Gender and DDR: Lessons Learned from DDR Research
Written by Phoebe Donnelly
**Editorial note**

The findings from this report came from a review of approximately 80 resources by Phoebe Donnelly, Head of the Women, Peace and Security Program and a Senior Fellow at the International Peace Institute. Significant editorial input was provided by Frida Gabrielsson Kjärl, Senior DDR Officer at the FBA and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, DDR Specialist, FBA.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the FBA.

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Executive Summary

SINCE THE 1980s, women have been targeted for inclusion in only one-third of all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs.1 Including women in DDR is an essential starting point for developing gender-responsive interventions. But making DDR truly gender responsive means more than just adding women to DDR processes. It requires recognizing and understanding gender as a way to gain insight into context-specific power dynamics. Gender-responsive DDR also encompasses examining assumptions around security and masculinity.

The UN’s integrated approach to DDR has the ambitious goals of implementing DDR to build security, protect civilians and even promote gender equality. To work towards these goals requires seeing gendered relationships and how different aspects of integrated DDR processes, including DDR-related tools and reintegration support during conflict, reveal strengths and vulnerabilities of various gendered individuals. The launch of the revised UN approach to DDR in 2019, through the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), presents an opportunity to further strengthen the integration of a gender perspective in DDR.

A main finding of this report is that while research has highlighted the need to include women in DDR processes, there is less research on how to meaningfully integrate women as key actors and leaders. To support women’s participation and the integration of gender more broadly, this report provides specific examples of the gender dynamics of DDR processes drawn from countries such as the Central African Republic, Haiti, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Iraq, Somalia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Rwanda.

Similarly, while some actors have called for DDR practitioners to consider masculinities, there is little guidance on why and how to do this. This report highlights some of the ways in which militarized masculinities are promoted through membership in armed groups and how new forms of masculinity and pathways to manhood should be purposefully considered in DDR processes.

Finally, research has found that reintegration is the least prioritized component of DDR, yet it is essential for rethinking gendered roles and relationships. Reintegration is a moment of shifting gender dynamics and identities for men, women, boys, girls, and sexual and gender minorities. Failing to plan for the ways that shifting identities have long-term impacts on conflict-affected societies can lead to continuing cycles of violence.

In line with these three themes, this report includes the following recommendations to work towards gender-responsive DDR.

Recommendations.

Integrate gender in the overall objective and aim for integrated DDR processes, including when a DDR-related tool is mandated by a United Nations Security Council resolution.

• Conduct gender-sensitive analyses prior to any DDR-related intervention that include quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data and the gender dynamics and patterns of violence specific to the context. Specifically, assess barriers to the participation of women and girls, and consider former combatants, individuals associated with armed groups and communities set to receive these individuals.

1 Oliver Kaplan, DDR Program Dataset.
• Partner with civil society organizations and women’s groups working on gender issues at the start of any DDR-related intervention, maintain these relationships throughout the intervention, and promote the leadership of national and local partners.

• Prioritize and set aside funding for a long-term plan for the integration of gender that considers and addresses how gender-related expectations of men and women affect the gendered division of labour and the opportunities for a sustainable return to civilian life.

• Develop a shared monitoring and evaluation system to track reintegration interventions across gender, age and other key identity markers over time, and not only the number of participating women.

• Design DDR-related interventions that focus on alternative masculinities and paths to manhood. When it comes to livelihood opportunities, creatively address the interests and types of jobs men and women can fulfil to push back on stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

• Prioritize the conduct of systematic assessments and evaluations of gender-responsive DDR processes, to better understand the long-term impact of gender-responsive DDR.

• Support research that explores women’s and men’s motivations for joining and leaving armed groups and compare how these motivations differ across genders, ages and time periods.

List of Abbreviations

AGDTO  Armed Group Designated as Terrorist Organization
CAR   Central African Republic
CVR   Community Violence Reduction
DDR   Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPO   United Nations Department of Peace Operations
DRC   Democratic Republic of Congo
FARC-EP The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army
IDDRS Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
ISIS   Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IOM   International Organization for Migration
LRA   Lord’s Resistance Army
LTTE   Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MINUSMA United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
PRR   Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
RUF   Revolutionary United Front
SSR   Security Sector Reform
UNDP   United Nations Development Programme
UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WAM   Weapons and Ammunition Management
Introduction

IN THE MORE THAN FOUR DECADES since the creation of the concept of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), what have researchers learned about DDR activities’ relevance to various aspects of the population? In particular, how can DDR be implemented in a way that considers power dynamics and gendered relationships?

DDR programmes began in the 1980s with the ambitious goal of ending protracted civil wars.1 Since the inception of DDR programs, the concept has evolved to include broader goals like rebuilding institutions, promoting reconciliation across communities and improving gender equality. As DDR has evolved, so too have the normative frameworks around integrating women and a gender perspective into peace and security. In 2000, the first UN Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security articulated the gendered nature of DDR (S/RES/1325). Security Council resolution 1325 calls for all those involved in planning for DDR to consider the different needs of male and female ex-combatants. This resolution marked the beginning of the UN Security Council agenda for Women, Peace and Security, which currently comprises 10 resolutions. No fewer than nine of them reference DDR. Despite the shift in DDR’s goals and forms, the need to integrate gender and the questions, around how to do so remain relevant and essential to contexts today.

In reviewing the existing literature on DDR, this report highlights a few themes. The first is that gender-responsive DDR is not just about adding women but taking a holistic view of DDR and considering its different impacts on men, women, boys and girls. The idea that gender and DDR is not only about women is a refrain often repeated among gender experts, yet most policies and programmes are still vague about how to gender DDR apart from counting the number of women who participate. While ensuring that women are represented in DDR processes is essential, looking only at the number of women included is not sufficient for the integration of a gender perspective.

A second key point is that while there are some ideas on how to gender DDR the implementation of these ideas remains a challenge. Additionally, most of the existing research and guidance is narrowly focused on adding women and girls to existing frameworks. There is less guidance and best practices around integrating masculinities as part of gender-responsive DDR. The bulk of research, especially academic research, on gender and DDR focuses on ‘DDR programmes’ and needs to be updated for today’s context, which relies on integrated DDR processes, including DDR-related tools.

Third, the reintegration process is often seen as the most important component in DDR, yet it is frequently deprioritized due to funding and programme timelines.2 Shortcomings pertaining to not adequately planning for long-term reintegration can be especially detrimental to gender relationships and equality. There are conflicting views on the gendered challenges of reintegration, with some research noting that women take longer than men to reintegrate and recover from engagement with an armed group,3 and other studies finding the opposite.4 The gendered challenges of reintegration likely depend on multiple factors in addition to gender identity, such as context, group dynamics and roles, age and marital status. However, it is clear that reintegration has some unique gender dimensions that should be accounted for in planning for long-term recovery.

This report will begin with a brief history of DDR with an emphasis on its goals and how they have evolved over time. The next two sections focus on two key challenges when

gendering DDR – the meaningful incorporation of women and girls into programmes and the relationship between masculinity and DDR. The final section includes a gender analysis of some of the DDR-related tools and evidence from case studies.

The findings from this report came from a desk research review of approximately 80 resources combining academic literature on DDR, key documents from within the UN and other international organizations, and reports by non-governmental organizations. Additionally, the author attended DDR workshops and meetings with experts in the field of DDR.

Key Concepts

When referring to DDR in today’s context, this report is discussing integrated DDR processes, including DDR programmes, DDR-related tools and reintegration support during conflict. DDR-related tools can be used piecemeal and in contexts where the preconditions for a DDR programme are not present.5 The majority of research on gender and DDR has focused on DDR processes and not the other aspects of broader DDR processes. More recently, there has been policy research on weapons and ammunition management (WAM) and community violence reduction (CVR), with some discussion of women’s integration into these tools. However, research on the integration of gender in DDR-related tools is largely still missing.

The majority of literature and guidance on incorporating gender into DDR focuses on why it is necessary to design gender-responsive DDR.6 There are two central explanations for the need to mainstream gender into DDR. One is the “rights-based” framework that holds that women must be included in DDR because they have a right as half of the population, as individuals affected by the conflict and as political actors.7 Another approach to advocate for gender-responsive DDR focuses on effectiveness, the idea being that DDR processes will be more effective in the long term if they include a gender perspective.8 More recently, gender experts and UN agencies have noted that including programming related specifically to men and masculinities is also key to successful DDR.9

As of the drafting of this report, there have been no assessments evaluating whether gender-responsive DDR is more effective in promoting certain outcomes.10 However, one study concluded that when women’s groups were able to effectively influence a peace process, a peace agreement was more likely to be reached and implemented.11 It is possible that more-inclusive DDR processes would also lead to more successful peacebuilding results, yet no cross-national research has explored this question. Additionally, gender-responsive DDR, as will be explained in the following section, involves more than adding women to existing processes

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Gender-responsive DDR is based on understanding the risks and opportunities related to gender norms in a given society, identifying and addressing gender-specific needs and capacities, and ensuring equal access to and benefit from any DDR-related intervention.

Before describing the ways in which gender has become part of the conceptualization of DDR work today, this report will provide an overview of the evolution of DDR. Understanding the successive phases of DDR illuminates the progression of thinking on DDR, and where and how gender has been included or excluded.

First-generation DDR was focused on helping to end civil wars, particularly in Latin America and Southern Africa. In this phase, programmes were used to break command and control within formed military units, provide benefits to individuals returning to their communities and allow some former combatants to enter security entities. Early DDR programmes were seen as a component of the post-conflict period and were anchored in a peace or ceasefire agreement. The initial conceptualization of DDR focused on security and was targeted at ex-combatants and military units, which were assumed to be composed entirely of men. Thus, the foundational work on DDR focused on men.

The second generation of DDR evolved alongside the broadening mandates of UN peace operations in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The goals of DDR programmes became more ambitious, including promoting reconciliation between ex-combatants and communities, rebuilding social institutions, and promoting economic livelihoods for combatants and their dependants. The goals of DDR work today are broader still, and often involve interventions amid ongoing violence in environments where a peace deal has not yet been reached. The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) recently conducted a study on the way DDR is evolving and cites two key factors that require a change in the way DDR is conceptualized: fewer meaningful political settlements to conflicts, and an increase in violence by non-state actors and in localized conflicts.

In light of these changes, the UN has revised its approach to DDR as framed in the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards. The goals for DDR processes as outlined in the IDDRS are broad and note that DDR can “contribute to preventing conflict escalation, supporting political processes, building security, protecting civilians, promoting gender equality and addressing its root causes, reconstructing the social fabric and developing human capacity.”

The IDDRS also outline the preconditions required for the “implementation of a viable DDR programme”. These conditions include the signing of a negotiated ceasefire and/or peace agreement, trust in the peace process, willingness of the parties to the armed conflict to engage in DDR and a minimum guarantee of security. Language and terminology in discussing DDR become particularly important because, while these are the preconditions for DDR programmes, UN and international actors can use DDR-related tools and reintegrationsupport (including when complementing DDR-related tools) in contexts where these preconditions are not met.

DDR-related tools include many activities that are related to violence reduction in conflict contexts. According to the IDDRS, DDR-related tools are “immediate and targeted measures that may be used before, after, or alongside DDR programmes or when the preconditions for DDR programmes are not in place.”

The IDDRS guide only briefly addresses the use of DDR-related interventions in contexts where UN armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTO) are operating. It can be challenging for DDR practitioners to operate in these contexts, given the legal dynamics.
of ongoing conflict with AGDTOs. The IDORS briefly notes that “support to programmes for those leaving armed groups labelled and/or designated as terrorist organizations may be provided by DDR practitioners in compliance with international standards”. The reference to “international standards” likely relates to Security Council resolutions 2178 and 2396. These resolutions call on Member States to develop prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) strategies for suspected terrorist actors.23

The term “PRR” was first used in 2017, but it still does not have a clear and agreed upon definition. According to the Security Council, PRR strategies should be for individuals with links to UN-designated terrorist organizations.24 DDR and PRR are considered separate processes and are usually separated in policy frameworks. PRR is associated with counter-terrorism actors and approaches. However, some of the discussions around gender and PRR are applicable to DDR. Material from the UN related to PRR highlights the importance of gender, with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) articulating its focus on gender dimensions and women’s rights in responding to terrorism.25 UNODC notes that PRR strategies should “avoid being based on stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women in terrorist groups and pay particular attention to the situation of women and children who were associated with the terrorist group”.26

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22 Ibid., p. 6.
23 See Sarfati and Donnelly, “Protection Dilemmas”, for a discussion on PRR and its relationship to DDR. This report uses a broader understanding of AGDTO than just UN-designated groups and also includes groups listed by the U.S. State Department as foreign terrorist organizations.
26 UNODC, “Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Strategies”.

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Integrated DDR processes consist of a combination of DDR programmes, DDR-related tools and reintegration support during conflict.
Gendering the Components of DDR

In general, while some male combatants may have challenges accessing DDR activities, “women – as a group – are often excluded from DDR programmes, while this is never the case for men”.28

Demobilization
Demobilization can lead participants to lose a sense of collective identity. Even the way ex-combatants discuss demobilization can be gendered. A female ex-combatant in Colombia declared, “Demobilisation is a castration. The challenges related to identity can differ for men and women and between different men and women. For example, in the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), the group’s leadership used forced marriage to build families that operated homesteads together.”23 For some women, the relationship with the co-wives they lived with was positive and a place for deep connection, whereas other women viewed their co-wives as a threat to their safety.24

Research also highlights the bonds men can build in armed groups. Losing that community and social ties can have an isolating effect on some men.25 Demobilization is a key opportunity to discuss ex-combatants’ expectations related to gender roles after they leave cantonment.26

For some women, being a part of an armed group can provide them with a specific form of political power or, as one female ex-combatant in Colombia put it, “mobilization is a social and political practice.”27 This same sentiment was echoed by another Colombian female ex-combatant, who noted that “demobilization is depoliticization.”28 This feeling of depoliticization can be amplified in the reintegration process, during which women are often expected to return to traditional roles and their voices and expertise are only seen as relevant as victims of conflict or as peacemakers.

Reintegration
Reintegration is a process where ex-combatants are supposed to form new civilian identities. These identities will differ for men and women and may involve different challenges and opportunities related to gender. For example, women inside armed groups may have forms of power they did not have access to in civilian life.41 Men may face a similar challenge reintegrating because of the perceived power they had in an armed group. For some, being in an armed group represented a path to manhood unavailable to them in civilian life because of a lack of economic or other forms of power.42

Reintegration can be viewed as transforming one’s identity, and this process can involve the psychological burden of hiding one’s ex-combatant status and experiences as a combatant.43 This psychological burden is likely felt differently depending on one’s age and gender. In Liberia, DDR officials explicitly told ex-combatants to “forget about the war” and not mention having been a combatant to avoid being stigmatized.44

There is some data around reintegration pathways based on the DDR process in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Out of the 110,000 combatants who formally registered for demobilization, 4,524 were women.45

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This number is likely an undercount, because combatants were required to hand in a weapon in order to register, and many women ex-combatants may not have had access to such a weapon. However, an interesting finding was that of the women who registered for demobilization, 2,396 chose reintegration into society, and the rest preferred army integration. The fact that almost equal numbers of women decided to reintegrate into society, as in the army is notable, and it would be useful to understand the women’s motives for choosing the different options.

In a study on reintegration in Colombia, researchers examined a sample of demobilized persons that included 232 women and 1,253 men. They found that men were more prone to recidivism and that “their feelings of loss of status after demobilization can be emasculating and turn into emotional impulses toward illicit activities.” However, other researchers question whether it might be easier for women to return to violence than to their communities because DDR activities often fail to offer incentives to women to leave groups in the same way they do the male combatants.

Research on reintegration has demonstrated the importance of context in terms of how gender stereotypes function across communities. For example, in the Lake Chad Basin, a study found that in certain instances women were seen as more dangerous than men because they were perceived as easily influenced by men to participate in violence. This perception of women has affected the reintegration process because in some communities, if a woman leaves Boko Haram and her husband remains with the group, the community doubts the sincerity of the woman’s reintegration.

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Women and Girls in DDR Processes

SINCE THE 1980s, women have only been included in approximately one-third of all DDR programmes.49 As a consequence, women and girls have largely missed out on the potential support provided through DDR. This omission can harm women and girls associated with armed groups, as well as women and girls in communities where members of armed groups are reintegrating.50

Historically, the rationale behind DDR has been to reduce the perceived security threat posed by ex-combatants left without livelihoods and employment after demobilization. While the IDDRS guidelines have a broader focus than just security concerns from ex-combatants, they articulate the goal of DDR processes as being primarily “to address the security challenges posed by members of armed forces and groups.” The guide goes on to note that “provisions should be made for the inclusion of other groups (including civilians and youth at risk), depending on resources and local circumstances.”51 A focus on security threats tends to mean an emphasis on men and boys.52 While research demonstrates the key role women play in armed groups,53 if the focus of DDR is only geared towards armed combatants (as opposed to all individuals supporting violent groups), women and girls will not be incorporated holistically. While women and girls can be combatants in violent groups, historically they have not made up the majority of armed groups and are usually not seen as security threats.54 This is because they are stereotyped as either being peacemakers or victims. One review of the DDR literature concluded, “The DDR process is seen as more important for men to avoid discontent, unemployment, idleness, and further mobilization to violence.”55

Because of the assumption that men are violent and women are peaceful, women and girls will be delinked from security concerns post-conflict and instead viewed as “social problems”, whereas men are viewed as security threats or concerns.56 This is not an ideal outcome for men and boys (who are narrowly viewed as security threats) or women and girls (who are not prioritized because they are not seen as security threats).

While research shows that men make up the majority of armed combatants, it is also clear that the support for women and girls is essential to the perpetration of violence in conflict. For example, one study tested the ways in which women in armed groups advanced rebel group goals and found that rebel groups use women members to secure support from different international actors.57

Researchers have challenged the assumption that men are the default actors in conflict through quantitative data showing women are active participants in well over half of the world’s rebel groups.58 Women’s roles in rebel groups are varied. Women are most frequently in support or non-combat roles. However, in nearly one-third of all rebel movements, women take part in violent attacks, and in over one-quarter of rebel groups, women occupy leadership roles. In seeking to understand why women participate in varying roles and levels across different armed groups, some researchers argue that the political ideology of an armed group is the key explanatory factor.60 Another study found that organizational factors such as group size and the use of terrorist tactics explained women’s varying levels of participation in rebel groups.61

In addition to the need to recognize women as combatants in armed groups, the general categories used in DDR processes (like ex-combatant) are too broad and perpetuate gender narratives. In examining the DDR process in Liberia, one study highlighted problems with the generic category of “ex-combatant”, which was meant to apply to fighting groups in every context.62 The researchers found that framing ex-combatants as a threat (or using a “threat narrative”) can be counter-productive for reintegration and peacebuilding goals. Importantly, in Liberia, the threat narrative of ex-combatants came from a view of the war there as “unnecessarily violent, and simply unnecessary, an irrational reflection of the violent urges of rag tag groups of angry men.”63 In describing this threat narrative, researchers explained that “danger attaches to the figure of the ex-combatant because DDR discourse biologically embeds violence in the character and disposition of ex-combatants.”64 The use of the term “biologically” has implications for the ways in which ex-combatants are implicitly labelled as men. When women were included in Liberia’s DDR activities, it was only as a “special target group” distinct from combatants.65

Given the need to categorize individuals during DDR, DPO recently identified three labels to use for women in DDR programmes. The first is combatants, defined as direct participants in armed conflict using arms. The second is supporters, who participate in conflict in support roles in a forced or voluntary capacity, including as cooks, nurses, spies and/or sex workers. And finally, the third role is that of dependant, which describes women who are part of an ex-combatant’s household and socially and financially dependent on the ex-combatant.66

UN Department of Peace Operations summary of categorizations for women beneficiaries in DDR processes67

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49 Oliver Kaplan, DDR Program Dataset. (forthcoming).
50 Mazama, Kristof-Braek, and Observatory, “Gender and Environment, Demobilization, and Reintegra- tion.”
54 “Women and Girls in DDR Processes.”
58 Henshaw, Why Women Rebel.
59 Wood and Thomas, “Women on the Frontline.”
60 Thomas and Bond, “Women’s Participation in Violent Organizations”, p. 503.
61 McMullin Review of International Studies, p. 393.
62 Ibid., p. 394.
63 Ibid., p. 396.
64 Ibid., p. 450.
65 UN Department of Peace Operations, “Gender Responsive DDR.”
66 Ibid., p. 397.
67 “Gender Responsive DDR.”
Finally, although there is an effort to include women members of rebel groups in DDR, there has been little attention to women in pro-government, self-defence or civil defence forces.

Barriers to Inclusion

Women should be included in the earliest phases of planning for DDR, ideally in the peace process phase. The IDDRS module “Women, Gender and DDR” reiterates a call across the UN to insist on 30 per cent female participation in any decision-making forum. The guide notes that if this 30 per cent quota is not possible, DDR planners must at least consult women.

One method to include women in DDR processes early on is to focus on outreach and access to information on programming and available services. This outreach can be targeted directly to women ex-combatants and women associated with armed groups or communicated to key people in communities who can help spread the information.

Ideally, if diverse women’s voices are represented in the planning for DDR, some of the common errors that discourage or exclude women from participating in DDR processes can be avoided or at least mitigated. The international community has generally moved away from requiring individuals to present a weapon as proof of their combatant status to participate in DDR processes. Still, women may think they need to prove their combatant status to be allowed to participate. This narrative has also been exploited by men who are married to female combatants. For example, a female combatant in Sierra Leone said that her bush husband told her that if she registered for disarmament “they” would take her picture and she would be sent to court. The female ex-combatant gave her weapon to her husband and explained, “I had to do it because he gave it to me…. But I was not afraid to disarm. I should have disarmed [if] I should have got a gun.”

In addition to representing diverse women’s voices in planning for DDR, it is beneficial to identify barriers to women’s entry at the earliest stage of the process. For example, in Nepal, female ex-combatant participation in the DDR process was seen at the highest rate (38 per cent) of all UN-led programmes. One researcher credits this success to practitioners’ recognition of the barriers to women’s participation, including lack of support for pregnant or breastfeeding women, and adapting the programme accordingly.

Other logistical challenges blocking women’s participation in DDR programmes include the distance from the site of the programme to women’s communities, the lack of transportation or funds to reach the site, lack of childcare options and the need to balance immediate economic needs with DDR participation. In the aftermath of war, women will have other demands on their time, such as caring for family members and other dependants.

During the demobilization phase of DDR, women often face specific challenges. Cantonment sites can be places of particular insecurity for women. Analysis of the demobilization phase in Liberia noted benefits to women and girls when they were separated from men, especially former commanders. Guidance in the IDDRS gender module notes that while men and women should have separate facilities, there should also be a family facility where families can stay together. Another best practice at the cantonment sites in Liberia was establishing “interim care centres”, which offered reproductive health support and trauma counselling to boys and girls who had taken part in the conflict. A related recommendation is to ensure women fieldworkers are available to conduct interviews if women combatants feel more comfortable speaking to women.

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1 Thomas, “Gendered Security Sector Reform.”
2 United Nations, “IDDRS 5.10: Women, Gender and DDR.”
3 Ibid.
5 Referred to using phrases such as “one man, one gun” and “no weapon, no entry” in DDR literature.
6 United Nations, “IDDRS 5.10: Women, Gender and DDR.”
7 Henshaw, “Female Combatants in Postconflict Processes”; United Nations, “IDDRS 5.10: Women, Gender and DDR.”
9 Steenbergen, “Female Ex-combatants, Peace, and Reintegration.”
10 Cabinet of Sierra Leone, “Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration.”
11 Ibid, “Gender and Disarmament in Liberia.”
12 United Nations, “IDDRS 5.10: Women, Gender and DDR.”
13 Ibid, “Gender and Disarmament in Liberia.”
14 Farr, “The Importance of a Gender Perspective to Successful DDR Processes.”
A key concern for many men, women, boys and girls who participate in DDR processes is stigma. Stigma is often gendered. Boys and men can in certain instances face less stigma than women and girls for their roles in armed groups because of stereotypes that see men as warriors and violence as masculine. In contrast, women who participate in violence are often viewed as transgressive, and their participation in armed groups is frequently sexualized. One source notes that, for girls in DDR, stigma is “longer, more severe, and more difficult” than for boys because of the assumption that girls had sex with men and therefore are seen as less marriageable.61

Interestingly, a Lake Chad Basin study demonstrates that stigma varies based on the gender of the community member. The researchers found that women were more fearful of women returning from Boko Haram, while men were more focused on the difficulties of reintegrating men from Boko Haram.62 The study also draws attention to a counterintuitive reality: in some ways, women disassociated from Boko Haram benefit from an informal clemency from the population that men do not receive. However, it notes that, despite this clemency, women suffered from severe social stigma and marginalization. Community members in the Lake Chad Basin noted that they thought women would be more stigmatized than men because they would be rejected by other women and be unable to marry.63 Evidence from Sierra Leone illustrated that women faced a more difficult and longer reintegration process because they faced higher levels of stigma and had fewer ways to support themselves.64 Because of the fear of stigma from participating in a DDR program and identifying themselves as being linked to an armed group, many girls choose not to participate in the programs and instead reintegrate on their own.65 Women and girls’ tendency to avoid formal DDR programmes makes it harder to track their reintegration success and can lead to false conclusions about reintegration.66 Finally, another factor that can prevent participation in DDR is that girls and young women are often among the last to be released from fighting forces, if they are released at all.67 This pattern was particularly prevalent in the case of the LRA in Uganda. It would be useful to conduct additional research that tracks the timing of the release of women and girls across rebel groups in various regions.68

Women who had been sexually abused while in an armed group may be subject to an especially harsh reception from their communities. The Lake Chad Basin study noted the additional stigma women who had been victims of sexual violence from Boko Haram would likely face. Children conceived from rape or while the mother was associated with Boko Haram may be discriminated against or rejected.69

Mothers of these children are sometimes forced to choose between the children and other members of their families. Finally, for men disengaging from some armed groups, the suspicion that they perpetrated sexual violence while with the group can also negatively impact their reintegration.

Extra burdens might be placed on women as part of the reintegration process—services for the reintegration and rehabilitation of children associated with armed forces and armed groups. Since women are the primary caregivers in many contexts, they become responsible for the reintegration of these children. For this reason, there may be a need to provide support and specialized training on how to understand and cope with traumatized children.65

Finally, even when reintegration processes deliberately attempt to include women, women are often expected to represent a certain narrative and speak only about certain topics. In Colombia, for example, female ex-combatants were often included in dialogues or processes, but “their participation [was] limited to an expectation that they narrate gendered harms”.68

Consequences of Exclusion

When women are excluded from DDR processes, they are removed from the political sphere. This pattern was observed in cases where women were reintegrating from armed groups (outside of a formal DDR processes), as occurred with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Women leaving the LTTE described the end of the war and their return to civilian life as an “infantilizing experience”, and were frustrated that they could not employ the skills they gained in wartime in their civilian lives.69 Research shows that women have often been denied the opportunity to participate in DDR because they have immediately been labelled as victims and steered towards services for victims.70 This is despite the fact that cross-national data has shown that the majority of women in armed groups had their own motivations for joining the groups and were not forcibly recruited.71

Women, like men, can be victims and perpetrators of violence, and the rationale for making demobilizing combatants choose between services for victims and services for those seeking reintegration is unclear.72 By immediately classifying women as victims and preventing them from participating in DDR, practitioners are denying women agency. This assumption is addressed in the UN’s AWP framework, which advocates for “shielding the protection of women as solely victims of armed conflict or subject of protection by the security forces, to recognizing them as decision makers, security officers, and changemakers in SSR and DDR”.73

While women are often left out of DDR, DDR processes unintentionally rely on the unpaid labour of women in their communities to care for the disabled, young, sick or traumatized ex-combatants. Instead, DDR can engage meaningfully with women in communities, including through financial contributions, as partners, stakeholders, and resources in DDR design and delivery.74

DDR rarely prioritizes the reintegration phase, which harms prospects for lasting security. In Sierra Leone, women faced a more difficult and longer reintegration process than men, experienced higher levels of stigma and had fewer ways to support themselves.75 The need to prioritize reintegration emerged as a key theme in both gender-focused and non-gender-focused DDR literature, but deprioritizing reintegration and long-term programming particularly harms women who have been associated with fighting forces.

Finally, while the exclusion of women from DDR processes leaves women in war, it also harms societies recovering from violent conflict. By failing to take women’s roles as key political actors, the international community is not allowing women to participate in the rebuilding of their societies.
Masculinity in DDR Processes

In many ways DDR prioritizes men and boys because they are seen as the key actors in perpetrating violence. For example, in the Lake Chad Basin, the majority of respondents in a study saw the reintegration of men as a higher priority than that of women. As summarized in the researchers’ report, “reintegration of men is perceived by communities as a preventive solution to violence in areas under Boko Haram influence. Respondents explain that if men leave Boko Haram, the group would cease to exist.” Perceptions about men being the key to ceasing and preventing violence are the reason men have been prioritized in DDR activities. Despite this, there has been little examination of men’s gendered identities.

The literature on masculinities examines the ways in which they are used to support or resist violence. One study of masculinity in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone found that “masculinity structures the practices of men. Although masculinity is normalized as the natural state of affairs for men, individuals still must work to obtain their masculine status.” One specific type of masculinity, “protest masculinity”, has been used to explain the types of violence perpetrated by the RUF in Sierra Leone. Protest masculinity involves exaggerated masculine practices, particularly by young men who are not able to attain the full status of the most powerful or idealized masculinity (hegemonic masculinity).

According to research from Uganda, masculinity influences not only men’s sense of themselves, but their relationships with other men, as well as with the state more generally. This same research also highlights a potential link between violence and frustrated expectations around manhood, what has been called “thwarted masculinity.”

Recently, there have been discussions about the need for DDR to address violent masculinities. There is a focus on “militarized masculinities”, or the “fusion of certain practices and images of maleness with the use of weapons, the exercise of violence, and the performance of an aggressive and frequently misogynist masculinity.” Historically, associating maleness with the use of weapons has been a key tool militarized groups employ to recruit men and persuade them to use violence.

Focusing on masculinities pushes against the simplistic understanding of gender-responsive DDR. Addressing the needs and experiences of women and girls is essential, yet a DDR process that only sees gender as being about paying attention to women and girls is not gender responsive and misses key benefits of incorporating gender into the process. Programmes that tout their gender sensitivity are sometimes basing their programming on gender stereotypes, as opposed to gender analyses grounded in context. A basic principle of a gender analysis is that ideas about one gender are influenced and reliant on ideas about another gender – for example, the ways masculinity is contrasted with femininity. Additionally, a gender analysis is a power analysis, and by ignoring men, boys and masculinities, the analyses are missing key insights into how power operates in the transition phase from conflict.
Even for DDR practitioners and policymakers who want to incorporate masculinity into their policies and programmes, there is still a lack of guidance on how to do so. Discussions around masculinity and DDR frequently come from an academic and theoretical perspective, making it hard to figure out how to incorporate masculinity into DDR processes.

The Risk of Stereotypes and Reinforcement of Militarized Masculinity
An entry point into the topic of DDR and masculinities is to make DDR practitioners aware of how DDR processes can reinforce militarized masculinity.108 The focus on combatants, especially combatants with arms, can privilege a certain form of militarized masculinity. While men often constitute the majority of combatants, they also fill support roles in armed groups. In interviews with ex-combatants from the Lord’s Resistance Army, many male participants described roles outside of combat or fighting, such as being a babysitter to children born into the LRA or cooking.109 One male ex-combatant noted that he was in the group for two years before being taught to fight. Men in Boko Haram–controlled areas also have different problems than men ex-combatants, particularly men in intercaste marriages.111 These examples demonstrate that while men are the predominant owners and users of small arms, they are also injured by guns in far larger numbers than women.112 Additionally, other research notes that sexual violence against men and boys in conflict settings is at times “widespread”.113 This pattern of violence and victimization illustrates the problem with labelling any individual a combatant or a victim. Since men are victims of violence, there is an opportunity in DDR processes for men “to become critical agents of change to end these multiple forms of violence”.114 Leveraging partnerships with men will require DDR practitioners to move from seeing men and boys only as a security threat and instead recognize the ways in which they are victims of conflict and would benefit from an end to cycles of violence.

Gender-responsive DDR focuses on masculinities and femininities. While the UN-led DDR programme in Nepal was successful in terms of attracting female ex-combatants, it failed to consider men’s unique needs in the DDR process. Specifically, there was little consideration given to the gendered needs of male ex-combatants, particularly men in intercaste marriages or who were single parents.115

Another problem with immediately labelling male ex-combatants as perpetrators and women ex-combatants as victims is that this logic fails to recognize alternative masculinities in armed groups. For example, in the LRA men would have children with their forced wives, and several spoke about their roles as fathers and how that changed their approach to fighting.116 Some interviewed participants spoke about how having children made them less inclined to use violence; for some male combatants, fatherhood and was a motivation to leave the Lord’s Resistance Army.117

A contextual analysis can reveal what men and boys gained in an armed group and how that power or those privileges influenced their journey into manhood or fulfilling masculine ideals. Reconfiguring wartime masculinity may mean satisfying several needs met by an armed group.118 For example, a study on men’s reintegration in Uganda noted that livelihood activities were important for raising men’s community esteem and lowering their social marginalization, thereby reducing the appeal of armed groups as a source of respect and upward mobility.119

Related to the role of alternative masculinities, DDR practitioners must recognize that men will be reintegrating into a new socioeconomic reality, both in terms of the new roles men and women have taken on during conflict as well as the altered socioeconomic environment. A report on men and peacebuilding notes that men and boys may not be able to get jobs in post-conflict settings, which can lead to loss of identity, emotional distress, substance abuse and violent behaviour.120 DDR practitioners can potentially avoid some of these maladaptive patterns by considering alternative paths to manhood and to building the confidence that men will be looking for after they leave DDR processes.

PROGRAMMES THAT TARGET MEN, BOYS AND MASCULINITY
A report published by the United States Institute of Peace provides examples of programmes that respond to militarized masculinities. Learning from such programmes can inform the continued integration of gender in DDR.

Programmes featured in the report include:
- The Refugee Law Project in Uganda, an organization that focuses on male survivors of sexual violence.
- Programmes in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo that focus on therapeutic spaces for men to discuss norm changes aimed at preventing sexual- and gender-based violence.
- Programmes that centre on unlearning violence, developing nonviolent behaviours, and changing community norms. Specifically, one programme promotes men’s roles as equitable and nonviolent fathers and caregivers.
- Initiatives in Rwanda that show how engaging men to support and partner with women’s economic empowerment initiatives improved economic outcomes for women, supported men’s income generation needs and provided opportunities to improve relationships between couples.121

111 Thobani, “Reconstructing Masculinities”, p. 32.
114 Ibid., p. 17.
115 Lord’s Resistance Army, p. 12.
119 See, Krystalli and Baaré, “Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration”, p. 34.
AS DDR HAS EVOLVED, DDR-related tools have been used across different contexts, either in conjunction with, or outside of, formal DDR programmes. The DDR-related tools most commonly discussed through a gender framework are community violence reduction (CVR) and weapons and ammunition management (WAM). However, even within these topic areas, there is little data on specific methods to integrate gender into the projects and assess the impact of doing so.

Community Violence Reduction
Community violence reduction was first used in Haiti in 2006 in response to MINUSTAH’s perception that a DDR programme was not the appropriate strategy to address violence by urban armed groups. CVR differed from other forms of DDR being used at the time because the goal of the programme was to work directly with “at-risk” communities, i.e., the focus was on prevention rather than reintegrating ex-combatants. The UN describes CVR as a “[c]omponent of a UN peace operation, aiming at preventing and reducing violence at the community level in ongoing armed conflict or in post-conflict environments.” The CVR projects launched in Haiti included the UN’s gender mission representatives. However, the author of this report could not find any data assessing the CVR projects in Haiti, or other contexts, through a gender lens.

More recently, CVR projects have been introduced in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali. In a review of CVR projects in CAR, the authors note that CVR can be linked with community-mediated peace deals brokered by community leaders and organizations, including women’s organizations. In CAR, CVR projects were focused on income generation opportunities as well as promoting social cohesion and community resilience. While not analysed specifically in the CAR case, it feels impossible to discuss social cohesion without considering gendered relationships.

In the UN peacekeeping operation in Mali (MINUSMA), the DDR section is in charge of CVR work and has targeted “youth at risk.” One programme in Mopti targeted 200 young people, connecting them with 100 Islamic teachers. A report discussing this programme does not mention the gender of the young people, although the “youth at risk” description usually attaches to young men. The ways in which terms like “youth” or “young people” conceal gender identity highlight the need to specify not only participants’ ages but their gender as well.

The IDDRS guidance on CVR stipulates that CVR programmes can include gender-transformative projects. Specifically, the IDDRS guidance explains that CVR projects can “challenge harmful notions of masculinity and engage with men and boys to promote behaviours that value gender equality and non-violence.” However, there is little evidence on how to effectively integrate masculinity into a CVR project.

The IDDRS guide and findings from CAR highlight the need to make sure CVR projects and beneficiaries of CVR are diverse and representative of the community and that gender is an integrated part of any project. Specifically, the IDDRS provide specific quotas for inclusion of women in leading CVR projects and as beneficiaries of such projects.

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**Notes:**
1. Vess and others, “The Other Side of Gender.”
Weapons and Ammunition Management

Gender has been mainstreamed into discussions of weapons and ammunition management (WAM) at the policy level through two pathways. According to the UN’s guidance, gender should be integrated into WAM by considering the impacts on women, men, girls and boys “at every phase of the lifecycle management of weapons and ammunition processes”.130 In particular, the impact of weapons on sexual and gender-based violence is raised in the IDDRS module on weapons and ammunition management.131 The second approach to including gender in WAM that the UN advocates is to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities to participate in the development and implementation of WAM policies and practices.132

The inclusion of women in WAM has received some attention and research, especially within policy organizations. The UN Institute of Disarmament Research examined women’s engagement in WAM. The resulting study noted the dearth of gender-disaggregated data on national militaries or police forces with specific information on who is engaging in WAM. However, the study found some support for the assumption that women are underrepresented in WAM, in line with patterns of keeping women away from roles where weapons are handled and managed.133

The UN Department of Peace Operations analysis of WAM states that “gender-sensitive arms control operations are proven to be more effective in addressing the impact of the illicit circulation and misuse of weapons”.134 However, the report does not cite any data or other evidence to support this claim. While men are primarily seen as more likely to engage in the illicit circulation and misuse of weapons, women have historically been involved in weapons smuggling across various contexts.135 The UN guidance on WAM does note the link between masculinities and weapons ownership, and suggests crafting outreach and communication for young men that focuses on “disassociating arms ownership from notions of power, protection, status and masculinity”.136

Women have been seen as a key asset to WAM. According to a 2003 study on gender and DDR, in certain African countries a woman has the power to stop a man from taking his gun outside the house if she is economically empowered to provide food for their family.137 One DDR expert quoted explained that women need to be empowered so they can disarm men. While women can be an asset in WAM, more recent thinking on DDR moves past supporting women only so they can disarm men and instead sees them as actors in their own right.

THE 2016 PEACE AGREEMENT IN COLOMBIA

In Colombia, women participated in the peace process and helped set the stage for an inclusive DDR process.138 The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian Government and FARC-EP contains over 100 provisions on gender, and the agreement has been heralded as leading to “one of the most successful weapon laydowns in history”.139

However, although the 2016 peace agreement includes gender provisions, researchers have noted that only few of these were later implemented and there were no clear mechanisms for post-demobilisation participation for women developed.140 Hence, despite attention to women during the peace process in Colombia, the peace agreement has been unable to transform gender roles.141 In addition, the reintegration of women ex-combatants in Colombia has tended to pressure women to conform to traditional gender roles.142 The Colombian example is just one illustration of the ways in which most peace agreements seek to return society to a “normality” that is “unequivocally patriarchal”, as cases from Palestine, Nepal and Sri Lanka also illustrate.143

Ibid., p. 6.
Ibid., p. 12.
The Council resolution 1373, requiring Member States to focus on accountability in PRR and its relationship to the DDR and judicial frameworks operate. In these contexts, questions often arise around although not-officially labelled as DDR processes, have become as important tools in contexts where AGDTO operate. In these contexts, questions often arise around the relationship between DDR and judicial frameworks and counter-terrorism activities (often labelled PRR). According to interviews with experts working in the DDR and counter-terrorism space PRR and its relationship to DDR are not yet well understood. A key difference is the focus on accountability in PRR. The accountability framework for DDR is based on guidance in Security Council resolution 1373, requiring Member States to bring to justice perpetrators of terrorist acts. While the risk of secularizing aspects of the DDR process through PRR frameworks has been identified, there are also important gendered aspects of PRR that are less well understood.

In Somalia, experiences from the screening process for defectors from al-Shabaab has highlighted several gender implications. The process categorizes individuals as “high risk” or “low risk” but what these terms mean and to whom are not clearly articulated and vary across contexts. Women are usually classified as “low risk” by default, regardless of their role in the group. They therefore avoid detention and do not gain attention from state authorities. The criminal justice systems treat men, women, boys and girls differently. For example, in addition to being indicted under national criminal codes, counter-terrorism laws and anti-terrorism financing laws, women have been charged with crimes related to endangering their children and illegally entering a country.

Finally, in spite of often being categorised as “low risk”, women, are often punished in their own communities and are seen as transgressing societal norms and expectations – in effect, they are doubly “punished” for engaging with AGDTOs. Hence, despite rarely facing legal or criminal penalization, they are ostracized by both national authorities and by their communities for perceived affiliation with terrorists. Some experts predict that in the future women will become more frequent targets of judicial processes.

There are also questions regarding how to best integrate gender into the risk assessment frameworks used in settings where AGDTOs operate. The existing instruments are often labelled “gender neutral”. However, when it comes to policy documents, the term “gender neutral” usually means that a programme was designed for men. This practice ignores emerging findings that suggest that many of the risk factors tend to differ according to gender.

Inserting women into a prosecutorial and securitized frameworks, without re-evaluating those gendered frameworks, can cause gendered harms. But basing these on preconceived gender stereotypes is equally problematic and will not lead to a gender-sensitive approach. Additionally, making assumptions about women’s roles without asking questions and learning about their experiences deprives women of agency.

Explicitly discussing the ways in which women should be incorporated into the screening process creates the opportunity for criminal justice processes to be gender-responsive. UN guidance on gender-sensitive prosecution processes for women highlights the need to recognize women’s (especially young women’s) unique needs in detention, interrogation and witness protection programmes. There is particular concern around avoiding secondary victimization and re-traumatization of women who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Focusing on the complexity of women’s roles and experiences, instead of automatically categorizing them as victims, can actually enhance a victim-centric approach to their rehabilitation.

**Complexity of Roles for All Ages and Genders**

One challenge in considering how to treat men, women, boys and girls in contexts where AGDTOs are operating is that the roles individuals play in the group are often very diverse (and many are not related to violence). In addition, the pathways individuals take to fullfil these roles are a complex mix of voluntariness, coercion and extreme pressure.

AGDTOs like al-Shabaab or ISIS often gain and sustain power through a diverse set of engagement with the communities they govern. For this reason, a nuanced understanding of women’s engagement with al-Shabaab do not easily map onto categorizations such as “high risk” versus “low risk” or combatant status.

UN guidance on screening recommends that there be “individual assessment and screening to appropriately assess each individual case and determine each person’s affiliation and/or victimhood”. The UN guidance is mostly focused on the experiences of “women and children”, highlighting the ways in which both groups can be victimized. Gender scholars press against equating women and children (“womenandchildren”), as doing so takes away women’s agency as independent political actors and promotes the idea that they are in need of protection in the same way children are. Given the diversity of women’s and girls’ experiences in armed groups, DDR activities should carefully assess an individual returnee’s motivations for joining and role in the AGDTOs, the threat they may pose, and various options for reintegration.

Operation Safe Corridor, a defectors programme (usually regarded as a PRR programme) started in Nigeria in 2016. In its early years, it struggled to ensure the rights and safety of programme participants. Many participants in the programme reported problematic conditions within the detention centres where many were held before officially entering the programme, voluntary defectors were held in government facilities for years without the ability to contact family members and some individuals died in confinement. There were allegations that women who participated in Operation Safe Corridor were pressured to engage in sexual acts with programme leadership. Since these allegations became public, Operation Safe Corridor has set up dedicated programmes for women.

Boys also face unique challenges in their engagement with DDR-related programming and criminal justice systems. They are often treated differently within security and criminal justice systems based on their age and gender. For example, the vulnerabilities for boys and young adolescents detained in al-Hol and Roj camps in northeast Syria have been noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. Boys and young adolescents in these camps are separated from their mothers and sisters and held in detention facilities, a practice...
inconsistent with the rights of any child. One of these detention centres is characterized as a “rehabilitation” camp. According to the Special Rapporteur, there is no adequate legal basis to justify the detention of any of the children held in the centres. Boy children are not seen as victims in the same way girl children are and are instead viewed as a potential security risk.

Another study on assisting women formerly associated with al-Shabaab in Somalia, makes clear that not all women formerly associated with al-Shabaab “are the same, have the same needs, the same risk profile, or suffer the same risks”. Because of this, it is suggested that DDR practitioners should ensure a “minimum basket” of services for all women in their location in Somalia but specify other services based on women’s needs in different locations.

Complications in Reintegration

In contexts of ongoing conflicts, including where AGDTOs are operating, individuals reintegrating into society can face unique challenges that often play out along gendered lines. An expert on Somalia’s defectors programme noted the obstacles in following up with programme participants in a country where international actors’ ability to travel outside urban areas is limited. In addition, while women tend to receive more lenient treatment in criminal justice systems compared to men, they also tend to receive less rehabilitation and reintegration support.

Monitoring the reintegration of women who have been associated with AGDTOs is particularly challenging, given that many of them do not participate in formal programmes. In the Somalia defectors programme, defining what it means for women to “leave the group” is difficult, given that many women involved in al-Shabaab are not fighters in the traditional sense and are supporting al-Shabaab from their homes. It then becomes unclear what it means for women to defect when they did not necessarily join al-Shabaab by living with the group. For example, a woman might be married to an al-Shabaab fighter and provide her support to the armed group through her husband or work part-time fundraising for al-Shabaab from her home. These complications are likely to be applicable across many similar conflict contexts.

A related issue concerns women who have crossed international borders in their engagement with armed groups and face challenges in returning to their communities of origin. There is a large disparity in the percentage of women foreign terrorist fighters who returned from Iraq and Syria compared to the percentage of men who returned. Several factors could explain this phenomenon, including for example that female affiliates of ISIS surrendered their passports once they arrive in the conflict zone; prohibitions against women traveling without a male guardian; the large fees human traffickers require women to pay to leave ISIS zones; and some countries’ prioritizing the return of children while preferring adult citizens to be prosecuted in the region where they fought.

Women with children face additional challenges in trying to reintegrate back into communities, especially given the transnational nature of many conflicts today. Based on laws related to the country of origin, some countries make it challenging for children to establish citizenship if they were born outside the country. If mothers are unable to gain citizenship for their children in their communities of origin, they are unlikely to return. There are also examples of countries that have tried to strip the citizenship of dual or naturalized citizens who are perceived to be associated with AGDTOs. The peculiar challenges of children born into armed groups, especially as a result of sexual violence, remain underexplored and have implications for the future of conflict-affected societies.

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161 Stern and Peterson, “Assisting Women Formerly Associated with Al-Shabaab”.
164 CTED, “Sudan Darfur.”
165 ICAN and UNDP, Invisible Women, p. 41.
Conclusions

Integrated DDR processes, consisting of DDR programmes, DDR-related tools and reintegration support during conflict, constitute an opportunity to further strengthen and inform the integration of a gender perspective in DDR. DDR-related tools such as community violence reduction and weapons and ammunition management are instructive in relation to the integration of gender and gender transformative interventions.

Gender-responsive DDR requires contextual gendered analysis. DDR practitioners should use such analysis as a tool to recognize the way power has shifted in society and transformed gendered roles and relationships during the armed conflict. By beginning to compare lessons learned across cases and tools, DDR practitioners and experts can provide a more extensive toolkit for creating gender-responsive DDR.

While we do not yet know whether gender-responsive DDR is more effective than gender-blind DDR in accomplishing the multiple goals of DDR processes, we do know that DDR approaches that take into account the complex power dynamics and roles of men, women, girls, boys, and sexual and gender minorities, better reflect the complex realities on the ground. This report demonstrates some of the ways in which integrated DDR processes can be transformed through a gender analysis. Through case studies from a range of different countries, as well as programmatic examples of incorporating masculinity into DDR tools and best practices for integrating women in DDR, this report provides a starting point for putting gender-responsive DDR into practice.


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The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development.

FBA supports international peace operations and international development cooperation. The agency conducts training, research and method development in order to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict and post-conflict countries. We also recruit civilian personnel and expertise for peace operations and election observation missions led by the EU, UN and OSCE. The agency is named after Count Folke Bernadotte, the first UN mediator.