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Özerdem, A.

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# **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of Ex-Combatants and Development with a Specific Reference to the Reintegration of the Taliban in Afghanistan**

Alpaslan Özerdem

## **Introduction**

The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants often presents itself as one of the most crucial activities in a post-conflict peacebuilding context, with important effects upon the wider transitional process from war to peace and development. According to the United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)<sup>1</sup> DDR 'is a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian and socio-economic dimensions' (IDDRS, 2006). This is particularly the case in environments where there is a large caseload of ex-combatants; in some instances such as Liberia, there were as many as over 100,000 in a population of only a few million (Podder, 2012). Even where there are small caseloads of ex-combatants, as was the case in Kosovo and Timor Leste, it is important to note that with a high number of dependants for each ex-combatant, the real 'caseload' of people depending on DDR processes can be many times more than those ex-combatants who are benefiting directly from such programmes (Özerdem, 2003; 2003a; 2010). In other words, DDR programmes can have much wider implications for prosperity and development in a typical post-conflict environment than just their directly attributable outcomes in terms of reintegration benefits for ex-combatants.

This chapter argues that each aspect of DDR, from disarmament to reintegration, involves activities that are likely to have profound implications for peacebuilding and post-conflict development trajectories of war-torn societies. Although disarmament is primarily considered a matter of military concern, as it involves the collection, control and disposal of small arms and light weapons and the development of responsible arms management programmes in a post-conflict context, the 'economic' and 'social' value of weapons demands much broader response, and one which takes into consideration the more general security and development challenges in that particular society. Similarly, while demobilization in the technocratic sense might only be a process by which the armed forces of the government and/or opposition or factional forces either downsize or completely disband, the decision-making that frames the re-settlement, livelihoods and employment paths of ex-combatants tends to have serious long-term implications for development. Having been demobilized and transported to their community of choice, the ex-combatants and their families must establish themselves in a civilian environment. In such contexts, reinsertion assistance, which often includes post-discharge orientation, food assistance, health and educational support and a cash allowance, might again be a significant factor for wider development prospects. However, the most significant phase in the DDR process that would be likely to have a decisive impact on development is reintegration, in which ex-combatants and their families are integrated into the social, economic and political life of (civilian) communities. Thus, reintegration is a long-term and continuous social and economic process of development (IDDRS, 2006; SIDDR, 2006; Özerdem, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup>The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) were produced by the Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, which brought together 15 agencies, programmes and funds, mainly from the UN.

It could also be argued that the formal DDR programmes, which tend to have a duration of no more than three to four years, are in fact only a prelude to the real 'reintegration' that takes place within conflict affected societies after their completion. In other words, formal DDR programmes are significant in providing post-conflict opportunities for ex-combatants, but reintegration is an almost open-ended process involving ex-combatants and their receiving communities. As this takes place within the socio-economic and political challenges of post-conflict environments there needs to be a much longer perspective in terms of the duration of reintegration processes and much deeper and comprehensive understanding of actors and issues involved in their implementation. This is particularly important considering that most conventional DDR programmes tend to approach the challenges of reintegration primarily from a one-man-one-weapon perspective (Özerdem, 2008; Özerdem, 2012).

This chapter begins with a conceptual exploration into DDR, delineating its significance in the overall post-conflict peacebuilding and development context. The next section presents an indicative example of the close interaction between DDR and development in relation to the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Programme (APRP), which aims to provide a pathway for the reintegration of Taliban members. Finally, the chapter outlines possible linkages between DDR and development that should be considered carefully in the planning and implementation of such programmes, with a particular emphasis on community involvement and community based strategies.

### **DDR – a conceptual exploration taking into account broader aspects of development**

Development is a highly imprecise concept, ridden with paradoxes and there are many conflicting approaches seeking to define what it is and how it can be measured. The contemporary development agenda includes a wide range of issues from economic growth, poverty reduction and environmental issues to decentralisation, democratisation and social development. At its core development aims to improve quality of life, be that through facilitating greater access to health facilities and education, providing opportunities for increased levels of income and food consumption, or providing enabling conditions within the governance system such that the levels of self-esteem among citizens increases. This is achieved through the relevant political, economic, institutional and social systems that promote self-respect and dignity.

Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchical human needs, encompassing physical needs (such as food, clothing, shelter, health and security); the need for social affection (incorporating love, friendship and procreation); the need for dignity (in terms of self-esteem and mutual respect); and the need of self-actualisation (referring to the pursuit of social interests and the fulfilment of individual potential) can be used a general framework for the objective of development. On the other hand, Amartya Sen's capability approach defines development not in terms of met needs, but the expansion of a person or group's freedom to promote or achieve objectives of value. According to Sen, the selection of these is a matter of value judgement and is thus subjective and relative to the context. In other words, Sen stipulates neither a list of basic capabilities, nor a method for identifying and ordering capabilities of importance. Based on Sen's view of development, Martha Nussbaum presents a list of ten central human functional capabilities which range from being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length to being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities, and to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life by having the right of political participation, protection of free speech and association, and being able

to hold property, seek employment on an equal basis with others and have the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure (2000).

Nussbaum's central human functional capabilities are important for a number of reasons. First, they present a set of objectives that can be taken as an overarching goal of post-conflict reconstruction and development. It is often the case that reconstruction strategies are designed in terms of what socio-economic and political programmes would be required to initiate a sustainable peacebuilding process, without paying much attention to what they would actually mean in terms of improvements in an individual's life. Such specifications of human functional capabilities give a clear focus and an outline of activities that would need to be undertaken in reconstruction. Second, reconstruction is often considered from a macro-level in terms of nation-state building, with a concomitant focus on institutions, systems and mechanisms, often at the expense of what should be the main focus: human life. This dilemma shows itself at different levels and areas of post-conflict reconstruction. For example, when security is conceptualised as part of a reconstruction strategy, it is typically considered in terms of regulating, limiting or prohibiting access to and use of military hardware. In the post-9/11 era it is also considered in the context of war against terrorism. Within such a top-down and externally driven security agenda, the security needs of conflict affected communities are unlikely to appear as a priority. Afghanistan is a good example of such a dichotomy (Özerdem, 2008).

It is also the case that the pursuit of security at the national level may sometimes pose a direct threat to the well-being of minority groups as has been the case in a number of countries from Sudan and Sri Lanka to Colombia. Therefore, it is critical that when post-conflict reconstruction and development decisions are made, these should aim to balance the need for success at the macro-level with the need not to neglect disengage from micro-level priorities. There can be no trade-off between these two levels despite initial appearances to the contrary. The objective of reconstruction should always be to set systems at the macro-level for the improvement of human security at the micro-level, not the other way around, as is often the case in contemporary post-conflict reconstruction and development. By taking Nussbaum's central human functional capabilities as the overarching goal of DDR programmes, the process can be planned and implemented at various levels in order to address the causes of conflict with the objective of improving human life.

The field of DDR is also littered with several overlapping terminologies, which all too often result in a conflation of stages and cross-cutting mandates. This confusion extends to the various and overlapping R's (namely Reinsertion, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resettlement), which need to be clarified before investigating the relationship between DDR and development. Broadly speaking, current theorisations of DDR can be located within a continuum, ranging between the minimalist perspective espoused by the UN, focused on "improving security", and the maximalist understanding of DDR as "an opportunity for development and reconstruction" embraced by the World Bank (Muggah, 2006; Nussio, 2011). The importance of recognizing the complementarities of the minimalist and maximalist standpoints is revealed when DDR is conceptualized as a social contract. In the 'social order' of war, a weapon has both economic and security value for its owner, in the sense that it can be used to make economic gains as well as preserve physical security. This is the case because from the socialisation to solidarity with other combatants, being part of an armed group provides a social environment too and this is for example, a particularly significant issue for the reintegration of child soldiers. DDR in such a context can be seen as a social contract forged between the combatant and the government and/or international community. It can represent

commitment to, and faith in, the short-term and long-term creation of an environment where the economic and security value of a weapon is gradually eliminated (Knight and Özerdem, 2004:506).

Within this coinage, disarmament and demobilisation are primarily concerned with consolidating security on the ground, which in turn can facilitate the initiation and commencement of reconstruction and developmental activities (Spark and Bailey, 2005). Reintegration, however, constitutes part of wider development affairs, with the long-term goal of reintegrating ex-combatants into communities, and securing their financial independence and acceptance by community members and leaders. It is this wider remit of the reintegration component of in DDR particular that offers the best possibilities for bridging the 'controversial "relief-development" gap' that spans short-term emergency and long-term development concerns (Muggah, 2006). Reintegration, according to Kingma should be considered as 'consisting of thousands of micro-stories, with individual and group efforts and with setbacks and successes' (2001:39). According to Berdal (1996), reintegration programmes are 'meant to increase the potential for economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants and their families.' Supporting this view, Kingma states that the objective of social reintegration is to create an environment in which former combatants and their families feel part of, and are accepted by, the community. Political reintegration is the process through which they become a full part of decision making processes, while economic reintegration enable them to build up their livelihoods by having access to production mechanisms and other types of gainful employment (2000:28).

Nübler asserts that the long-term objective of reintegration is "to enhance economic and human development and to foster and sustain political stability, security and peace" (1997:3). It is also crucial that the reintegration process recognises and reinforces local reconciliation processes, since reintegrating former combatants in society can contribute in the long term to the overall strengthening of peace and to reconciliation by increasing interaction between different groups and former warring factions (Kingma and Sayers, 1994). Successful reintegration can help build mutual confidence among former belligerent groups, thereby reducing the risk of renewed hostilities (Özerdem, 2002). An important issue that needs to be recognised in the context of reintegration programmes is their sheer complexity. They are conducted on large scale, reaching large numbers of ex-combatants often over a wide geographical terrain, and this can help to bring about transformation at multiple levels. All of these characteristics underline the way that DDR programmes play a significant role in the development prospects of conflict affected societies (Özerdem and Podder, 2012).

This does not mean that the disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion phases are somehow less complex undertakings, but that reintegration is by nature a social, economic and psychological process that is both slow and costly, and if implemented effectively, it can increase social justice and contribute to the eradication of the root causes of conflict (Porto, et al., 2007). As is the case with disarmament and demobilization, reintegration is also an intensely political process; indeed, there is perhaps a higher degree of political intensity since reintegration would mean a comprehensive involvement in political, economic and social reconstruction, ameliorating the root causes of the conflict as much as possible (Peters, 2007; Söderström, 2011).

The content of reintegration programmes can vary from the provision of access to land and education to vocational training and micro enterprise development projects. In fact, former combatants tend to have limited information about their society and the opportunities available to them when they arrive back in their home. If this task has not been covered as part of the demobilization phase, then information, counselling and referral services should be established in

order to provide the vital link between former combatants and the services planned for them. The reintegration of former combatants, whether this takes place in a rural or urban area, would need first of all to consider a number of basic needs such as housing, infrastructure and services. However, for the reintegration of former combatants in rural areas, access to land is probably the most important consideration (Bruthus, 2004). Reintegration activities in urban areas, by contrast, may need to be more diverse and of longer duration (Colletta, et al., 1996). In the Ethiopian reintegration experience it was explained that “the urban target group was more complex and difficult than that of the rural ex-combatants because of the diverse social and economic backgrounds of the ex-combatants, [and] the tightness of the urban labour market”. Bearing in mind these socio-economic characteristics and the likelihood of high unemployment rates in a post-conflict environment, the utilisation of large public works programmes in the short term is recommended. In Ethiopia the majority of former combatants were referred to short-term public works programmes such as agricultural and construction activities for the Ministry of Agriculture, in addition to Employment Intensive Works Programmes (EIWP), an economic stimulator and mass employment creation tool (ILO, 1997).

One of the correlates of DDR planning which is often overlooked is the overall economic situation in which programmes are attempted. Much of the literature on reintegration stresses the inevitability of conflict recurrence if ex-combatants return to abject poverty. This raises critical issues of sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic wellbeing for both the caseload of combatants and their receiving communities. The challenges posed by poverty in this context is a critical factor to consider, as it is decisive in determining what reinsertion and reintegration benefits are needed and how this is translated into programmes. For example, the benefits of newly gained vocational skills or micro-enterprise schemes created as part of reintegration could only be realized if there is a sufficient demand and absorptive capacity in the economy. The issues of corruption, economic insecurity and infrastructural challenges in the financial system can also undermine the utility of certain types of reinsertion and reintegration assistance. Therefore, it is essential to consider macro-economic indicators and issues of poverty in planning DDR responses (Maclay and Özerdem, 2010).

Another crucial issue with the DDR process is that of beneficiaries. There is a mistaken tendency to regard the caseload of former combatants as homogenous, overlooking the significant variations based on gender, age, disability, ethnicity, military ranking, education and vocational skills which even small caseloads encompass (Özerdem and Podder, 2011). In fact the range of needs, capacities and expectations of former combatants tends to vary widely depending on these variations. On the whole, transition from disarmament to reintegration is often fraught with delay and subject to considerable difficulty in catering to all beneficiaries and developing comprehensive programmes. Mistakes and oversights made during any phase of DDR have the potential to compromise long-term reintegration and development prospects (Bowd and Özerdem, 2013).

### **The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) from a development perspective**

Since 2010, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) for Taliban members has become one of the most significant peacebuilding programmes undertaken in the country. The APRP followed the previous two DDR initiatives – the first being Afghanistan’s New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) which was launched in 2003 and completed in June 2005 with a mandate of providing assistance to the government of Afghanistan for the DDR of Afghan Military Forces (AMF), involving more than 60,000 ex-combatants and costing nearly \$ 141 million, and the second being the

Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme, which ran from 2006 to 2010 and aimed to address the reintegration needs of approximately 1,800 separate militias with some 80,000 combatants in total (Özerdem, 2010).

With a set target of the international community's military disengagement from Afghanistan in 2014, the APRP is considered a way of breaking power relationships between the core Taliban leadership and combatants (UNDP, 2013). It is led by the Afghan Government and its primary objective is to provide means of employment and sustainable livelihoods to those Taliban who renounce violence until 2015. The programme was initially considered as a major step forward to deal with the continuing security problems of the country. However, as there has not been a settlement with the Taliban so far and the killing of Usama bin Laden in 2011, which was followed by the assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, Head of Afghan High Peace Council only months after by the Taliban as a response, all posed serious setbacks to the implementation of the programme. Overall, not much progress has been achieved so far.

Given the difficulties in obtaining reliable information on belligerent groups in war-torn environments in general, and the characteristics of the Taliban in terms of their amorphous command and fighting structures in particular, the following characteristics for the numbers of *potential 'ex-Taliban'* combatants are presented for indicative purposes only.

- **Caseload size:** It was estimated that there would be some 25,000 – 30,000 of ex-Taliban combatants taking part in the APRP. In order to present an even handed and community-based approach, and to limit resentment among the population at large, a similar number of former Mujahedin and civilians would benefit from the programme. The overall plans for reintegration anticipated a caseload of approximately 50,000 participants. Among them would be 2,000 - 3,000 Commanders of different ranks.
- **Age groups:** It was estimated that ages of combatants would range from 14 to 45, with around 50% of the caseload being in their 20s.
- **Duration in fighting:** The majority of the caseload was understood to have spent between two to eight years fighting. However, as people drift in and out of the Taliban and spend long periods in their own communities, for example during the poppy harvest, this needed to be factored into the planning of programmes. There were also those who fought with the Mujahedin against the Soviets and then later with the Taliban. These people would usually have over 20 years of fighting experience and were primarily in senior leadership positions.
- **Capacities:** The majority of Taliban members came from a low educational background with poor literacy and numeracy skills. However, most Taliban members are 'community-based' and so are likely to have some employment or livelihood skills.
- **Disabilities:** It was estimated that 5% of ex-combatants would have a disability, making them a much more vulnerable group within the target caseload. The percentage of disability among the civilian population was expected to be much higher and this would need to be factored in when calculating quotes for the disabled.
- **Family and community structures:** As part of the reintegration process, the stimulation of family and community structures is highly important for effectiveness and sustainability. Considering local traditions and cultural values of Pashtun communities, most ex-combatants were likely to be married with children. Although, this increases the urgency of providing economic opportunity as a means for reintegration, it can also potentially be an opportunity for more successful reintegration outcomes.
- **Pashtun culture and social structures:** As a conservative community, there are well-defined gender roles in the Pashtun culture, and such dynamics need to be borne in mind in deciding the type and specific elements of economic reintegration programmes.

With this profile in mind, the following section will elaborate a number of hypothetical DDR programmes that could provide close linkages between the overall reintegration of Taliban members and development challenges in Afghanistan.

#### *Establishment of a reconstruction company for infrastructure development*

The reconstruction and development needs of Afghanistan are vast. It is important that ex-combatants are given an opportunity for ownership and a sense of belonging in the future of their country by taking part in large-scale and important infrastructure development programmes such as the construction of roads, highways, dams, water supplies and other lifelines. The conventional method for implementing reconstruction programmes is often via labour intensive public works initiatives, which have a life-span that comes to an end with the completion of the particular project. It is also important to recognise that there tends to be a large international private sector interest in lucrative projects, with companies often bringing their own work force.

With these issues in mind, it is important to adopt a different approach to labour intensive public works, and to establish a reconstruction company that could provide employment opportunities for trained ex-combatants as a potential way forward for long-term sustainability. The company should be founded and supported by the APRP in the first three years, and foreign construction companies could be 'encouraged' to work with it as a business partner in their reconstruction project bids in order to have the opportunities of know-how transfer and on-the-job training. Depending on the size of construction projects that the company can undertake, this initiative could provide employment opportunities for thousands of ex-combatants in the early years of the reintegration process. More importantly, by the time the APRP is completed, the company would become an independent entity to carry out future construction works.

#### *Strengthening of Afghan disaster preparedness and response through training of ex-combatants as search-and-rescue personnel*

One of the main challenges with the reintegration of ex-Taliban combatants will be in relation to the high level of mistrust and resentment among civilian populations, particularly in the non-Pashtun parts of the country. It is important that the overall reintegration strategy provides benefits to the entire population, both in terms of providing direct dividends through training and employment opportunities, and by providing services that can be accessed through newly created structures. Considering that Afghanistan is highly prone to a wide range of natural disasters such as earthquakes and droughts, the country would benefit from the strengthening of its Disaster Preparedness and Response Unit under the umbrella of Presidency. The reintegration initiative can focus on the training of ex-combatants in search-and-rescue, fire-fighting, relief assistance and other activities that would strengthen human resource capacities of the existing institutional structures.

By providing training and employment opportunities for ex-combatants in civil defence, this initiative can play a significant role in building bridges between the divided communities of the country.



Similar approaches were used successfully in a number of DDR contexts such as Kosovo, and there is an excellent opportunity to achieve similar outcomes in Afghanistan.

#### *Training of ex-combatants for re-forestation and other environmental protection work*

As a result of its devastating protracted armed conflict there is a high environmental risk in many parts of Afghanistan, with threats including water pollution, soil erosion and deforestation. The future of the country will partly depend on the successful handling of these environmental challenges. Training ex-combatants in environmental management and providing employment opportunities in large scale environmental programmes such as re-forestation schemes is likely to be very popular among the general population. By adopting a long-term perspective to reforestation a wide range of activities could be included, from nursery establishment to forest management.

The role of civil society organisations can also be significant in this process, as the protection of forests can only be achieved through the sensitisation and education of wider public. There have been a number of highly successful reforestation programmes led by the public sector and civil society organisations in Turkey, and this particular initiative could incorporate the exchange of know-how and experience through training of trainers and on-the-job training schemes that could be conducted by relevant Turkish counterparts.

#### *Programmes for self-sufficiency agriculture*

Agriculture will continue to play a very significant part in providing income generation and livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan, and programmes for ex-Taliban members that focus on agricultural assistance, for instance by providing grants to re-start farming or assistance with other non-financial project inputs, would be highly important. However, similar experiences since 2002, such as schemes undertaken for the eradication of poppy production, and agricultural assistance provided as part of the ANBP, show that unless the whole production cycle from growing crops to marketing is tackled holistically it is difficult to ensure effectiveness and sustainability.

It is with this prerequisite in mind that I argue that any agricultural approach to reintegration should focus on 'self-sufficiency', and that programmes need to be much more than just the provision of animals, seeds or fertilisers. Outreach would be particularly important, and a comprehensive programme would also need to incentivise ex-combatant beneficiaries to grow crops rather than poppies. Separating the 'self-sufficiency' of ex-combatants could not be envisaged in isolation from such a requirement of focussing on the needs of receiving communities. Therefore, the participation of receiving communities in any of these agriculture programmes would be pivotal not only in their effective implementation, but also for the sustainability of their outcomes.

#### *'Sports for peace' approach promoted for both ex-combatants and civilians with disabilities*

The principal approach for the reintegration needs of ex-combatants with disabilities should also be in terms of employment and livelihood opportunities. However, because the disabled in Afghanistan usually end up in destitution, with little prospect of financial assistance or employment, it is

imperative that disabled combatants would be given a high priority in selection processes. A mandatory quota of employment under each component that would be created as part of APRP should be allocated to disabled ex-combatants. A similar needs-based approach can also be adopted in the selection process for vocational training courses.

Having dealt with the economic needs of disabled former combatants, the proposal here is to use sports as a tool for their rehabilitation and reintegration. The use of disability sport could aid the reintegration process and promote the overall objectives of APRP. By opening such an initiative to civilians with disabilities it means that they would also benefit from APRP, alleviating the possibility of resentment towards ex-Taliban members.

The initiative may face a high level of resistance from ex-Taliban combatants because of their religious ideology, but some of this resistance can be overcome through the right level of sensitisation during the cantonment period. The recent popularity of cricket in the country after the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan can be considered as a good example for such opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The above examples for the incorporation of DDR initiatives within a wider development context in a war-torn country like Afghanistan are far from forming an exhaustive list. However, they represent how a DDR programme like the APRP, operating within a challenging Afghan context, could focus on a wide range of issues from the revitalisation of agriculture to plans for forming a civil defence corps or integrating capacities of ex-combatants in sports. In addition to these examples, the peacebuilding sector has a number of other more conventional approaches for integrating DDR with development priorities, such as by employing ex-combatants in humanitarian landmine clearance programmes providing employment and livelihoods opportunities through vocational training, small enterprise development and labour intensive public works. Various versions of 'Disarmament for Development' type of initiatives have also been implemented in a number of different contexts around the world, including the DIAG programme in Afghanistan.

In short, a maximalist view of DDR planning and implementation, identifying and building on the possible linkages with wider development challenges and opportunities, would need to be the way forward in order to ensure effective reintegration of ex-combatants. The fact is that no DDR programme takes place in a socio-economic and political vacuum, and even the most conventional reintegration programmes such as vocational training would need to consider the level of economic demand in order to anticipate how newly gained skills could be turned into employment and livelihoods opportunities. The key point to remember with the objective of enabling DDR-development linkages is how such quests incorporate receiving communities. Without making sure that receiving communities are active agents of ex-combatant reintegration the process would fall short in meeting its objective, no matter how much the actual implementation would focus on wider development challenges. Addressing the reintegration of ex-combatants in cooperation with the wider development priorities, needs and challenges of receiving communities would need to be the main principle of planning and implementation for DDR programmes.

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