

Disarming Rebels or Empowering Communities: Aid Strategies in Reintegration of Former Combatants

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One of the primary debates in aid disbursement strategies for post-conflict and fragile states is how to mitigate security risks to peace-building efforts. As a result, over the past decade more extant and better funded peacekeeping missions have included disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes to minimise security risks from ex-combatants as possible spoilers. This mode of thinking undermines the fact that by disarming, combatants are forging a new social contract with the government and the international community. Combatants surrender the security and economic surety that their weapons provide, in exchange for opportunities and assistance in finding new peaceful livelihoods. In this three-fold process of return, however it is increasingly accepted that the R or reintegration stage is critical in minimising conflict relapse. At the same time much programmatic debate on humanitarian and development assistance delivery to post-conflict societies concerns the question of whether support should be targeted to the individual or dispersed into the broader community. Presently DDR efforts are focused on ex-combatants who are perceived as security threats and given compensation in the form of education and vocational skills support to enable their smooth return to civilian life. This privileging of ex-combatants through DDR creates stigma and makes social reintegration problematic. It also foments animosity of community members and civilians towards them since the latter are equally impoverished and in need for aid support. If ex-combatants are approached as a human resource and empowered through skills in community based reintegration (CBR) projects that also benefit civilians, it will help strike a fine balance in targeting strategies to ensure a community-based recovery and encourage positive social reintegration. So far literature on reintegration and CBR has failed to consider contemporary analyses on aid targeting strategies as part of international development and reconstruction efforts through DDR programmes in West Africa, Afghanistan, Sudan, East Timor and Nepal, among other cases. The key puzzle which this paper seeks to investigate is the interaction between aid policies in DDR/post-war reconstruction, ex-combatant-community relations and the dynamics of post-conflict social reintegration.