

The Reintegration of Ex-combatant Women in Liberia: Long-Term Challenges

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Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes are seen as an essential part of peace-building, as without efforts to assist former combatants to reintegrate into society, their potential volatility could provide the opportunity for conflict to reignite. It is argued that the stability of the entire peace process can depend upon successful DDR and therefore it needs to take into account the requirements of all former combatants and be implemented in coordination with broader peace-building and recovery activities (Muggah 2009, p.277). However, this is often not the case for women associated with fighting forces as their needs are often poorly considered in post-conflict peace negotiations and planning. Women often receive less attention than men as they are not viewed as much of a security threat and therefore not afforded a priority in DDR (Nilsson 2005, p.76). Research has shown that despite numerous guidelines, policies and special DDR programmes which have been developed for women, implementation of the effective gender components still remains questionable, which makes social and economic reintegration into communities for these women extremely challenging. Moreover, there is little analysis regarding the long-term impact of the gender components of DDR programmes on ex-combatant women's lives so there is a poor understanding of the sustained benefit of DDR for women.

Therefore, this paper investigates the long-term reintegration situation for ex-combatant women in Liberia. It examines what aspects were most beneficial in the various phases of the DDRR programme and reviews initiatives that NGOs have implemented for ex-combatants. Through data collected during primary field investigations in 2010 and 2011 in Liberia, the experiences of women through the DDRR programme (i.e. the main programme 2004-7 and residual caseload 2008-9) and other initiatives are explored, to assess the impact that they have had on their lives a number of years later. This paper considers how an examination of these aspects together over time, may help to provide a suitable framework for a holistic analysis of DDR programming to offer a deeper and broader understanding of the challenges faced during reintegration for ex-combatant women. It also explores the extent to which this approach allows for more appropriate programmes to be designed in other post-conflict settings and policy recommendations proposed for female ex-combatant reintegration initiatives.