegration is presented from page 65, including practical advice on several aspects, for example resettlement, access to land, training, employment and social reintegration.


This paper considers what factors account for successful DDR at the micro-level, rather than what macro-organisational arrangements are conducive to DDR programmes. The authors analyse DDR programmes and processes in Sierra Leone and find little support for conventional views about the importance of age and gender in facilitating reintegration. Instead they argue that an individual’s prospect of gaining acceptance from family and wider society depends largely on the abusiveness of the unit in which he or she fought. In evaluating DDR programmes, they also find no evidence that those who participated had an easier time gaining acceptance from communities than those who did not participate.

6. Additional information

Author
This query response was prepared by Zoë Scott: zoe@gsdrc.org

Contributors
Prof. Paul Jackson (IDD, University of Birmingham)
Prof. Stefan Wolff (Nottingham University)
Huma Haider (GSDRC)
Shivit Bakrania (GFN-SSR)

Websites visited
Google, GSDRC, Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, World Bank, UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center, GFN-SSR, Bonn International Centre for Conversion, Stabilisation Unit, DFID, UNDP, Clingendael, Center for Global Development, Reliefweb, GTZ, USAID.
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