



VIRTUAL DISCUSSION ON **GENDER AND DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION & REINTEGRATION**

Reintegrating Female Ex-Combatants: Good practices and lessons learned
in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of women and girls

Week One Summary on Specific Needs and Roles

UN-INSTRAW would like to thank all participants who have contributed to the first week of discussion. Your time and input has provided us with a foundation to delve further into the specific issues relevant to women and girls in reintegration processes. We are now well placed to make connections and synergies between colleagues and tease out good practices and lessons learned. Following is a summary of comments, including main points made during the discussions and a full-length review of specific comments made during week one.

Week One of the virtual discussion aimed to address the following questions:

1. What are the specific needs of women and girls that must be addressed in reintegration processes?
2. What are the different roles women and girls assume during armed conflict and its aftermath and how do these affect their status in reintegration?

Week One: Main points on the specific roles and needs of female ex-combatants

- There is a need to include women at all levels and phases of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, which means the adoption of a participatory model for needs assessment and the incorporation of women at the peace and negotiation table.
- It is very important to address stigmas and patriarchal structures that inhibit women's successful reintegration. This necessitates training and sensitization of male counterparts and community members.
- It is essential to adopt a human security framework and to frame the issue of DDR within broader work on integrating women and gender into peace and conflict processes as called for by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325).
- Women and girls assume different roles in combat and therefore the definition of "combatant" needs to be broadened to include women and girls who are not armed.
- Psychosocial support and reproductive health needs must be addressed in reintegration processes.
- Vocational training cannot assume essentialist gender ideals and roles and must provide women with choice (this includes the provision of child care where relevant) and must be self-sustaining, long-term and empowering.
- Organizations and entities providing women and girls with effective reintegration packages that address stigmas and community exclusion must be aware that unsuccessful programmes may result in females having to resort to sex work.

Week One: Summary of comments made

Specific Needs

A number of participants made comments regarding the first question on the specific needs of women and girls that should be addressed in reintegration processes. *Helen Basini* from the University of Limerick gave insights on this topic from her experiences in Liberia. She acknowledges that women's needs were never adequately incorporated in the DDR process. Problems included incorrect information about eligibility, and insufficient (if any) provisions on training and education. The issue of stigmas and the exclusion from participation in needs analysis was also part of the Liberian experience of female ex-combatants. Many promises had been made to these women and girls, such as the provision of psychosocial support, with few outputs. Such support was a vital need for these women and the lack of adequate reintegration programmes has left many on the fringes of the community and having to resort to prostitution.

Courtney Rowe from the International Human Rights Law Institute (DePaul University) added comments regarding the needs of women and girls who experienced sexual and gender-based violence (including domestic violence) that extend beyond disarmament and demobilization phases. She describes the lack of funding and resources for the effective reintegration of women and girls as well as the lack of effective training for male counterparts and community members. *Courtney* also raises the issue that many community members do not understand the concept of "force" in sexual and gender-based violence and lack empathy toward female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, shaming them and hindering their successful integration.

Building on the need of reproductive health services identified, *Ifeoma Ezeabasili* from Nigeria talked about the needs of female survivors of SGBV and asked how women who experienced SGBV that has resulted in unwanted pregnancies could be adequately reintegrated into communities, considering stigma, psychosocial trauma and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). She encourages more dialogue regarding this issue because of the highly patriarchal contexts in which many of these ex-combatants are returning.

Drawing on her work with Maoist ex-combatants in Nepal, *Sarah Dalrymple* noted the need to provide child-care support in order to enable women's participation in reintegration programmes, particularly since many women are isolated from their families and communities. Unaddressed reproductive health concerns and psychosocial support are also identified as specific needs for female ex-combatants, as well as vocational training that guarantees long-term employment such as vocational training to support newly acquired gender norms and equality; a participatory approach; and a community driven reintegration process.

In addition to *Sarah Dalrymple*, several other participants talked about the need for vocational training programmes. *Ana Leao*, who has been working in the area of human security in post-conflict contexts in Africa, noted that women who were included in reintegration, often complained about the type of training available, such as sewing, which often assumed traditional gender roles. She went on to say that most women were prevented from attending school in order to pursue careers of their choice. A lack of information and emphasis of traditional roles poses further challenges to women's inclusion in DDR and effective reintegration. *Eva Ronhaar* added to this by noting that reintegration is an opportunity to empower women through self-sustainable reintegration programmes such as vocational training and micro-credits.

Drawing on their experiences in Liberia and Nepal respectively, *Helen Basini* and *Sarah Dalrymple* both noted that when the needs of female combatants fail to be addressed, many female ex-combatants resort to work in sex industries due to failed reintegration programmes.

Roles of Women and Girls

In reference to the question about the different roles that women and girls assume during armed conflict and its aftermath, *Onyinyechukwu* pointed to stigmas that are derived from existing patriarchal structures from her experiences in African societies. She referred to women's involvement in armed groups as a form of women's empowerment and a transformation from traditional gender identities, which poses challenges in both the family and community for women during their reintegration. She noted the urgent need to transform such structures. *Ana Leao* also affirms this point of the challenges made by assumptions within traditional gender roles and patriarchy from the context of Mozambique as does *Eva Ronhaar* in her affirmation of training communities and male counterparts.

Sarah Dalrymple brought to the discussion a challenge in Nepal regarding the shift in gender roles during the conflict. She noted that current and former women combatants have expressed concerns about reintegrating into their communities because of the perception that they had acted in ways that are against culturally determined gender roles. She says that many community members talked about women ex-combatants as being 'violent' and 'sexual' because they worked and lived close to men. She also noted tensions between ex-combatant women and women in the communities where ex-combatants are reintegrating, saying that such tension necessitates work to build trust between women in the community and women ex-combatants.

Adding to the discussion's coverage of the recognition of the variety of roles that women and girls play in conflicts, *Sarah Masters* commented about the importance of extending the definition of ex-combatant beyond armed members of armed groups. She cited Annie Matundu Mbambi's suggestion of creating a parallel process to DDR, incorporating women and girls into the process while avoiding the stigma that female ex-combatants encounter. She provided examples of such stigma as having lost their virginity (with implications of a loss of purity), being infected with a sexually transmitted infection (STI), posing threats to families, neighbours and communities because of military commanders or "husbands," and being poor influences on other women.

Similarly, *Ana Leao* shared information she has gathered from her experience working with female ex-combatants in Mozambique. She writes about redefining the ideas of "women fighter" or "active" combatant. Many of the women in Mozambique underwent military training and held important roles, including deciding when and whether to evacuate the camp; leading through minefields; directing in which direction to flee. Despite their important contributions, few were reported as fighters or dependents of male fighters or base commanders and therefore most were excluded from DDR.

Other Issues Raised: Frameworks & Methodology

Framework for discussions

Anu Mundkur, associate director of the Gender Consortium (Flinders University), noted the importance of keeping in mind the broad framework within which we think about and address gender and DDR. *Anu* specifically mentioned adopting a human security framework to DDR; and recognizing that UNSCR 1325 includes the participation of women and girls in decision-making.

Corey Barr (UN-INSTRAW moderator) draws upon *Anu Mundkur* proposal for the adoption of a human security framework, namely addressing the UN Security Council Women, Peace and Security resolutions (UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889). She emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the resolutions' call for the participation of women, mainstreaming gender, and the protection of women and girls from SGBV and other forms of violence. She follows with posing a question on how needs assessments have been carried out and by whom.

Picking up on UNSCR 1325's coverage of women's participation in peacebuilding processes, *Jennifer*, an academic from the Philippines, describes the lack of participation of women during the negotiation process as a major challenge for the effective reintegration of female ex-combatants. In the Philippines, while women have contributed to negotiations as both state and non-state group representatives, despite their female biology, they do not adequately represent of the needs of female ex-combatants.

Methodology

bwsgreen raised an issue of methodology, referring to the importance of incorporating the voice of female ex-combatants and direct beneficiaries into dialogue on their specific reintegration needs. *Sarah Masters*, *Ani Colekessian* (UN-INSTRAW moderator), *Jennifer*, *Ana Leao*, and *Helen Basini* each reiterated the importance of such a participatory methodology and emphasized the responsibility of practitioners and academics to act as conduits to incorporate the input of ex-combatants into needs analysis and programming. This idea of participatory analysis is important and has significant implications for good practices and lessons learned.

In addition to being participatory, *Krismak* emphasized of the importance of contextualizing circumstances. This is reiterated by *Eva Ronhaar* (UN-INSTRAW) and her rejection of a "one-size-fits-all" model for reintegration. For example, *Eva* drew upon her experience in the Islamic context of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and mentioned the specific need to include the topic of religion in aid and psychosocial initiatives. As a resource, she has referenced the War Child *IDEAL* project.

Also in terms of methodology, *Krismak* noted the need for age disaggregated analysis. This is especially relevant given the specific situations of girls and middle-aged women. *Ana Leao* also emphasizes this point from the Mozambique context. *Anu Mundkur* emphasized the inclusion of participatory gender analysis tools (like *Sarah Masters*, *Ani Colekessian*, *Jennifer*, and *Ana Leao*) to encourage women to discuss the roles they assume in armed groups, needs in reintegration, and how their gendered-roles (transformed or traditional) affect these needs.

Sarah Masters concludes the week's discussion with shared resources on DDR. She emphasizes the importance of lessons learned and identifies the example of Liberia, where the inclusion of women into the DDR process was largely the result of lessons learned from Sierra Leone. She references the UNIFEM checklist for DDR and the UN IDDRS good practices manual (included in the Gender and DDR bibliography) and poses the important question regarding how these translate into practice.