Current Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs are often based on ill-defined underlying assumptions about change and fall short when meeting the realities of war and peacebuilding. A thorough mapping of the underlying assumptions about change would enable better and more efficient DDR programs to be devised.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs are designed and intended to facilitate the transformation of combatants into civilians. Despite the abundant literature on the lessons to be learned from previous DDR processes, there is little evidence that DDR programs actually produce the desired

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Experiment with cash/capital-centred interventions in DDR programs.
- Do not focus solely on skills and vocational training as a reintegration approach.
- Integrate an explicit approach to underlying assumptions about change into the early phases of DDR program design to establish a clear alignment between the aims of reintegration and the best means available to achieve them.
The approaches, strategies and tactics of DDR programs are often based on ill-defined underlying assumptions about change.

"In other words, training does not provide jobs, and in fact it might not even provide access to employment at all. More often than not, training is poorly suited to labour market needs. Furthermore, without capital, the returns on skills training could be low."

outcomes. Important loopholes and gaps remain, in particular around the mechanisms at stake in the successful social and economic reintegration of former combatants. Very few DDR programs aim to achieve a sustainable reintegration of ex-combatants. Arguably, the aim has been to provide a tangible peace dividend and to stabilize the situation in the short term, as we have seen, for instance, in Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Sudan and Nepal.

**Ill-defined assumptions of change**

DDR approaches, strategies and tactics are rooted in assumptions about change that are at best ill-defined – for instance, the claim made by DDR programs in Liberia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan that unemployment is a root cause of conflict and that employment and training will therefore automatically foster peace. These assumptions are embedded in the approaches of practitioners and peacebuilding organizations, their capabilities and intervening methodologies, as well as in the perspectives of different stakeholders about conflict and peace.

DDR programming would benefit from a thorough mapping of the underlying assumptions of how change comes about – that is, the understandings of how to secure stability and the effective reintegration of ex-combatants. Program decisions are based on a number of factors, including assumptions about how to bring about the desired changes, such as sustainable peace. It is important to uncover these assumptions in order to test them against the realities of war and peacebuilding and to provide the basis for evaluating progress in the objective of reintegrating combatants.

Assumptions about change embedded in DDR include those presented in Table 1, though a systematic inquiry into ongoing and past DDR work is likely to reveal many others. Some assumptions concentrate on what needs to change: it may be an institution (an armed actor), a situation (war/armed violence) or a norm (the militarization of daily life). Other DDR programs focus on who needs to change, that is, which individuals and groups in society or which relationships need to change (conflict-prone combatants). Other program activities are tied directly to a particular intervention logic about how the change could ultimately happen.

A thorough mapping of the underlying assumptions about change would enable better and more efficient DDR programs to be drawn up. It would also make possible scrutiny of the central elements of DDR programmes and assessments of their efficiency in obtaining the stated goals. One is the very pervasive assumption that providing combatants with skills and vocational training will ensure their transformation into civilians and help them gain sustainable employment and income.

**Education and skills training does not provide jobs**

One of the most influential assumptions in DDR programs is that providing ex-combatants with education or vocational skills training is a first step in economic reintegration. However, the actual link between these activities and the desired change has recently been questioned. An independent evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) worldwide work with reintegration programmes concluded that ‘relevance can be limited and efforts conducted [are] often limited both financially and technically’. In many instances, DDR programmes send ex-combatants on vocational skills training courses assuming that they will automatically be integrated afterwards and that training will lead to employment, which in reality rarely happens. In this regard the evaluation concludes:

- Training or vocational training is just part of a continuous, systemic and coordinated reintegration process whereby ex-combatants receive support for further employment, self-employment and integration into markets;

- Training and/or vocational training is often delivered at a standard level, in some cases hampering the ability of many ex-combatants to acquire the necessary level of skills in what are already saturated markets (tailoring, carpentry, mechanics etc.);

- Training in other cases is perceived by ex-combatants as a first step towards further entitlements. Generally ex-combatants are not fully committed to the programme; and

- Follow-up microenterprise investments do not capitalize on state-of-the-art technology that could make a difference to programme beneficiaries.

Furthermore, the report states that the type, quality and length of the vocational skills training that is provided is central to the potential success of a DDR programme. However, in practice the type of training carried out often does not even amount to half of the duration required for a civilian in peace circumstances. In other words, training does not provide jobs, and in fact it might not even provide access to employment at all. More often than not, training is poorly suited to labour market needs. Furthermore, without capital, the returns on skills training could be low.

If the outcomes are that meagre, then why are education and skills training still so central to DDR? For some critical observers, vocational training persists because it is what donors and implementing actors know and are willing to fund, and it therefore involves little risk (the measurement of success is straightforward: the number of graduated trainees). If DDR has been ineffective in facilitating economic reintegration for former combatants, the reason may be that the programs’ approach to the problem is wrong because skills training will not be effective in certain economic situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory of Change</th>
<th>Expected Result</th>
<th>Assumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If combatants are disarmed and demobilized</td>
<td>Peace and Stability Reduction of violence</td>
<td>Chaos and violence causes citizens to mobilize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If ex-combatants are provided with skills and vocational training</td>
<td>Successful social and economic reintegration</td>
<td>Unemployed ex-combatants represent a threat. The provision of livelihoods enables ex-combatants to make a living through peaceful means</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. Underlying assumptions about change**
Unpopular capital-centred DDR activities show good results

In contrast to the poor results of training and education, recent research on DDR programmes has shown that capital-centred DDR activities are among the best performing ones. Capital-centric intervention refers to start-up grants, in-kind capital transfers and cash injections. In Burundi, for instance, a reinsertion allowance was offered for eighteen months, with the amount depending on rank. A business start-up grant worth about $1200 was also offered. Comparing the results for those who received it with those who did not, researchers found a large reduction in poverty among the former. This review of DDR experiences suggests that ex-combatants tend to use the cash received wisely to satisfy their immediate needs and that some manage to save and invest. In Liberia cash transfers had a positive impact on local and national security. This is reflected, for example, in the low levels of violence reported in parts of Liberia, where the Danish Refugee Council ran a dollar-a-day program for ex-combatants after the war ended. Injections of capital – cash, capital, livestock – seem to stimulate self-employment and raise long-term earning potential. The main assumption is that these programs are cost-effective and enable ex-combatants to expand their income generating activities. And yet most donors are reluctant to fund these initiatives due to the widespread concern that communities may feel that ex-combatants are being rewarded for actions that have caused them to suffer.

The need for theories of change

Theory of change thinking is increasingly being used in conflict and security programs by a wide range of actors. This is a process of analysis and learning that produces insights to support critical thinking throughout the program cycle. DDR programs need a robust intervention logic with clearly articulated and reasonably well-evidenced theories of change, as well as a results framework.

Making theories of change explicit will allow programmers to reveal the assumptions about how change works and why the chosen priorities function better than others.

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Coverphoto: Ganta, Liberia, 2006. Ex-combatants from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).