

UNEVOC Forum

Once were warriors: Reintegrating ex-combatants

This edition of the UNEVOC Forum provides a snapshot into countries emerging from conflict, examining some of the challenges faced, and vocational training issues to be addressed, when seeking to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life. Prolonged conflict damages not only educational structures but also educational relationships and economic livelihoods. Short-term actions by the international community after conflict or disaster often focus on rebuilding educational structures. This Forum provides an update on efforts to rebuild livelihoods and lives through effective educational relationships and reflects on how more learner-focussed processes could lead to improved outcomes.

» Estimates vary, but there are certainly more than 20 major armed conflicts continuing in the world today, with another 15 or so that have ceased since 2000 (Project Ploughshare). Whole generations of learners miss out entirely on education and training, and many more have interrupted education and careers. In the period following conflict, some economies quickly collapse and new post-emergency bubble economies (with their own internal

drivers) emerge. Unemployment may be as high as 80 per cent. Coupled with the need to re-absorb large numbers of internally displaced persons as well as ex-combatants, the demand for technical and vocational education and training for livelihoods, whilst impossible to estimate, is undoubtedly high. Yet provision is often ad-hoc, under-planned and under-funded.



by Karina Veal ¹

In the emerging field of post-conflict studies (within development studies), scholars give clarity and distinction to a variety of situations in the world today; distinguishing between failed states, fragile states, deteriorating states, states with low capacity and high will, states with high capacity and low will, states in post-conflict transition and states in early recovery (Meagher 2005). Whilst these distinctions can be useful for some purposes – experience tells us that particular responses best suit particular situations – there is often a shared set of circumstances that suggests the provision of skills development is at once most important and most difficult. Armed conflicts most often occur in countries with low development indices, and as such the myriad challenges faced by least developed countries in general are often true, with the added overlay of the post-conflict environment.

Despite the increased international interest in the field of TVET in post-conflict societies, amongst practitioners and also academics,

¹ The author would like to acknowledge and thank Marie-Christine Heinze for her research unpacking the DDR process and Tonka Eibs for her research as the basis of the section *Becoming a civilian – again*.



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most of the available literature in the young field is 'grey', in the form of non-indexed reports and case studies, and often ephemeral. Booklets outnumber books. There are handbooks and guidelines and 'how to' manuals put out by international agencies operating in the field (ILO, UNHCR and UNESCO) and a small number of publications on the topic of education in situations post-emergencies. However, a number of researchers have written up case studies of TVET in a variety of post-conflict settings and several universities now include the topic for academic study.

With activity at the practitioner level, and the focus of written materials on description and documentation, there is yet to be an agreed typology of TVET in post-conflict settings

through which a more sophisticated understanding of the issues could be appreciated. Researchers from the Conflict and Education Research Group (CERG) at the University of Oxford, England, have given some welcome attention to this issue (and have also authored a recent discussion paper '*Education for Livelihoods and Civic Participation in Post-Conflict Countries*' in the UNESCO-UNEVOC Discussion Paper series). CERG have conceptualized four main contexts in which vocational education might function: rapid response, single project delivery; longer-term economic planning and forecasting; donor coordination and systems delivery; and peace building and reintegration. This model provides a useful basis for further development and allows the various functions of TVET to be understood in public policy terms.

The scope of discussion for this UNEVOC Forum is less ambitious, describing the processes at play regarding ex-combatants, and the role of TVET as part of their reintegration, following disarmament and demobilization. It focuses on the area of youth ex-combatants. After some general discussion two particular aspects are dealt with; the psychosocial needs of ex-combatants in training and the need for improved responsiveness to the labour market.

D Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

>> TVET programmes offered by governments or international agencies as part of national education provision are of course open to ex-combatants but in many post-conflict settings TVET as part of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes form a large part of provision. Understanding how the programmes work is thus important.

The ultimate objective of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is to support the conditions for long-term peace and security. DDR tries to deliver a safe environment that can allow people, communities and nations to rebuild. Its focus is on achieving these objectives; matters of economic and social post-war reconstruction form part of broader reconstruction agendas. The obvious pre-condition to DDR is an agreed political commitment to peace.

DDR aims firstly to disarm combatants and then, secondly, to formally demobilize those combatants. Disarmament may be done by assembling combatants in camps and then collecting their weapons for safe storage, redistribution or destruction. Disarmament is not always comprehensive since small arms are easy to conceal and keep, and people may wish to maintain their weapons 'just in case'. Demobilization is likely to involve registering

combatants ahead of disassembling either small groups or entire armed forces (irregular or regular) and relocating people to preferred destinations. Ideally this process would include not only combatants but also persons working in logistics and administration as well as sex slaves and 'war wives'. The final phase is to reintegrate those combatants into civilian life by providing access to civilian forms of work and income as well as fostering social reintegration.

DDR is now an integral part of UN peacekeeping missions as well as part of post-conflict reconstruction plans. Skills development (and economic development) are seen as an integral part of DDR. The success of the reintegration components of such programmes is vital for sustainable peace and development, for only when ex-combatants feel that they have a real alternative for making a living can peace and stability gain a real foothold. Conversely, disaffected veterans can clearly be dangerous, and are at risk of re-engaging in conflicts or other violent activities. Their reintegration is crucial to the wider community.

DDR is a complex process with political, military, security, humanitarian and socio-economic dimensions. Numerous organizations are involved in the planning and implementation of the various aspects of DDR programmes.

DDR AS PART OF UN PEACEKEEPING

The last seven UN Peacekeeping Operations established by the UN Security Council have all included DDR in their mandate. These are: the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS, 2005), the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB, 2004), the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH, 2004), the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI, 2004), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL, 2003), the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC, 1999), and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL, 1999). Moreover, the UN also supports DDR programmes in many settings where there is not a UN peacekeeping operation, such as: Aceh (Indonesia), Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Niger, Somalia and Uganda.

Source: United Nations DDR Resource Centre

While arguably there is a case for a coherent and clear approach to DDR and for contingency in the planning, financing and implementation of DDR programmes, in most countries the whole range of the DDR process is not covered by a single organization or mandate. Within the context of UN peacekeeping missions, the New York-based Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) traditionally takes the lead on planning DDR with the collaboration and

support of other UN agencies, funds and programmes. Given the increasing emphasis on partner state involvement, the tendency today is for a more participatory planning process. This is likely to involve UN agencies at both country and HQ levels as well as members of the country's government and administration and other non-governmental organizations.

Reintegration is generally seen as the most difficult part of the DDR process. Often, this phase is split into two consecutive components: reinsertion and reintegration. Reinsertion offers short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs and can last up to one year, while reintegration is a longer-term, continuous social and economic process of development. The reinser-tion process provides the demobilized and their families with bare necessities (often including some cash payments) as well as first measures in education, training, employment and the provision of necessary tools. Reintegration is a longer-term, open-ended process that builds upon reinser-tion measures and leads towards sustainable lives and livelihoods. TVET can be offered as part of both the immediate and longer-term compo-nents of reintegration.

DDR programmes are usually funded through diverse financing mechanisms involving a mix of peacekeeping assessed contributions, multi-lateral (e.g. trust funds managed by UNDP or the World Bank) as well as bilateral funding within the context of single DDR process.

TABLE 1 - THREE APPROACHES TO REINTEGRATION

1. SHORT-TERM STABILIZATION (REINSERTION)

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

- » To draw ex-combatants away from fighting or criminality until a peace mission is deployed, or security sector or political reform is completed
- » To provide rapid transitional support for resettlement and short-term income-generating opportunities to all potentially disruptive ex-combatants

ACTIVITIES

- » Information, counselling and referral services
- » Transitional support schemes (food, clothing, transportation, other)
- » Short-term labour-intensive projects

2. EX-COMBATANT FOCUSED REINTEGRATION

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

- » To provide ex-combatants with specifically designed, individually focused sustainable solutions for long-term reintegration
- » To engage ex-combatants in sustainable microprojects to reduce the long-term security risk they present

ACTIVITIES

- » Information, counselling and referral services
- » Microproject development through grants
- » Training, technical advisory and related support services

3. COMMUNITY BASED REINTEGRATION

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

- » To provide communities with tools and capacities to support the reintegration of ex-combatants, together with internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and other special groups
- » To support ex-combatant reintegration as a component of wider, community-focused reconciliation and recovery programmes

ACTIVITIES

- » Community projects with greater inclusion of all social actors
- » Peace-building and reconciliation activities
- » Activities to increase local security

Source: IDDRS Operational Guide UNDP

more community-based approach. They note that the cost per combatant increases with each of the three approaches, commensurate with the level of resourcing. In addition, they caution that the nature of the conflict, the nature of the current security levels and the predictions for ongoing security are factors which influence the appropriateness of the approach used. For situations where ex-combatants may be deemed to be an ongoing security threat (for example if there is a likelihood of re-engagement of conflict or formation of armed criminal gangs) the second, individual centred approach is recommended. This is the approach with the highest emphasis on vocational education and training – although TVET experts would also argue for a higher TVET emphasis for the other approaches too. An issue of concern with the ex-combatant focussed approach relates to equity amongst the community, whereby priority education, training and support opportunities offered to ex-combatants create feelings of unfairness within the broader

community. Inclusiveness, practical application of the training, and cultural considerations always need to be considered in developing TVET programmes for these participants, in common with good practice everywhere.

Table 1 details the three broad approaches to reintegration as put forward in an operational guide to the International Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards. They distinguish between short-term stabilization, ex-combatant focussed reintegration and a

Becoming a civilian – again

» Criticism of existing TVET efforts within DDR often focus on the lack of relationship between programmes offered and the needs of the labour market, and a short discussion on that issue can be found in the following section. Another key problem is the lack of understanding of the support needed for individuals in the transition from military to civilian life, and it is to that topic that this article now turns.

Why is this transition such a challenge for many former combatants? Having been born as civilians could it not be assumed that, given peaceful circumstances, they would quickly choose to reintegrate into civilian life? For some, of course, it is an easy transition, but not for all. Tonka Eibs (2006) highlights two main aspects that make reintegration difficult; the

challenges of acculturation in general and from a military culture specifically. Military culture becomes established in the combatant's identity, and the various elements may be quite resistant to change, since change may be perceived as an attack on the personal identity of the individual. Studies of military socialization are pertinent here, and Eibs identifies three key elements to be understood:

Military culture gets into all spheres of life, affecting not only working hours but also leisure hours. During armed conflicts, combatants frequently live in camps, constantly (even exclusively) in the company of comrades. Wearing uniforms and being given new names, combatants are de-individualized in a number of ways.

Military ethics are entirely different from civilian ethics. Values such as obedience, loyalty and discipline strengthen the functionality of a military group and allow an individual to get fast and clear feedback, which helps tie the values of effective military command together with the values of the individual and the group. Universal moral considerations are distanced.

Military units are usually characterized by an extreme cohesion within the group, increased by specific rituals, and by a shared identity and a shared perception of the enemy.

These particularities of military culture are real and imbedded. Former combatants engaged in the DDR process are asked to leave the life they know for an uncertain future, often in

TABLE 2 - POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS FOR SUPPORTING TRANSITION PROCESS

PROBLEM	DESCRIPTION	INTERVENTION
>> Problem with acculturation process	Stress because of uncontrollability, ambiguous situations and insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Psycho-education on the process of acculturation >> Training with adapted instrument 'culture assimilator'
>> Problems with specific abilities required in civilian context	Possible problems with abilities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> independence >> problem solving >> conflict management >> tolerance of ambiguity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Training in these abilities >> Psychological supervision, accompanying the first integration phase for supporting adaptation, independence, identification and problem solving

Source: Tonka Eibs 2006

societies with very few employment opportunities. During the process of acculturation they may have to admit that their previous experiences do not fit with civilian life, and this can be highly stressful. Clearly a number of soft skills / life skills will need to be taught. Weakened decision-making authority and so on all have some short-term advantages for military life but need to be reassessed to prepare individuals for today's labour market.

Table 2 takes a look at education and training options from a psychological perspective and suggests the sorts of elements that could be considered to assist with particular problems

frequently displayed by ex-combatants. Such interventions would, of course, need to be adapted according to context and culture.

Training and support for ex-combatants must take due consideration of the challenges for the process of acculturation, and support individuals as they give up elements of their former lives during reintegration into civilian community. Successful training programmes need to focus not only on vocational skills but also on the skills necessary for civilian life. Detailed assessments of the characteristics of the armed group from which the ex-combatants are coming will also provide important


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contextual knowledge and enable better-targeted support.

R reintegrating or recycling?

>> In reality, plans, decisions and actions for reintegrating ex-combatants are made on the ground in difficult circumstances. Planning and implementation is done with limited resources against tight timelines. Those responsible for the skills development component of DDR may have little experience in TVET. An ongoing concern remains regarding the disconnect between TVET and the labour market. There is often a general shift during wars away from transaction intensive and value added activities towards subsistence agriculture and the informal economy (Nübler 1997). Rebuilding an economy for sustainable prosperity is a slow and complex process of its own. Within this situation, it is crucial that whatever TVET is available is appropriately targeted and oriented towards real employment opportunities. Without effective reinteg-

ration there is a higher risk for individuals recycling back to violent livelihoods.

The approach to skills development and utilization as outlined by Irmgard Nübler effectively offers a contemporary human resource management (HRM) approach for post-conflict environments. Starting with the question of how to utilize the capacities of the population and how to meet the needs of the economy, she advises TVET interventions as part of DDR should first understand the existing competencies of the ex-combatant group, competencies acquired either prior to, or during, military time. Secondly, she suggests a matching of these competencies with the available and predicted employment opportunities before developing measures to train for, and deploy skill. Published ten years ago, the

practical advice on developing a closer relationship between the labour market and training is still current, and underutilized. A better understanding of how to increase systems learning in this field would be valuable.

Circumstances certainly differ, but whatever the challenges, the magnitude of the task of rebuilding fragmented individuals, communities and nations is enormous. There is evidence that, for ex-combatants, participating in TVET programmes helps build social capital, but also that positive outcomes are not assured. If education is truly to become part of the peace dividend after conflict, its promise needs to be fulfilled.

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