From conflict to ownership:

Participatory approaches to the reintegration of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone

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INTRODUCTION

Programmes for the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants have become a standard element in the package of measures carried out under the heading of 'peacebuilding'. They deal with a wide variety of aims in support of a peace process, from security concerns, stabilisation, and management of spoilers, to social and economic recovery of the country involved. If anything, they have been a victim of their own success, in the sense that they can be seen as something to be applied in most situations, although many voices warn that each DDR programme must relate to its particular context and conflict (for example, Stockholm Initiative on DDR, 2006: 41-45; Integrated DDR Standards, 2006). The lessons learned have lead to discussion of 'second generation DDR', which proposes a wider range of options, so that programmes can be more flexible and responsive the local context and to input from the communities involved (Specht, 2010; Colletta and Muggah, 2009; UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2010).

The results of DDR have also been mixed. Some studies show real benefits for those ex-combatants who took part in reintegration programmes, in terms of their social and economic well-being (Pugel, 2007). Others have failed to measure any significant benefit (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004), or have highlighted significant difficulties in trying to bring about social and economic reintegration (Jennings, 2007), especially for women.

One of the difficulties with reintegration programmes is that they interact with a wide range of issues, from security sector reform (Nathan, 2007) and transitional justice (Cutter Patel, 2009), to political and economic reconstruction. Sometimes the boundaries and lines of

responsibility are not clear. The need for a holistic, integrated approach has long been recognised (Berdal, 1996; Muggah, 2005; Integrated DDR Standards, 2006), but putting this into practice remains a challenge. The scope of the task and range of actors becomes clear if we consider the standard UN definition of the last (and most difficult phase) of DDR:

> Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.
>
> UN Secretary General (2006: 8)

Participatory approaches

The context in which this is supposed to take place can include destroyed infrastructure, economic disruption, population movement, trauma, and loss of social capital, amounting to a fragile or barely-existent state. Since post-conflict reconstruction and recovery is the context, the framework used for this study is taken from the discourse within development: namely, a participatory approach to designing and implementing programmes. The term 'participation' in this study is taken from the development context, as explained by Robert Chambers (1997, 1998), and as promoted by those agencies committed to a partnership approach to development work through nationally-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This requires, among other things, that the intended beneficiaries of a development programme are genuinely involved in, consulted on, and make input to, the main stages of its planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The objective is not only that a better and more relevant programme is developed; it also aims to engender a higher level of ownership of it by the community, building of capacity and social capital among actors in the country, and greater sustainability of the programme's outputs. The importance of these factors in DDR is that reintegration of ex-combatants can be a difficult process for all parties, including the communities being asked to accept them, which requires political buy-in at several levels, if it is to be sustainable. Dzinesa (2006) highlights the need to engage with communities and to build their capacity in the aftermath of conflict. A badly conceived or managed process, in which there is inadequate participation can lead to resentment, unfulfilled expectations, and a perception of unfair rewards for militia members. All these factors can in turn affect the outcome negatively.

A number of typologies or 'ladders' of participation have been developed which usefully distinguish between various senses in which the term is used, and highlight the degrees of sincerity with which the concept may be employed. Both those advocating and critiquing participation point to the gap between aspiration and reality, and highlight the significant power imbalances between stakeholders (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cornwall, 2008; Gaynor, 2010). Pretty (1995) has based his ladder of participation on earlier iterations, and it addresses these important questions. The most inadequate of the seven categories is described as 'passive participation' in which people are told what will or has happened: 'It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.' (Pretty et al, 1995, p 61). Other sub-optimal manifestations include the involvement of communities in return for material incentives, but with decision-making still retained by powerful outsiders; there are restricted agendas or frameworks within which issues are raised. At the final point on the scale, which is described as 'self-mobilisation', communities are not only carrying out their own analysis and setting the agenda, they are also independently accessing outside resources or assistance, while retaining control over how these are used. Fundamental concerns which are explored in this typology include the issue of who sets the agenda, controls access to resources, and ultimately exercises power. Although most discussion about participation presumes a more stable environment than an immediate post-war situation, the ladder is a useful tool for analysing the way in which reintegration programmes have been planned and implemented.

Typology	**Characteristics of each type**
1. Manipulative participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with "people's" representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no power.
2. Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without any listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
3. Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes, and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources, for example, labor, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and labor, but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.

5. Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduced costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still only be coopted to serve external goals.
6. Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7. Self-mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilization can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.
From Pretty (1995: p 1252), who cites several earlier sources from which it was adapted.	

Table 1: Pretty's typology (1995: p 1252) of participation: how people participate in development programmes and projects

Besides participation, this study's other conceptual home is within the framework of peacebuilding. This moves beyond peacekeeping and mediation, to look at the matters of implementing peace agreements and the wider range of issues affecting peace processes. This extends to addressing underlying causes, and communities' capacities, including their ability to deal with future conflict without the use of violence (Doyle and Sambanis, 2006).

METHODS

The study is based on data gathered in the capital (Freetown), and in and around three main towns (Bo, Kenema, and Makeni) in Sierra Leone. This provided a mix of city, town, and semi-rural environments across the country. The methods used were:

(1) Semi-structured interviews with ex-combatants, members of the communities accepting them back, and those involved in designing and implementing the reintegration programme;

(2) A questionnaire for ex-combatants, which was developed prior to the trip and piloted in-country (32 respondents); and

(3) Six focus group discussions of ex-combatants[1].

For the survey and focus group participants, the snowball sampling method was used, based on several initial introductions in each locality. There was therefore a number of entry points to the population. The rationale for this was dictated partly by the question of building trust with potential participants, who might otherwise be reluctant to talk to outsiders. Since purposive rather than random sampling was used for the survey, which in any case had a small number of respondents, it is not possible to generalise with any certainty from the sample to the population of ex-combatants. Once this limitation is made explicit, however, some useful insights can be gleaned, both from the quantative aspects of the survey and the open-ended questions. The data-collection is in fact part of a larger study of reintegration in both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

DATA GATHERED ON PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

The reintegration programme came after ex-combatants voluntarily surrendered any weapons they had, received some initial support, and typically stayed for a time in a demobilisation camp, where they received orientation on civilian life and options for them during the reintegration phase. These usually consisted of a return to education, or vocational training in areas such as hairdressing, driving, car maintenance, or as an electrician. Children were diverted when they arrived into a separate programme, which usually involved greater support in an interim care centre, and a reintegration by returning them to education within their original community, if possible. The extent to which participatory approaches can be seen in these reintegration programmes is assessed here using the ladder of participation. The initial stages or 'lowest rungs' of the ladder simply involve receiving information about the programme. This does not yet involve the idea of consultation or making an input to decisions, but even at this level shortcomings in the amount and accuracy of information are apparent. It was often perceived as not being borne out by events; that it was inaccurate; or even that it was deliberately misleading, involving lies and deception. In addition to these forms of miscommunication, there is the related question of unrealistic expectations being created, whether inadvertently or not.

[1] The term "ex-combatant" is used throughout this study to mean all those who were associated with armed forces or fighting groups. It is not limited to those who actually fought, carried a weapon, or had a gun to ensure their entry to a DDR programme. It therefore covers those whose roles included cooks, porters, intelligence gatherers, and "bush wives".

Explanations of reintegration and their accuracy

The first issue is the amount of information about reintegration which was received by ex-combatants. They were asked in the survey if the process was explained, using a three-point Likert scale. While a majority said they had felt they had received *enough* information, and had met an official who gave them advice, much fewer of them felt they had the clearer understanding which an explanation would have provided. When it came to whether the information was accurate, the majority reversed dramatically, with more than two-thirds saying it was not. The discrepancy is statistically significant (p=0.000, Fisher's exact test). It also shows that the negative views expressed by ex-combatants were not simply a function of a generalised disaffection, or a reaction to current difficulties in daily life: there were well able to distinguish between those aspects which they found positive (like the amount of information) and other more negative experiences (such as its accuracy).

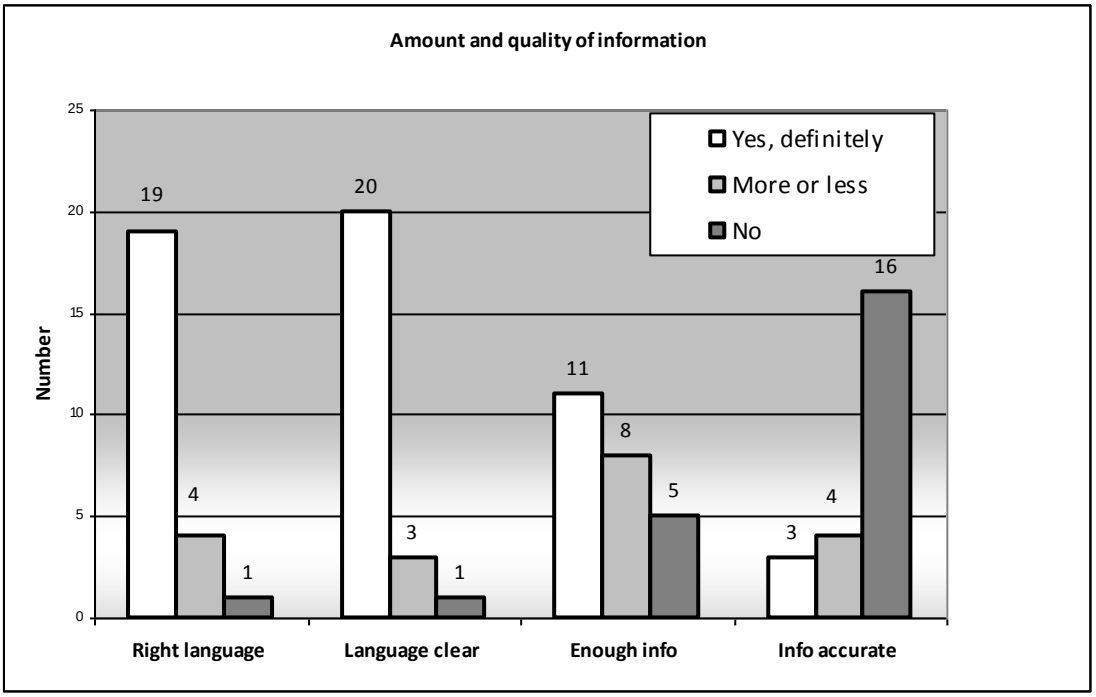

Figure 1: Amount and quality of information

The problems with the information-giving process, can be placed on a spectrum, and indicate different levels of foreknowledge or motivation on the part of the information-provider. In this case, this refers to information given directly by those involved in administering the DDR programme, rather than second-hand information passed on by commanders, friends, and other ex-combatants. As in all communication processes, both the sender and the receiver of the message play a role in possible problems. On one hand, we see the need for those administering DDR to take into account the possibility of their words being misunderstood or

taken up incorrectly, such as an expression of intention to provide certain benefits, or a possibility of certain benefits, being taken as a firm commitment. The possibilities for misunderstanding on the part of the receiver are of course considerable, since some ex-combatants may have difficulties in dealing with the authorities or with forward planning; others were receiving the information second-hand, possibly via commanders who simplified or exaggerated the promised benefits for their own purposes; some would have missed out on basic education during the conflict; and some were still dependent on drugs, and might not have been able to focus on complex explanations or long-term gains.

The spectrum, then, begins with poor communication, inadequate information, and unintentional creation of unrealistic expectations. Further along the spectrum, there is inaccurate information which was given in good faith. At this point in the spectrum, these problems amount to unfulfilled commitments and broken promises: the incorrect information was actually given, rather than it being an incorrect perception arising from poor communication. The furthest end of the spectrum amounts to knowingly misleading the ex-combatants, or giving information which was known at the time to be incorrect; or making commitments which the information-provider knew were not going to be fulfilled.

Leaving aside false impressions created either deliberately or unintentionally by non-DDR sources (such as family, commanders, other ex-combatants), the scale could be summarised as follows:

(1) Misunderstandings by ex-combatants, based on genuine and correct information from the DDR programme which was properly communicated. This may be exacerbated by ex-combatants' experiences of dealing with people in authority, alienation from those in power, high expectations, lack of education, drug dependency, or lack of trust.
(2) Poor communication from the DDR programme, in which statements which were badly expressed or open to a number of reasonable interpretations, or suggestions about possibilities were vaguely worded and understood to be a certainty, resulting in ex-combatants arriving at the wrong conclusion about just how much was being promised.
(3) Genuine information, properly expressed and understood, about how the programme would be run, but which subsequently did not come about due to failures or shortcomings in its implementation. These failures may have arisen due to problems with different agencies (such as implementing NGOs) than those originally providing the information. This may be interpreted ultimately as broken promises, false information, or deliberate deception.

(4) Information which was unintentionally inaccurate.
(5) Deliberate vagueness by those providing information, knowing that this would create a false impression; deliberately misleading ex-combatants; and deception.

From the perspective of the ex-combatants, it may be difficult to distinguish between 'false information' (given deliberately or not) and a failure to deliver on benefits which had genuinely been intended. These categories are not, of course, mutually exclusive, and problems may arise through a combination or poor or inaccurate communication, and also a failure to deliver on benefits which they were in fact supposed to receive. There is an underlying sense of the power relationship, and perhaps a difficulty in dealing with officials:

> I don't really know because what they told us they were going to do, they didn't do all. We didn't get any further information from them even when we tried asking what they were going to do for us, they didn't tell us.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo

And:

> They just said nothing to us because the guy who was suppose to act between we the student and the office, we tried to ask him so many question but said he has no information from the office.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo

There were repeated references to benefits which ex-combatants felt had been promised but not received. These included many references to the reintegration identity card issued to them, carrying four letters, from A to D, each of which was supposed to be punched when the benefit was received. But participants complained that some parts of the benefit package were not provided despite this, and others said that sometimes two letters were punched when only one element was actually provided:

> A lot of information but they did not apply to them accurately. For instance, the card has "A, B, C, and D " and each should be perforated at each stage. But this was not so.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo

> In some cases they would perforate A to C independently. In other cases, they would perforate both A and B, for just A's benefits. The D was never perforated, that had huge benefits [attached]. Some were as lucky as not to have C perforated. We have rallied around, yet to no avail, especially in my case, two holes were perforated for one, so that the benefits would be siphoned off. Complaints were made several times to the police, but to no

> avail. They would even call [to the DDR programme], but nothing would come out of it.
>
> Participant 1, Focus Group B, Bo

Delays in payment of stipends, or non-payment, were among the biggest complaints, along with missing start-up toolkits which were supposed to be part of the vocational training. The duration and quality of the training was often mentioned.

Expectations, promises, and deceit

The perception of 'broken promises' arises partly from expectations. In one case, a participant in Focus Group E was unhappy that his preferred training option, of driving, was not available, so he had to opt for training as an auto mechanic instead. To him, this was an example of an unfulfilled promise, whereas only a limited number of people could in fact be trained for the most popular options, such as driving, as the labour market could only absorb a limited number of drivers.

There is a strong sense that these expectations were created in the context of what was clearly understood to be a 'deal', in which benefits would be provided in return for handing over weapons.

> Before I say anything, I have to bring out my view: I *deeply regret* [very emphatic] that I handed over my gun. If I had known that such was going to be, I would not have given my gun. I would be in the jungle still. Just as my brother was saying the tool was not sufficient for us. Yes. I was trained as a carpenter. Right now, I am dis... I don't even know what to say.
>
> Participant 4, Focus Group C, Bo

For many ex-combatants, the failure to provide expected benefits was clearly seen as a broken promise. In terms of participation, this breach of trust is worse than receiving no information at all, and it came to define their relationship with those running the reintegration programmes. These benefits were clearly understood to have been commitments made at the start of the programme, and sometimes even before disarmament took place.

> Nothing of what they promised, did they give us.
>
> Participant 3, Focus Group A, Bo

> So we are trying to tell you people that according to the DDR programme, what was said [promised] to us, was not given.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group A, Bo

One participant thanked the moderator 'a lot' for asking about how things were between him and his family. He felt bad that due to his economic situation, he 'was not a father' to his children, because he was unable to provide for their needs, such as education:

> The problem lies with those who promised things to us but did not fulfil. Benefits were expected which we would have used to ensure support for our families, and these were not provided. That is why my kids are all in the streets, so you can see that my condition is terrible, I swear to God.
>
> Participant 4, Focus Group A, Bo

Focus group participants were also asked how they would go about running a reintegration programme. The issue of making unfulfilled promises came up again:

> I will make sure everybody has his or her own share in the programme what is meant for them. I will not tell them of what is not in the programme.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo

When it came to advice for anyone who might be entering a DDR programme, the comments again brought up the question of unfulfilled expectations.

> I will tell him about my experience and about the failed promises.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo

There is one step beyond that of broken or unfulfilled promises, and that would be premeditated deception of the ex-combatants by those running the programmes. While many focus group participants mentioned inaccurate or inadequate information in general, some of which was described in terms of broken promises, a much smaller group again attributed this to a deliberate act of lying or deceit:

> So really the disarmament process did not go down well [with us], because they cheated us: what was meant for us was not given to us. But since we are lovers of peace, we do not have problems with it, we have forgotten about it.
>
> Participant 1, Focus Group A, Bo

One participant highlighted the fact that civilians received benefits intended for ex-combatants as one of the ways in which the programme was undermined by deception:

> The DDR idea is a very salient one. And even for the ex-combatants who had been a wanderer in the bush, to now have to give up the guns for 60,000 [Leones] is fine. That gun was the weapon he would threaten people with, now he had decided to hand it over so he can live a liberated life. Such an idea

> is really good. But the implementation is poor, because it's mixed up with deceit and theft. For what was promised to us was not given.
>
> Participant 3, Focus Group A, Bo

The same idea comes again when the question is raised of advice for someone who might take part in a reintegration programme:

> Well if it is my own brother who is to partake, I will advise him not to do so because they did not do what they promised us. I will advise him not to go because they lied to us.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group F, Kenema

Survey open-ended questions

The final part of the survey asked a number of open-ended questions, starting with 'If you were running a DDR programme now, what things would you do to help people feel included in the process, and have their views listened to?' A recurring theme related to being listened to, as suggested by these respondents:

> I will make adequate time for them to express their views and provide (for) their needs
>
> I would allow them to speak their mind
>
> I would listen to them, and allow them to fully participate
>
> To listen to [their] views and their needs
>
> I will allow all to provide their opinion and see the way I am working
>
> I would make them tell me what can be done to make them develop themselves and the nation
>
> I would try to know what they want
>
> Selected responses to Question J1

When asked 'How or why would that help', most referred to improvements in the programme or its implementation:

> This would help me to give them the right training
>
> This will allow a true programme for the right people
>
> Selected responses to Question J2

There was also an open-ended question asking 'What would you *avoid* doing?' The responses are dominated by concerns about corruption, theft, false promises, and exclusion of ex-combatants from benefits. The issue of corruption or mismanagement had not in fact been mentioned at all in the survey, so its emergence as an issue was entirely unprompted. It was mentioned spontaneously by nearly half of the respondents, such as these replies:

> Corrupt practices
>
> Not to take bribe
>
> Avoid corruption
>
> I would not eat [steal] people's benefits
>
> Corruption, marginalisation
>
> No theft

Selected responses to Question J3

Corruption is not generally mentioned in the literature on participation, yet it is relevant to this study. This is because it recurs continually in the focus groups, survey, and interviews, as a topic which is brought up spontaneously when the integrity, honesty, or effectiveness of the programme is being discussed. It is also relevant as both the reality and the perception of corruption and poor governance fundamentally undermine the social contract at the heart of DDR and of any participatory approach. Participation is based on addressing the interests of the beneficiaries rather than just the donors or those implementing the programme; on honest communication in both directions; and on shared decision-making, to whatever extent. These essential aspects are negated when the interests or voice of another group – those mismanaging the programme or diverting resources – replace the perspective of the beneficiaries. Corruption and diversion of resources are also fundamentally at variance with even the lower rungs of the ladder of participation, relating to the sharing of accurate information about how the programme would proceed. It is particularly problematic when its influence is hidden or unstated, as it supplants any attempt at dialogue and consultation. Finally, while participation is ultimately about addressing asymmetrical power relationships and attempting to frame them in a way which makes them more amenable to being challenged, corruption and the diversion of benefits intended for ex-combatants is a function of the power imbalance, expressed in a way which avoids even the pretence of consultation or accountability.

Another common theme was false promises or building up expectations:

Marginalising and duping the target group(s)

Avoid deceit

Building up false hopes

Making bogus promises

Selected responses to Question J3

Consultation and shared decision-making

The next stages in the progression towards self-mobilisation as one moves up the ladder of participation involves two-way information flow: the extent to which their views were passed on, sought, or considered by those designing and running the programmes. This largely relates to consultation, rather than actually sharing decision-making to any considerable extent in terms of programme design. (This is distinct from choices by individuals about their own future, from a predetermined list of options). It does however to touch on stakeholders' views being into account, when it comes to any modification of how specific details in the programme were implemented, especially after representations were made or views expressed.

In terms of the reintegration programme, the specific ways in which possibilities for participation might manifest themselves include the following:

- Expressing an opinion.
- Being asked for one's view.
- Being listened to.
- Those running the programme knowing what ex-combatants' needs were.
- Choices being available from a list of reintegration options (education, training, etc) and their location.
- Consultation with children about where they would return to (original community, which relative, etc).
- Input to decisions on how the programme was run (as opposed to individual choices).
- Lobbying for benefits (stipends, toolkits, etc).

Most of the definitions of participation deal with communities, which are usually stable, and which may have organisations or structures for conducting analysis, expressing views, or making decisions. The participatory elements in reintegration are more often seen at the individual level rather than being done in groups, partly because the demobilisation phase

aimed to break the ex-combatants link with commanders and to help them forge a non-military identity. Participation usually depends on social capital and group structures, which are more problematic during DDR. They are more likely to be found when it comes to engaging with communities rather than individual ex-combatants, as seen with the children's programme, and this is also a useful way to engage all stakeholders and allow them to interact and rebuild relationships.

Being asked for an opinion

One of the most basic measures is whether ex-combatants felt that their views were sought during the process. Survey respondents were asked if they had ever been asked for their opinion about the way disarmament and demobilisation was being done, and the same question was later asked in relation to the reintegration phase. Although the sample sizes were small, those saying they had been asked their opinion were outnumbered four to one by those saying they had not.

Asked for your opinion?	**About disarmament and demobilisation**		**About Reintegration**	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Yes	5	***20 %***	**4**	***19%***
No	20	***80%***	**17**	***81%***
Total	25		21	

Table 2: Being consulted on DDR

Going beyond the matter of whether ex-combatants' opinions were solicited, they were surveyed on the extent to which their views were in fact taken on board during DDR. Question E1 asked: 'Did you feel your views in general were listened to by those running the programmes?' The responses were overwhelmingly negative.

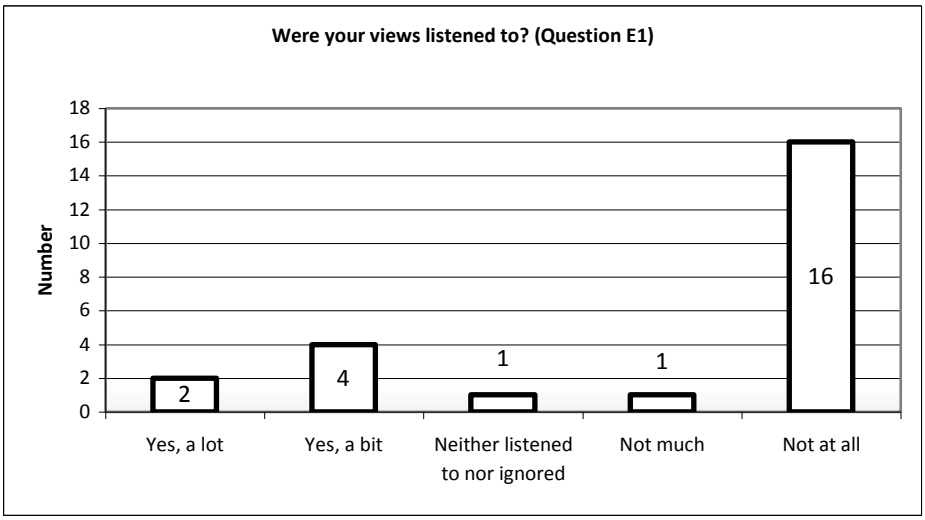

Figure 2: Were your views listened to? (Question E1)

The issue of whether their opinions had been sought was also raised in the focus group discussions. The responses again point to an understandable emphasis on livelihoods and self-sufficiency after the war, given the extreme economic conditions at the time and subsequently. One former commander said that during the implementation of the training, at a point when payment of benefits had become an issue, speaking up could have consequences when dealing with people who were corrupt. He had been asked if they ever sought his opinion:

> There was no time for that. They had no time for that, even if you grumble they will seize the little you were supposed have [the benefits].
>
> Participant 3, Focus Group B, Bo

Another highlighted the difference between being asked for one's view, and seeing the desires which they expressed being fulfilled. They were able to distinguish between these two elements:

> Yes they did asked us how we would want to see the programme. They did ask us. … But, our own view that we gave them, some of them were not considered.
>
> Unidentified participant, Focus Group E, Bo

A slightly different measure of the extent to which they felt their views were taken on board was explored in Question E3: 'Did you feel that people running the programmes knew what your needs were?' This goes beyond consultation to a higher level of participation, in terms of

programming being more closely shaped to their needs. A clear majority felt that their needs were not known at all by those running the programmes.

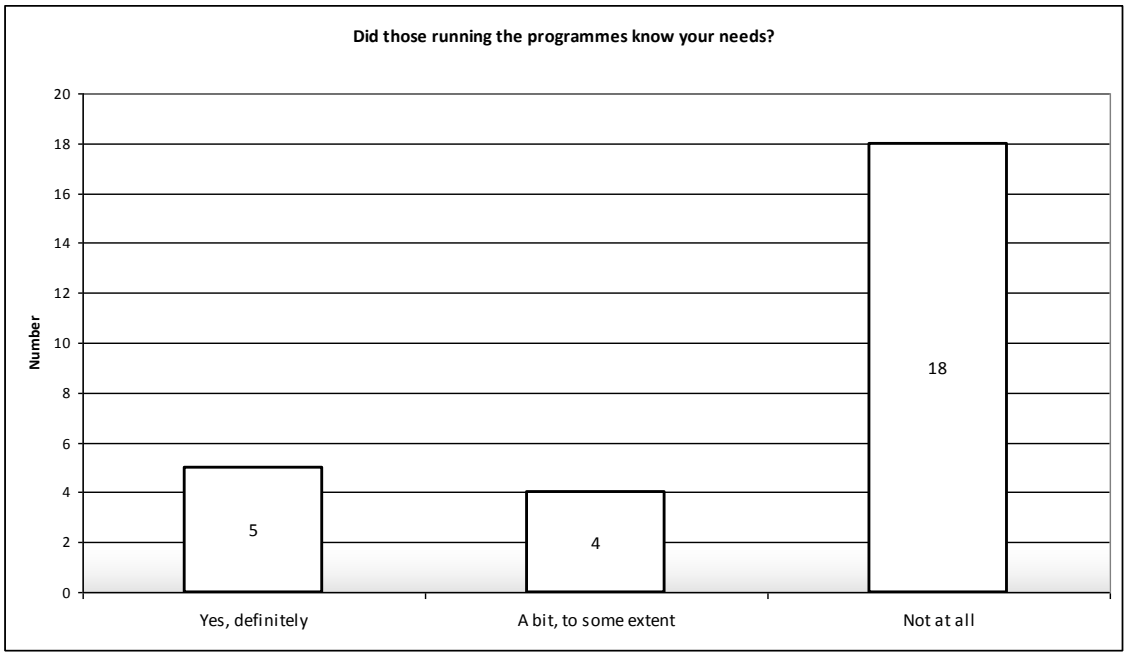

Figure 3: Did those running the programmes know your needs? (Question E3)

Those who were children at the time of demobilisation were more likely to say their needs were known. This difference is significant (p=0.024, using Fisher's exact test). Two thirds of them said their needs were known 'a bit, to some extent', whereas just over three quarters of adults said their needs were not known 'at all'.

As a more specific measure of the degree to which they felt their views had been taken into account, Question E5 asked: 'Did anything you said have any effect on how things were done?'[2] The response was overwhelmingly negative.

[2] This kind of question does risk conflating the matter of 'being heard' with that of whether specific needs were met, it has to be said. However, the qualitative data indicate that many ex-combatants were able to make a distinction between the two ideas.

Figure 4: Did what you say have any effect? (Question E5)

The choice of reintegration training or education is for many ex-combatants the most significant way in which they had a say on how the programme would benefit them. In this sense, it is of course something which touches on participation. Yet it is not necessarily participation *per se*: even a non-participatory programme would still have offered them a choice in the matter, if only for the sake of matching people's skills and aptitudes to the relevant options. The choices available were from a list of options, not least because there could only be training capacity in certain areas, and ultimately labour market demand was restricted to a certain number of people in each sector. So while this choice is a significant moment in the life in each ex-combatant, in which their decision could have far-reaching consequences, it is not the same as full participation in its most developed sense. However, one example from the town of Bo appears to indicate real imagination and flexibility on the part of those implementing the programming. The participant had said earlier that he 'did not take any training because it was boring and I was born a dancer', and in response to this question said:

> When I said I cannot go through training they brought me to the Sierra Leonian national dance troupe to become a better dancer. Now I have been to Europe, America and some African countries through dancing.
>
> Response to Question E6

Lobbying for benefits

Ex-combatants frequently mentioned having to lobby or campaign for the benefits they felt they were entitled to. This came up spontaneously in different focus groups, and it underlines the sense of disempowerment which many felt – a feeling which often contributed to disillusionment with the process, when they sensed their petitions were not heard. Some members of the group would have been in a position during the war where they had the upper hand, as a person bearing arms and power but little accountability. The role reversal, loss of status, and identity shift would have been quite disorientating for some, especially in the context of largely unaddressed post-traumatic stress disorder. Sometimes the attempts to lobby and to be heard were associated with real anger, especially among ex-combatants who felt they had in fact served in defence of their community.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focuses on the views of ex-combatants, rather than the receiving communities or those implementing the programme. More positive methodologies can be seen in the specific work of some of the child protection agencies, such as their consultation with communities receiving children after demobilisation. However, it is clear that many ex-combatants' perception of the reintegration programme is negative, in terms of participatory approaches. They saw significant problems with even the most basic elements of participation, such as the provision of accurate information. This relates to the very bottom rungs on the ladder of participation. The problems with the provision of information do not relate so much to the amount, which many felt was adequate in as far as it went, but with its perceived accuracy. The nature of this inaccuracy is important to consider, as it arises from the discrepancy between what was believed to have been promised, and what actually came about. As discussed above, this discrepancy can be due to imperfect information, or information given in good faith but which turned out to be inaccurate because programme implementation did not go according to plan. There were many actors, and those who explained the programme to ex-combatants were not always the same people who were involved in implementing later. However, trust, faith in the process, and a sense of ownership by key stakeholders were seriously undermined by the problems they saw with the information. The fact that that this was sometimes attributed to deliberate deception shows the depth of feeling. When it comes to the next rungs on the ladder of participation, problems were also perceived in terms of being heard or having an input to decision-making.

A participatory approach is not necessarily measured by the degree of satisfaction which stakeholders express with a programme's outcomes, which is a function of many different

factors besides participation. This is especially so in a complex, fluid and difficult post-war environment such as Sierra Leone, where capacity constraints, population movement, and security concerns can have a significant impact. The situation is further complicated by the fact that programmes for ex-combatants can be seen by the wider community as favouring those who persecuted them – and this community had enormous needs and challenges of its own after more than a decade of civil war. So while generalised disappointment with the programme outcome was expressed by many ex-combatants, particularly in terms of poverty, employment and livelihoods, the data presented here indicate that the lack of participatory processes was seen as a problem in itself, and is not just a manifestation of broad-based discontent.

Some of the factors working against a participatory approach which can be usefully explored in further research include the short timeframe for DDR programmes; the needs of donors for quick, measurable results and a definite exit strategy; post-war disruption and lack of capacity within the country and the agencies asked to implement it; lack of forward planning; divergent interests, agendas and cultures among the many agencies involved; and security concerns, instability, and population movement.

The views which emerged in the course of the study show that a ladder of participation is a useful way of analysing the experiences of ex-combatants and understanding their relationship with the reintegration programmes. Within the multi-faceted model called 'participation', it exposes key concepts of power, communication, expectations, consultation, inclusion in decision-making, and trust. It also raises the question of ex-combatants' agency in the process. Participatory process – or their absence – are inherently linked to the question of regenerating social capital in a post war society (a concept explored by Bowd, 2008 and 2011). These concepts are not just additive: they are a process in their own right, combining to form an essential part of the relationship between ex-combatants and those with power, be they staff from local authorities or international agencies. Judgments are made by ex-combatants about actors and their motivation or reliability, and about the way their own actions are likely to improve their situation. The ideas mentioned may or may not be part of the everyday language of ex-combatants. They are however the basis which is used to infer the rules of the game, to quickly form a model of 'how things work', using an intuitive process of induction based on how things played out. Their experiences in relation to credibility, accuracy of information, diversion or non-payment of benefits, and a sense of actually having been heard during any consultation process, are vital in determining this important relationship. It affects not just the level of trust, but also the whole idea of a new 'social contract' which DDR involves, and their notion of governance in the post-war

situation, and how they see themselves in this picture. This understanding of their relationship therefore influences ex-combatants' actions and behaviour towards society and the reconstruction project, arising from their sense of inclusion and ownership (or otherwise). Ultimately, it underpins the way they see themselves in society, both now and in the future, which is one of the key elements in social reintegration.

An assessment of reintegration from the point of view of participation is consistent with the more innovative approaches being discussed in second-generation DDR, and the ideals expressed in the Integrated DDR Standards. It goes beyond the 'minimalist' versus 'maximalist' dichotomy in DDR thinking, and complements the longstanding calls for better forward planning and a holistic, integrated approach to reintegration. DDR processes are, at best, only facilitators of the process of reintegrating ex-combatants[3]. Former fighters and their communities have been dealing with this question for millennia, and will continue to face it whenever there is war, whether or not outsiders get involved to try to help the process. Deciding that DDR programmes are of no use, or must be changed radically, does not mean that the difficult questions challenging all stakeholders simply go away.

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[3] I am indebted to Irma Specht of Transition International for highlighting this perspective, through the training courses run by her organisation jointly with International Alert.

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