

Gender in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Conflict: an “equal opportunity employer”

In Focus No. 1



Belying the stereotypical image of the adult male soldier, women and children fought alongside men during the decades of bloodshed that wracked the greater Great Lakes Region. Many more were dependent on fighting forces for security and livelihood, serving as porters, sexual partners or domestic servants.

Those engaged in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) initiatives in the area must therefore ensure that they are sensitive to gender in all that they do.

“Gender” is both men and women

While certainly many aspects of war are experienced similarly by men and women, war is also a gendered experience, where sex has a direct impact on how one perceives, acts and reacts to events, and is treated by others.

Female ex-combatants may, for example, have been subject to gender-specific abuse. Others may have experienced certain social freedoms during conflict, only to be subject to social pressure afterwards to return to more traditional female roles. Young male ex-combatants may be stigmatized and excluded if they are unable to find work or access land, thereby making them vulnerable to future mobilization.

Furthermore, if gender-specific experiences are not properly addressed, they can result in problems that may lead to other ills post-conflict. Depression and post-traumatic stress prevent individuals from making a full contribution to their families, communities and societies, for example, and may contribute to specific problems such as alcoholism and spousal abuse.



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Thus, being “sensitive to gender” means accounting for the experiences of all ex-combatants – male and female – and targeting special needs that either sex may have as a result of their gender.

As UNIFEM Executive Director Noeleen Heyzer said in a statement recently: "Peace in the Great Lakes Region...hinges on transforming soldiers into citizens... Peace and democracy hinge on the equitable participation of women, men, boys and girls in all reconstruction processes, including demobilization and reintegration."

Gender, DDR and MDRP

Efforts are underway at many levels to ensure that DDR programs of the greater Great Lakes Region – national, regional and local – address the needs of both men and women, as well as other special groups.

The Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) has a special responsibility in this area. As the largest program in the world supporting demobilization and reintegration, with programs in the greater Great Lakes ranging from micro- to macro-level, MDRP is uniquely placed to assist many actors to incorporate gender into their projects. With its special focus on assisting national governments to formulate national DDR plans, it can help ensure that the special needs of all groups are considered from the start.

For more information on MDRP, please visit www.mdrp.org or contact Bruno Donat, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at info@mdrp.org.