

A blue-tinted photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, a metal helmet lies on the ground, surrounded by small, sparse plants. The background shows a vast, open desert under a clear sky. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

**COORDINATION OF DDR
INITIATIVES WITH
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE
EFFORTS IN THE CONTEXT
OF SUSTAINING PEACE**

COORDINATION OF DDR INITIATIVES WITH TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE EFFORTS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINING PEACE

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This paper has been prepared to inform the consideration of a revised guidance note of the Secretary-General on the United Nations approach to transitional justice, as part of a broad exercise. The paper, however, reflects the views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations, including its funds, programmes and other subsidiary organs, or of the financial donors to the exercise. It should not be considered as a United Nations document and is not an official record of the United Nations. The exercise has received financial support from, inter alia, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

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Introduction



The coordination of **disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)** initiatives and transitional justice efforts has been the subject of many discussions among peace practitioners. Although DDR can be considered a “guarantee of non-recurrence” through the contribution it makes to preventing the occurrence or reoccurrence of serious human rights violations, the potential offered by an effective coordination of DDR and broader transitional justice processes and initiatives has so far remained underexplored (see [A/72/523](#)).

The 2010 “Guidance note of the Secretary-General: United Nations approach to transitional justice” called on the United Nations to “coordinate disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) initiatives with transitional justice processes and mechanisms, where appropriate, in a positively reinforcing manner”.¹ The guidance note was thereby aimed mainly at ensuring that human rights standards were upheld during the different phases of a DDR programme.² The system-

wide policy guidance on DDR, the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS),³ included a specific module on transitional justice, providing guidance to DDR practitioners on the coordination of DDR processes and transitional justice efforts.⁴ These policy documents have led to an increasing awareness among human rights and DDR practitioners regarding the complementarities and common goals of transitional justice and DDR processes, and the need for coordination between them. Recent examples that illustrate this trend include the inclusion of transitional justice as an item on the agenda of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration; the appointment, within the DDR Section of the Department of Peace Operations, of a transitional justice focal point, who is responsible for liaising with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and a recent joint transitional justice and DDR project pioneered by OHCHR and the United Nations

¹ See <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/682111?ln=en>. ² The working definition of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) was first established by the General Assembly in 2005 [\[A/C.5/59/31\]](#). On this basis, the United Nations Security Council mandates United Nations peace operations to support DDR efforts. The recently revised IDDRS goes further in defining the engagement of the United Nations in DDR. It distinguishes three types of DDR interventions: “DDR programmes”, “DDR-related tools” and “Reintegration support, including when complementing DDR-related tools”. See [IDDRS, Module 2.10](#), “The UN Approach to DDR”, pp. 5–6. ³ The Department of Peace Operations and UNDP co-chair the Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, which is currently revising the IDDRS, the main policy document on DDR. ⁴ IDDRS, Module 6.20, “DDR and Transitional Justice” (currently under revision).

Development Programme (UNDP) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Interviews conducted for this paper indicate, however, that the principal way in which DDR and human rights/transitional justice practitioners conceive of coordination is characterized by exclusion: it is predominantly focused on the screening of potential DDR participants in order to identify suspected perpetrators of international crimes and serious violations of human rights, so that they can be reported to the relevant authorities for investigation and prosecution, possibly resulting in their exclusion from the DDR programme.⁵ Such a narrow focus makes it difficult to identify other potential areas of coordination and collaboration that may more positively connect the two fields and allow them to reinforce each other's impacts.

A major evolution of DDR has taken place in response to increasing complexities in the field, in particular the introduction, in 2016, of community violence reduction projects preceding or complementing "traditional" DDR programmes in Africa.⁶ In light of its documented impact, community violence reduction has quickly overtaken DDR programmes as a mandated activity in United Nations peace operation contexts. Over the past five years, the United Nations Missions in the Central

African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali have counted over 350,000 beneficiaries of community violence reduction,⁷ which now accounts for a significant share of the budgetary spending of DDR sections within United Nations peace operations.⁸ The community-based approach that community violence reduction is built on forms the core of UNDP's main programmatic activity in DDR, which consists of reintegration support projects for combatants who voluntarily disarm. A review of the linkages between transitional justice and DDR therefore needs to take into account this important shift in DDR programming from the national level to the local level.

The introduction of community violence reduction into United Nations-supported programmes for armed groups opens up new entry points for dealing with transitional justice issues in contexts involving cyclical violence, where transitional justice processes have encountered significant challenges. **A key dimension of community violence reduction and community-based reintegration is that, beyond the reduction of armed group violence, these approaches are intended to facilitate work with stakeholders to address grievances within local communities in furtherance of stability, social trust and cohesion.** The aims of such DDR initiatives, as well as the means

⁵ The "Guidance note of the Secretary-General: approach to transitional justice" refers to the exclusion of members of armed groups from "reintegration into national police or military structures of ex-combatants" (p. 11). However, it should be noted that, according to the General Assembly definition of DDR, the R stands specifically for reintegration into civilian life. The new guidance note should correct this and clearly distinguish DDR from a process of "integration" into the security and defence forces. ⁶ The revision of IDDRS has introduced a categorization of different types of DDR efforts. According to this classification, community violence reduction is a "DDR-related tool". Other DDR-related tools include pre-DDR, transitional weapons and ammunition management, initiatives to prevent individuals from joining armed groups designated as terrorist organizations, DDR support to mediation and DDR support to transitional security arrangements. [IDDRS, Module 2.10](#), "The UN Approach to DDR", pp. 3–4 and 6. ⁷ Numbers provided by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI), DDR Section. ⁸ DDR section budgets by mission (2019–20): United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA): \$6.258 million; United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA): \$7 million; United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO): \$10.19 million. See DPO/OROLSI/DDRS factsheets.

through which they are being pursued (local dialogue, consultation, participation and the empowerment of women and young people) have much in common with those of transitional justice. It is therefore worth exploring in greater detail how community violence reduction and community-based reintegration could serve as an entry point for transitional justice initiatives for redress and prevention measures.

Overview of the content

In order to identify new avenues for integrating transitional justice and DDR, this note will take a comprehensive approach. It starts with an analysis of the nature of the contexts where the United Nations has been called upon to support transitional justice and DDR efforts, and of the decision-making leading up to the

DDR mandate of United Nations peace operations in these contexts (part A); second, it reviews how DDR implementation and the coordination of transitional justice and DDR have been hampered in these contexts⁹ (part B); third, it showcases the alternatives to “traditional” DDR programmes that have been initiated by DDR practitioners to respond to the challenges they have encountered (part C); fourth, it focuses on how questions of justice are being addressed in community-based projects (community violence reduction and community-based reintegration) (part D); the paper then examines the implications for transitional justice and presents an overview of recommendations on the way forward (part E); it highlights the need to link innovative local-level activities to national-level approaches (part F); lastly, it presents a conclusion, with concrete next steps.



UN Photo/Martine Perret

⁹ While this paper focuses on contexts with ongoing DDR programmes, some of the initiatives discussed may also inform United Nations-supported approaches to transitional justice in other contexts.

A. Background: Understanding the contexts in which the UN is mandated to support transitional justice and DDR



With a focus on addressing questions of justice in contexts where the United Nations supports transitional justice and DDR efforts, it is important to understand the conditions and the political-security dynamic, as well as the peacebuilding approach that the United Nations system is taking. This makes it possible to identify obstacles and opportunities for the coordination of transitional justice and DDR.

The challenge of transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict settings

One of the prime changes in the field of transitional justice since it emerged in the context of the post-authoritarian transitions of South America is its transposition – without much modification – to weakly institutionalized, post-conflict or even active-conflict contexts. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence noted that the implementation of transitional justice processes “has proven to be much more difficult in these contexts, and the results more ambiguous” ([A/HRC/36/50, para. 96](#)). Factors that account for such mixed results include not only the institutional setting, which is completely different in such contexts (institutions rarely have broad coverage or the capacity to provide services in the parts of the territory con-

cerned), but also the different nature of conflict that has generated the rights violations (e.g. a multiplicity of agents, often non-State actors), the different way in which such conflicts end (with negotiation between undefeated parties instead of regime collapse), the different types of violations committed, and the deep economic scarcity and low social capital in such situations ([A/HRC/36/50, paras. 95–96](#)).

More reflection is therefore needed on how transitional justice can or should be conceptually “adjusted” to the radically different types of contexts in which it is increasingly relied on as a policy response. **In weakly institutionalized conflict and post-conflict settings, transitional justice should logically include or be aligned with a significant component of institution-building.** These processes, however, can take decades, during which the needs (and rights) of victims and affected communities cannot be put on hold. **In such contexts, opportunities for more immediate progress may instead lie in local and inclusive responses and resources, which involve victims and civil society leaders, including women and young people, who are committed to the ideas of redress and prevention** ([A/HRC/36/50, paras. 100–101](#)). A localized transitional justice focus in weakly in-

stitutionalized settings has not, however, been a consistent focus of United Nations support so far.

Current United Nations DDR support and the focus of this paper

Similarly to transitional justice, DDR has been increasingly requested as a policy response in weakly institutionalized States. Although DDR advisory support is provided by the United Nations system in various contexts across the world, including in Colombia and Nigeria, the main operational engagement of the United Nations system in support of DDR programme implementation is currently taking place in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, three countries with a United Nations peacekeeping operation.¹⁰ UNDP, whose mandate focuses on ending poverty, building democratic governance, the rule of law and inclusive institutions, is supporting a number of smaller-scale projects, of which the most relevant for this study is taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹¹ While not all DDR or DDR-related initiatives supported by the United Nations take place in contexts where there is a peace operation, the extent and level of engagement with DDR processes under the United Nations system in these contexts is currently significantly higher, with several hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, compared with only a few hundred in other contexts.¹² These initiatives offer access to local populations and are serviced by various

field offices, including in hot-spot areas. The experience of United Nations staff supporting DDR and transitional justice in these complex environments will allow reflections to be advanced on how the United Nations can improve transitional justice support in weakly institutionalized conflict and post-conflict settings. This paper will therefore specifically draw from the experiences of the United Nations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali.

United Nations peace operations in these three countries have all been mandated by the Security Council to support DDR and transitional justice efforts. Through regular reporting obligations to the Security Council, these peace operations offer access to information on the evolution of the security situation, as well as on DDR and transitional justice processes and the challenges that are encountered in the implementation of their mandates. The level of engagement by the United Nations in these contexts and the challenges that parties to the conflict and United Nations partners encounter there can offer insights on transitional justice and DDR coordination that can help develop new and relevant programming options, not only for these contexts, but for other types of contexts, too. While not all contexts are benefiting from the presence of a United Nations peace operation, **the fact that community-based approaches are being supported by various United Nations actors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in both mission and non-mission contexts offers multiple opportunities for cooperation at the local, national and regional levels.**

¹⁰ Department of Peace Operations, [DDR web page](#). ¹¹ UNDP website, mission and vision: <https://www.undp.org/about-us>. ¹² Based on information obtained by the Department of Peace Operations and UNDP.

DDR programming in contexts of insecurity and active conflict

A significant challenge encountered over the past decade by United Nations actors who were requested to support DDR efforts operationally was that the majority of them were being asked to operate in environments with protracted conflicts, where active fighting was ongoing. Although peacekeeping mandates have evolved to complex stabilization missions, “stabilizing” an environment characterized by protracted conflict has proved to be extremely challenging. The peace operations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali are faced with cyclical outbreaks of armed group fighting, even after a peace agreement has been signed or a ceasefire agreed to. **While in most cases the signing of a negotiated agreement is followed by brief periods of relative stability, conflicts tend to re-escalate a few months after their adoption.** Such eruptions of violence are then followed by calls for increased protection of civilians, humanitarian assistance and new rounds of peace talks.

In light of the cyclical violence faced by the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali – and by the United Nations with them – the well-established concept of “post-conflict” engagement is being challenged.¹³ Regarding the security conditions and the dynamics among the conflict actors on the ground, it may be concluded that these countries as a whole, or some of their regions, have not truly passed from ac-

tive conflict to a post-conflict state, remaining instead in a state of cyclical conflict or continued insecurity. This presents a major challenge for the United Nations system: peace operations, the United Nations country team and partners are all supporting parties in the implementation of programmes that are specifically designed for the post-conflict phase. DDR is one of these programmes.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes are traditional “post-conflict interventions”, as their success inherently depends on the commitment of the parties who signed a peace agreement, requiring them to demobilize. **A DDR programme encompasses a voluntary approach to demobilization, as opposed to an approach involving the use of military force. One of the main preconditions for a DDR programme is therefore the consent of the parties to lay down their weapons voluntarily once a peace agreement is signed.** However, unless they are militarily defeated, armed groups will only disarm if the peace agreement that requires them to do so provides them with incentives. Another key factor is whether all armed groups that are expected to demobilize have been invited to participate in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of an agreement. Furthermore, in addition to the political process, the security situation has an impact on an armed group’s commitment to a DDR programme. Armed groups are reluctant to disarm if this leaves them and/or their communities exposed to violence from groups operating in neighbouring areas or countries or those that have not yet signed a peace agreement.

¹³ The post-conflict phase can be defined as “a transitional period bounded by past war and future peace”. See Andrew J. Cunningham, “Post-conflict contexts and humanitarian organizations: the changing relationship with states”, *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, No. 7 (September 2017), p. 1.

This is frequently the case in countries where the national defence and security forces are weak, lack accountability and are therefore not trusted by the local population.

More than 10 years ago, in order to promote the effective implementation of DDR programmes to practitioners in and outside the peacebuilding field, the United Nations defined four preconditions that needed to be satisfied in a given context for effective DDR programme implementation to take place.¹⁴ Three of these four preconditions are related to the conduct and outcome of peace negotiations, and one is related to security.

PRECONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DDR IMPLEMENTATION

- 1. A peace agreement signed by all key parties**
- 2. Trust in the peace process**
- 3. Willingness of parties to engage in DDR**
- 4. A secure environment**

United Nations DDR practitioners have been advocating for a wider understanding of the political dimension of DDR programmes for years, highlighting the need to include non-State armed groups in peace negotiations and to build their trust in the peace process. However, these calls for reviewing the roles of armed groups in peace talks and implementation processes remained largely unheard, leading to the continuous adoption of peace agreements with DDR provisions that lacked

the support of the relevant armed groups. **In 2018, 85 per cent of United Nations peace operations were deployed in contexts where armed groups were expected to demobilize, even though they did not support the peace agreement requesting them to do so, had no trust in the peace process or were not ready to disarm for political and/or security reasons.**¹⁵ This meant that few or none of the preconditions for the completion of a DDR programme were fulfilled in these contexts, making it unlikely that a DDR programme could be effectively implemented. To understand how such a discrepancy can emerge between the dynamics in a given context and the programming that the United Nations is mandated to support, it is helpful to recall the decision-making process that leads to the launch of a DDR programme.

The decision for DDR implementation: from peace agreement to Security Council mandate

The adoption of an initial peace agreement following a period of violent conflict marks a milestone in a peace process. As explained above, due to the voluntary nature of DDR programmes, armed groups need to agree to their disarmament. This is expected to happen as an outcome of peace negotiations leading up to the adoption of a peace agreement or cessation of hostilities (ceasefire). An armed group can only be expected to disarm in the framework of a DDR programme if it is a party to an agreement. Its representatives should only sign if it is committed to disarm.

In practice, however, whether or not a group has signed an agreement calling on them to

¹⁴ IDDRS, *Module 2.10*, "The UN Approach to DDR", p. 10. ¹⁵ Based on a total of 13 contexts, out of which 11 did not meet the preconditions. See World Bank Group, United Nations Peacekeeping and the Social Science Research Council, "[The changing landscape of armed groups: doing DDR in new contexts](#)" (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Office of Rule of Law Security Institutions, DDR Section, 2018), p. 6.

disarm has proved not to be a reliable indicator of its commitment. Parties to the conflict may sign an agreement for a number of reasons, even though they may not be committed to supporting it. Undue pressure may have been exercised on them in order to sign; they may see an advantage in pretending to support an agreement; or they may be doing so to gain visibility, hoping that a new round of peace talks will produce a more favourable outcome. The lack of commitment by conflict parties, in particular by non-State armed groups, may be explained by various factors, of which three are as follows:

(a) They were not included in the peace talks or in setting the agenda for the talks.¹⁶

(b) They feel that their interests and grievances, or those of the communities they see themselves defending, were not addressed by the

peace talks or in the text of the agreement.

(c) They are influenced by external backers who are undermining the peace process.

When a peace agreement contains DDR provisions and a United Nations peacekeeping operation is deployed to a country, the Security Council is likely to mandate this peace operation to support the parties in implementing a DDR programme. The Security Council mandate is decisive as to whether or not some countries will receive the financial and logistical means to plan, launch and implement a DDR programme. This is true for all three contexts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, where the DDR programme hinges on the support of the United Nations system and donors, in particular the World Bank.¹⁷



MONUSCO/Sylvain Liechti

¹⁶ Lack of representation of armed group and community members at the negotiation table may cause fragmentation of the group, thereby increasing the complexity of the overall situation. ¹⁷ World Bank, “Central African Republic - Reintegration of Ex-combatants Project”, 13 April 2017.

When the Security Council includes support for DDR programme implementation in the mandate of a peace operation, it does so based solely on the text of the negotiated agreement. This step is not preceded by an analysis of whether or not the preconditions for DDR are being fulfilled. There are three likely explanations for this. First, the Security Council does not expect a peace agreement to contain provisions that cannot be implemented. Second, even when there is a doubt, the Security Council does not want to be seen to be questioning the will of the parties; rather, it wishes to be seen as investing in the momentum created by the signature of an agreement. Third, the Security Council's knowledge of the specifics of contexts or operations such as DDR is often limited. As a consequence, United Nations peace operations, agencies, funds and programmes are mandated to support the implementation of DDR programmes in contexts where the preconditions for their effective implementation may not be in place. In other words, they are requested to support the implementation of a post-conflict programme while the conflict is still ongoing.

Challenges to the State-based peacebuilding paradigm

DDR is not the only post-conflict intervention that makes its way into the mandates of peace operations that are deployed into active conflict. DDR does play a particular role in this dynamic, however, as it targets members of the fighting forces and thereby calls specifically for working with at least one, and sometimes all, parties to the conflict. DDR is usually coordinated by a

national-level body, with the Government playing a key role in the process. Indeed, in most post-conflict environments, the Government has the highest interest in DDR implementation, as DDR is expected to establish the monopoly of force in the hands of the central State.

The role of the central State in the implementation of a DDR programme indicates that peace agreements that contain DDR provisions are built on what is known as the State-based peacebuilding paradigm. This approach to peacebuilding puts the State at the centre of the post-conflict strategy. It is built on the assumption that a legitimate Government and the reform of State institutions will provide the best framework for a comprehensive peacebuilding and reconciliation process. The weakness with this reasoning is that it mistakenly assumes the existence of operative State institutions and therefore underestimates the time, financial and logistical investments that are required, as well as the necessary level of engagement with the local population, in order to build effective State institutions in those places that lack them.

One explanation for the State-based approach to peacebuilding favoured by the international community is the predominant view that fragile States that are prone to conflict can best be supported through reform processes that strengthen central State institutions.¹⁸ Less prominent are bottom-up approaches that address the symptoms of State fragility at the local level. Conflict can be linked to the marginalization of populations in areas where the State has been absent,

¹⁸ For further analysis, including the impact this has on the effectiveness of stabilization missions, see Cedric de Coning and Linnéa Gélot, "Placing People at the Center of UN Peace Operations", International Peace Institute (IPI) Global Observatory, 29 May 2020.

sometimes leading to a lack of access to the most basic services.¹⁹ Marginalized groups may be particular ethnic groups, but also women. The degree to which women are excluded from political, economic and social life has proved to be a key factor influencing a society's propensity for conflict.²⁰ Studies conducted in the Central African Republic confirm that non-State armed groups mainly recruit among marginalized populations that have never experienced the State as a service provider.²¹ This has often led to communities developing their own customary forms of service provision, yet the significance of these customary mechanisms and ways to combine them with top-down approaches are

rarely foreseen by programmes such as DDR, which are part of the State-based peacebuilding paradigm.

One of the major challenges for the United Nations when it has been requested to support the implementation of DDR has been that the central State's control over its territory has been so limited that the State has been unable to recover and exercise a monopoly of force effectively or to extend its authority beyond certain regions in a sustainable manner. Structurally speaking, this can be explained by the fact that, in weakly institutionalized States, the central State can be so considerably weaker than non-State armed groups that to regain



UN Photo/Steen Johansen

¹⁹ World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, D.C., 2018), pp. 23 and 160. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116. ²¹ Michael J. Brown and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Social cohesion as peacebuilding in the CAR and beyond", *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (1 April 2015), p. 17.

control over its territory would require the State to work with these groups and their communities, even if this means making certain concessions. However, this is not what peace agreements under the State-based peacebuilding paradigm foresee. They assume that the State's control over its territory is unhampered, even where this is not the case. The "top-down" approach that combines elections with DDR and security sector reform is quickly undermined by non-State armed groups when they feel marginalized by the peace process and voice their frustration through new rounds of fighting. As the State does not have the capacity to defeat them, non-State armed groups will continue to fight, thereby creating an environment of insecurity that makes top-down institution-building difficult or impossible to achieve.²² Top-down approaches can also be seen as a provocation to armed groups that feel marginalized by the peace process. This is often the case in contexts where existing State institutions are dominated by one social or ethnic group that may have played a role in the conflict, and where access to posts in State institutions is difficult or impossible for parts of the population.

In the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, several regions have been under the control of non-State armed groups for years or decades. In some cases, communities have close ties with non-State armed groups, which they consider as the "lesser evil" compared with the central State, and they may support their claims of more inclusivity. This, too, makes the implementation of a top-down State-based peacebuilding approach challenging, including for

the United Nations system, for instance when it has the mandate to protect civilians, while at the same time being mandated to support the Government in processes where the rights of these civilians are only marginally considered.

Conclusion

The State-based peacebuilding paradigm has become a "standard" model used by the international community across a variety of peace processes, no matter the nature and complexity of the conflict. DDR is one of the key elements of this approach. The Security Council is mandating United Nations peace operations to support the implementation of DDR programmes in countries where the peace agreements contain DDR provisions, even if non-State armed groups that are expected to disarm are not committed to do so and the State is unable to exercise the monopoly of force it aims to recover. This often happens when Security Council mandates rely on the content of a peace agreement to provide a realistic framework for peacebuilding. This can be problematic when a peace agreement contains provisions such as DDR, which may not be adapted for the specific context. Attempts by the parties and by United Nations peace operations to implement these agreements lead to considerable challenges for the overall peace process, thereby decreasing the opportunities for other processes such as transitional justice.²³

²² Silke Rusch, *Peace Agreements and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): Insights from the Central African Republic and Libya*, CSS Mediation Resources, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich (July 2021), p. 62. ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

B. Challenges to DDR implementation and transitional justice/DDR coordination in peace processes supported by the United Nations



The Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali feature among the 85 per cent of peace operations that have been deployed to countries where the preconditions for a DDR programme were not fulfilled. The armed groups do not fully support the peace agreements requiring them to disarm. In areas controlled by armed groups there is no alternative security provider, and trust in the peace process among various groups of the population is low, as the peace talks and peacebuilding initiatives may not have sufficiently addressed questions of marginalization. The efforts made by the United Nations to implement DDR implementation have been seriously hampered in the contexts of the three featured countries by the ongoing conflicts and mandates that did not sufficiently reflect the situation on the ground. This has had an impact on the roll-out of DDR programmes, which has not only affected the sustainability of wider peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts but has also limited opportunities for the coordination of transitional justice and DDR efforts.

1. UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS: CHALLENGES TO DDR MANDATE IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND MALI

The conflicts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali involve various non-State armed groups, sometimes fighting each other and sometimes the central State. While DDR programmes in the past may have also targeted members of the host Government's armed forces, the programmes that are under way at the time of writing are targeting members of non-State armed groups or, in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, foreign armed groups. The central State that these groups oppose has only limited control over its territory. In the Central African Republic, for example, the central State is said to be in control of only 30 per cent of its territory, a situation that has lasted for decades.

At the same time, and across all contexts, the United Nations has been under considerable political pressure from the national Governments and from donors to enable the launch of DDR programmes. National authorities, whether transitional or newly elected, are eager to see threats to their power and to the

country's economic development removed. They therefore want to see members of armed groups enrol in a DDR programme as quickly as possible. In a good number of cases they may even support their integration into the security and defence forces. **As one of the objectives of DDR is the creation of a secure environment for the implementation of peacebuilding, including provision for elections, DDR is usually identified as a priority in the early stages of implementing a peace agreement.** United Nations Member States with interests in a given context are keen for elections to take place, as they generally allow them to draw down military engagement and put the future of the country in the hands of a (presumably) legitimate Government. Furthermore, the Security Council expects peace operations to report on progress made in the implementation of their mandate.

These political expectations put United Nations DDR teams in the challenging position of having to approach non-State armed groups across a State's territory to prepare for their disarmament, shortly after the signing of a peace agreement that the groups may have felt sceptical about, to say the least. United Nations DDR staff conducting assessment missions to prepare for the launch of a DDR programme often find themselves interacting with armed groups that are keen on engaging in political follow-up negotiations with the United Nations. Armed group leaders use these as an opportunity to convey their frustrations with the peace process, often clearly communicating their intention not to disarm unless political or economic concessions are made to them and their safety and security are provided for. Such claims are made to DDR staff not only by smaller groups but by

the leaders of major armed groups who have just signed a peace agreement or ceasefire.

As armed groups have refused to enrol their members in DDR programmes or have indicated that they do not fully support the peace process or disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, DDR programme implementation has been delayed across all three contexts – the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali – or it has only been possible to launch the programmes with a limited number of participants. This is highly problematic, as one of the underlying principles of DDR is that all groups who were fighting in a given context should participate. Groups that are being disarmed may otherwise be left exposed to violence from enemy groups.

With the Security Council mandate in place, United Nations DDR teams have therefore tried to work with members of armed groups and communities to establish a relationship of trust so as to identify even small opportunities for future DDR roll-out. DDR staff have been learning to read the local populations' priority needs and understand the complex relationships they have with the armed groups. **Whereas, 12 years ago, some still considered DDR work as mainly technical in nature, the political, sociological and gender dimensions of the programmatic work undertaken by DDR staff are now widely recognized.** Faced with political obstacles to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, DDR staff find themselves in a continuous process of analysing the dynamic on the ground, identifying the needs of local communities, interacting with members of armed groups on their readiness or refusal to dis-

arm, negotiating access to and use of project sites, and building a relationship of trust with a wide variety of local and national stakeholders. Yet all too often, staff do not have sufficient access to actors who are responsible for leading peace negotiations, and they find it difficult to feed their analysis into political processes.

2. IMPACT ON THE PEACE PROCESS

The political and structural obstacles to DDR programme implementation had a negative impact in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. While this impact was more pronounced in some contexts than in others, attempting DDR programme implementation in a context where non-State armed actors are unwilling to disarm always has some form of negative impact on the wider peace process.²⁴ As the DDR programmes in these contexts target non-State armed groups, and as these groups form the main parties to the conflict, it is crucial to understand how they react to the attempted implementation of programmes such as DDR that are mandated under the State-based peacebuilding paradigm.

It is important to note that the questions of momentum, timing and sequencing are crucial when it comes to peace processes. When non-State armed actors oppose a peace agreement that has just been signed, sooner or later they voice their frustration or opposition in one way or another. **Each time an armed group that is expected to disarm signs a peace agreement and this agreement**

does not reflect the conflict dynamic on the ground, trust is lost in how peace processes are run and supported by the United Nations. As a consequence, groups may opt out of the process, which all too often leads to a new cycle of violence. **This ultimately culminates in a wider loss of trust by the population and political actors in the peace process.**

The channel through which armed groups may voice their frustration depends on a number of factors, such as the availability of formal frameworks that may have been established by the peace agreement. Where such mechanisms do not exist, are not (yet) functional or do not cover security questions, armed groups may issue declarations, or they may plan and execute violent acts. The means that they choose will depend to a great extent on how “provoked” they feel by activities that are under way as part of the peace process. In some cases groups may send a few of their members to join DDR efforts, but only in an effort to gain credibility for the next round of peace talks that they are expecting to take place. As long as they are not committed to DDR, they generally retain the capacity to prepare for new attacks.

Armed groups may feel provoked if they witness preparations for DDR despite voicing opposition to it, as they consider that their fight is not over, and they will lose their leverage if they disarm. They may also feel provoked if they observe that external actors are training and equipping the State’s security and defence forces, in particular in countries where these forces played a role in the conflict.

²⁴ In some contexts (e.g. Mali), this issue is exacerbated by the presence of violent extremist groups.

When armed groups feel that the power and military dynamic on the ground is likely to shift to their disadvantage while they believe that their grievances and interests have not been sufficiently addressed in the peace talks, this creates a climate of mistrust, including towards the United Nations, and it lowers the chances of armed groups disarming. This, in turn, undermines the effective implementation of a DDR programme and the coordination of transitional justice and DDR efforts.

3. INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

As part of the review process, research and interviews were conducted with DDR and human rights field staff on United Nations peace operations in order to obtain first-hand insights and ensure that the analysis and recommendations were relevant for the conduct of DDR and transitional justice programmes on the ground.²⁵

The first question that United Nations field staff were asked was aimed at determining their awareness of the need to coordinate transitional justice and DDR processes, as requested by the Secretary-General's guidance note of 2010 and the IDDRS.

Awareness of the need for transitional justice and DDR coordination in field operations

The majority of United Nations human rights staff interviewed were aware of the "Guidance note of the Secretary-General: United Nations approach to transitional justice" and its recommendation for coordination of transi-

tional justice and DDR processes. They also felt concerned by the conduct of DDR operations and said that they advocated for transitional justice initiatives when senior management meetings discussed DDR and human rights issues. However, such advocacy was almost exclusively limited to screening DDR participants for serious human rights violations. Most United Nations DDR staff had been approached by human rights colleagues with questions on transitional justice and victims' rights, in particular as part of wider discussions on the human rights due diligence policy (HRDDP) on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces, linked to the integration of members of armed groups into the security and defence forces.²⁶ A majority of staff were aware of the IDDRS module on transitional justice. Some DDR sections had nominated human rights focal points, who attended meetings related to HRDDP and transitional justice. However, they were not able to report on concrete transitional justice and DDR coordination initiatives that went beyond discussions on screening for serious human rights violations (i.e. documenting and reporting). One DDR staff member admitted that some exchanges with human rights colleagues on DDR were done to "check the HRDDP box" rather than engage in meaningful planning of joint initiatives that had the potential to produce concrete results. Indeed, both human rights and DDR staff had only limited knowledge of the other field, and they found it challenging to envision concrete initiatives that went beyond the exclusion of serious human rights violators from DDR processes where required. In short, while staff were aware of the need

²⁵ Interviews with human rights and DDR staff in MINUSCA, MINUSMA and MONUSCO. ²⁶ The human rights due diligence policy applies to non-United Nations State security forces, but not to non-State armed groups.

for coordination, they did not have sufficient clarity – beyond compliance with the human rights due diligence policy – of what coordination between transitional justice and DDR could look like.

United Nations field staff identified a number of reasons why DDR and transitional justice coordination was hampered in contexts where armed groups were unwilling to disarm.

Challenges in transitional justice and DDR coordination reported by DDR staff

United Nations DDR staff generally perceived that the only relevant contribution to transitional justice efforts they were expected to make was to comply with the responsibility to exclude perpetrators of serious human rights violations from the DDR programme. In light of the obstacles to DDR implementation described above, this presented a challenge: as there was already a low level of acceptance among armed groups about enrolling in DDR, and as United Nations DDR staff had to invest in developing relationships of respect and/or trust with the conflict parties, staff did not want to be seen as also being advocates for transitional justice, fearing that such an attitude could result in weakening the trust of members of armed groups. One DDR staff member said that the team was concerned that the arrest and prosecution of an armed group leader would considerably lower the chances of the group supporting the peace process and enrolling in DDR, as it would discourage the rank-and-file membership from putting their future into the hands of the same organization that had assisted in arresting their leader.

DDR staff also reported a lack of knowledge about proceedings on the human rights and justice side, once they had handed their data over to the United Nations Mission's human rights team, which made it difficult for them to explain the procedure to potential DDR participants without raising any suspicions. This was mainly due to the nature of the screening (see text box below) that was conducted across mission contexts, in which the national Government had the final say. Although the involvement of DDR staff at the first stage of the four-step process could have presented an opportunity to educate participants on the opportunities that transitional justice offers, in practice, DDR staff still preferred to fulfil only the minimum requirements. They avoided engaging DDR participants in discussions on a process that seemed insufficiently transparent and that involved the central State, which was perceived by many potential DDR participants as an opposing conflict party and therefore unlikely to act in their best interests.

Challenges reported by human rights staff

Human rights staff working on issues of transitional justice have been focused on overcoming the challenges of working with the “weak” State institutions they were mandated to support.



FOUR-STEP SCREENING PRACTICE APPLIED BY UNITED NATIONS STAFF IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND MALI²⁷

STEP 1. Armed groups participating in a DDR programme submit list of names of combatants who they would like to register with the Government or the national DDR commission, which then submits them to the United Nations Mission (in its capacity as key partner of the Government in the DDR programme).

STEP 2: Once received by the Mission, the lists are handed over from the DDR Section to the Human Rights Office.

STEP 3: The Human Rights Office conducts a screening based on available documentation to identify perpetrators of serious crimes. When the Human Rights Section identifies an individual as being suspected of having committed such crimes, they will recommend to the Government (usually through the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General) that they be excluded from the DDR programme and investigated or prosecuted. For confidentiality reasons, information on the identified individuals and the recommendations is submitted directly to the Government (perhaps to the national DDR commission) without being seen by the DDR Section.

STEP 4: On the recommendation of the United Nations Human Rights Office, the Government decides whether or not to exclude an individual from the list of participants for the DDR programme. The national DDR commission shares the final list with the Mission's DDR Section.

Depending on the mission's mandate, they have had to invest considerable time and resources in building national justice capacities. They have found it challenging to identify opportunities for reparations, especially in contexts such as the Central African Republic and in regions of Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo where people live from subsistence farming.

Human rights staff have not always been fully aware of the political challenges encountered by the United Nations in DDR implementation. They insisted on the prosecution of armed group leaders whom they perceived as "spoilers". They referred to recent arrests of armed group leaders and their referral to the International Criminal Court as significant progress for justice

²⁷ Based on interviews conducted with DDR and human rights staff in MINUSCA, MINUSMA and MONUSCO.

in the Central African Republic. They acknowledged that the level of State fragility was gravely affecting the peace processes in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali and, with that, DDR and transitional justice efforts.²⁸ At the same time, they felt that, due to the higher budgetary and programme management capacities of DDR sections, the United Nations Missions were more active in supporting ex-combatants rather than victims, and that this negatively affected the chances for peace and reconciliation.

DDR staff views of transitional justice

The discussions with DDR staff reflected a lack of awareness regarding the opportunities that transitional justice could offer to DDR beneficiaries. DDR staff indicated that the focus of human rights teams on documenting and reporting on serious human rights violations was not conducive to the implementation of the DDR programme, as this only provided a snapshot (regarding specific incidents) of the complex victim-perpetrator relationships they witnessed in their work with members of armed groups and communities. They confirmed that, in some regions of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, participation in violence was often widespread, victims had turned into perpetrators and perpetrators had been victimized. They felt that, beyond information collected through human rights monitoring methodology, more analysis and work with communities was required in order to understand these complex relationships. DDR staff also pointed out that local populations were often more immediately in-

terested in the cessation of violence – in security rather than justice. They admitted, however, that claims for justice that remained unheard for too long constituted a source of tension in some of the communities they were working with, heightening the potential to reignite violence.²⁹

Human rights views on DDR

The discussion with human rights components on the potential for more transitional justice initiatives highlighted the point that they distinguish themselves from DDR sections not only through the nature of their work, which consists mainly of monitoring and documentation processes, but also through the budget and programmatic capacities at their disposal. While human rights staff may be deployed to the same field offices as DDR staff, the programme implementation and management dimension of DDR means that the roles of the United Nations in human rights and DDR are different in their nature: while DDR staff are in charge of supporting multimillion-dollar programmes, human rights staff have generally felt that they lacked the necessary resources and capacities for supporting more transitional justice initiatives.

Strategic vision of transitional justice and DDR coordination

Both DDR and human rights staff traced coordination challenges back to the lack of a strategic vision by the United Nations in a given context. They confirmed that this lack of vision starts with

²⁸ One human rights officer in MINUSMA pointed out that, in addition to the absence or “relocalization” of State officials, judicial processes were hampered by the absence of lawyers in the regions concerned. This has led to a more significant role for paralegals. ²⁹ This tracks long-standing results of surveys that have been conducted on justice, for example by the International Center for Transitional Justice in Uganda. See Phuong Pham and Patrick Vinck, “[Transitioning to peace: a population-based survey on attitudes about social reconstruction and justice in Northern Uganda](#)”, UC Berkeley Initiative for Vulnerable Populations (December 2010).

the fact that mandates do not sufficiently take the specific challenges in a given context into consideration. When asked whether they were encouraged to coordinate by senior mission leadership, staff said that, at the senior level, DDR and transitional justice were rarely recognized as programmes that should be closely coordinated.

4. ANALYSIS

The interviews reveal **three key challenges to transitional justice and DDR coordination** in United Nations field mission contexts:

(a) Although DDR and human rights staff developed an awareness of the need to screen participants for serious human rights violations, this type of transitional justice and DDR coordination produced no tangible results, as almost no one was excluded from the DDR process or prosecuted by the authorities.

(b) The focus on the screening and possible exclusion of DDR participants hindered a wider and more strategic understanding among staff regarding the potential of transitional justice and DDR coordination. After all, this is meant to strengthen reconciliation among conflict parties, preventing a re-escalation of the conflict, and it should encompass the implementation of transitional justice processes.

(c) The complex political environment in which United Nations peace operations are mandated to implement DDR has meant that DDR staff have had to invest more time and resources in pushing innovation in their own field, and they have therefore been less available for coordination with other processes. Furthermore, the interviews showed that the complexity in the

DDR field was not fully understood by human rights staff, who were dealing with their own challenges in active conflict environments. Both DDR and human rights staff therefore believed that a strategic vision for transitional justice and DDR coordination should have been provided by senior mission leadership. It should be noted, however, that both processes are highly complex endeavours that require a certain level of knowledge and specific experience that Special Representatives and Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General usually do not have. This means that they may shy away from encouraging further coordination, especially in light of the significant changes that have occurred in DDR over the past seven years. It is therefore more likely that entry points for coordination will be found at the level of DDR and human rights teams at field duty stations in particular, but also at headquarters, for example when new mission strategies are initially developed.

If the Secretary-General's new guidance note can effectively respond to these challenges and adapt to the innovations that have taken place in the DDR field, it can be expected that DDR and human rights teams will be much more likely to proactively design and implement joint initiatives. This can then garner strategic and material support from senior mission leadership and encourage further integration.

That said, the need for more effective screening of international crimes and serious human rights violations in traditional DDR programmes and for subsequent prosecution of perpetrators needs to be acknowledged. The revision of the IDDRS module on DDR and transitional justice, which is taking place at the time of writing, includes the development of a more effective approach to screening.

C. Alternatives to “traditional” DDR programmes used by the United Nations system to tackle armed group violence



The important changes that have taken place in the field of DDR over the past seven years are a direct result of the challenges and criticism that United Nations DDR practitioners encountered after the United Nations Missions in the Sudan and South Sudan experienced major challenges in delivering on core mandated tasks. One of these was a very costly DDR programme.³⁰ The political and operational obstacles that DDR teams in United Nations peace operations, agencies, funds and programmes were confronted with forced them to innovate, as the Security Council continued to mandate them with “support to DDR”. **This meant that political pressure on the United Nations system to reduce armed group violence remained high. United Nations DDR actors therefore looked into the possibility of creating complementary programming that responded to the specific contexts they were working in.** This led to a variety of projects being designed, such as those on commander incentive programmes and sequencing flexibility. Some of these projects were based on research produced by policy analysts and academia.

In 2010, these initiatives, together with many others, were subsumed by the United Nations under the term “Second Generation disarmament, demobilization and reintegration” and were presented in a publication intended as a guide for policymakers and United Nations staff.³¹

1. SECOND GENERATION DDR POLICY OPTIONS

“Second Generation DDR” encompassed a number of policy options that were applied in United Nations-supported DDR programmes. **Community violence reduction was one of these second generation DDR policy options, having first been introduced in Haiti in 2006.** Community violence reduction shall be examined in more detail below.

The goal of another second generation policy option, “commander incentive programmes”, was to minimize the potential impact of so-called spoilers by providing “special packages” in the form of material incentives to commanders and senior officers, who were most frequently engaged in illicit activities.³²

³⁰ Small Arms Survey, “Human security baseline assessment for Sudan and South Sudan”, 2011. ³¹ An overview of “Second Generation DDR” practices and policy options can be found in *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations: A Contribution to the New Horizon Discussion on Challenges and Opportunities for UN Peacekeeping* (United Nations publication, 2010), pp. 21–29 and 37–40. ³² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Lastly, the “sequencing flexibility” policy option recognized that some contexts did not provide an environment that was conducive to the disarmament of members of armed groups, perhaps because the security situation would have meant local populations being left without any protection against attacks from other armed groups and spoilers. The concept therefore proposes either that not all of the four components of DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration) have to occur, or that they could occur in a different order (e.g. starting with reintegration, hence “RDD”).³³ Sequencing flexibility was considered in the 2008–2012 DDR programme in the Central African Republic. However, the parties encountered challenges, in that the political support of armed groups for disarmament was lacking, and the reintegration opportunities did not provide sufficient incentives for combatants to ultimately disarm.

2. THE INTRODUCTION OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION INTO THE MANDATES OF PEACE OPERATIONS IN AFRICA

While second generation DDR practices initiated a process of innovation among DDR actors in the United Nations system, locally emerging practices such as community violence reduction, sequencing flexibility and commander incentive programmes remained ad hoc and did not receive any wider attention or support from Member States or the Security Council. This changed in 2014, when the Security Council deployed a new peacekeeping mission to the Central African Republic.

At the time, two major DDR programmes had failed in the Central African Republic. Armed groups who had refused to participate in the second DDR programme had formed a coalition and attacked the capital, thereby starting a brutal civil war. United Nations DDR staff were alarmed when discussions were initiated regarding a mandate for DDR within the newly formed mission, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). After briefing Security Council members on the challenges to DDR implementation in the Central African Republic, including the extreme level of State fragility, it was decided that the DDR mandate of MINUSCA would be complemented with community violence reduction programmes. Community violence reduction had been one of the second generation DDR initiatives, initially designed and implemented in Haiti, where gang violence was posing a security threat to local communities.

Community violence reduction and a similar programme called “pre-DDR” were then launched in the Central African Republic, ahead of the national DDR programme. The Security Council not only acknowledged the relevance of community violence reduction; it also commended MINUSCA for designing and implementing the pre-DDR programme. After external reviews confirmed that community violence reduction was reducing violence and improving social cohesion in the Central African Republic, the Security Council introduced community violence reduction into all major peacekeeping missions with a DDR mandate.³⁴ It also included it in

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 28. ³⁴ MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UNITAMS/ External review, Transition International (2017); Final Evaluation CVR Project Paoua, Transition International (2016), p. 28. Mid-term review, CAR pre-DDR programme, p. 2 (internal document available through the DDR Section of the Department of Peace Operations).

the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS), despite this being a political office rather than a peacekeeping operation. As a result, community violence reduction has now overtaken DDR as the main programmatic activity of DDR sections in the major peace operations. In 2020, 77 per cent of the programmatic funding of MINUSCA and 64 per cent of that of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was earmarked for community violence reduction.

3. THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMITTEES IN COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION IMPLEMENTATION

When community violence reduction is implemented in contexts where a traditional DDR programme has been agreed but cannot be launched or effectively implemented, it is conceived as a “complementary” or “stop-gap” measure. It is meant to reduce violence at the local level by empowering communities to identify and address local security threats. Local committees are set up and receive funding, logistical and advisory support from international partners. In the Central African Republic, for example, MINUSCA is responsible for rolling out the community violence reduction framework to hot-spot locations throughout the country. It has the programmatic funding to finance community violence reduction projects. While MINUSCA works with communities in developing, financing and overseeing com-

munity violence reduction, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) act as key implementing partners. In other contexts, an NGO may partner with the mission to support a community in designing and implementing a project. **While the composition of local committees may vary from one community to the next, it usually comprises key community stakeholders, including elders, women’s associations, religious leaders and members of armed groups.** The committees have the mandate to identify a security risk – for example, lack of access to water, which can lead to violent confrontations. New wells are then built, primarily by youth at risk and former combatants who have voluntarily disarmed. **Community violence reduction thereby has a double security function: it addresses a security threat through funding, for example by rebuilding infrastructure, employing those at risk of committing violence as members of an armed group, thereby also reducing the number of new recruits into armed groups. By doing this, it provides former combatants and youth at risk with alternatives to joining an armed group and with coping strategies to resist violence.**

Community violence reduction projects include weapons and ammunition management,³⁵ labour-intensive short-term employment, vocational training, infrastructure improvement, community security, mental health and psychosocial support, civic education and gender-transformative projects.

³⁵ *Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context* (United Nations publication, 2018).

Women play an important role in planning and implementing community violence reduction projects,³⁶ and their participation has been shown to strengthen the overall legitimacy and credibility of such projects. DDR practitioners have introduced quota systems requiring a minimum level of female participation (30 per cent) in project selection committees and among selected projects: 30 per cent of projects must directly support women's specific needs.³⁷ Many community violence reduction projects have nearly reached gender parity among beneficiaries.³⁸

4. LOCAL DIALOGUES

A central dimension of community violence reduction is the local dialogues that it fosters. As the local committees have the mandate to decide on priorities that need to be addressed, as well as monitoring the implementation of projects, they engage in discussions on a variety of issues, including the root causes of conflict. What the local committees discuss as part of the local dialogues often goes beyond security concerns. While security is the number one issue that tends to be identified at the beginning, claims for justice, economic development, gender equality and an end to marginalization quickly emerge as issues, which contributes to the design of projects. In Kaga-Bandoro in the Central African Republic, in the early stages of pre-DDR/community violence reduction implementation, young people and ex-combatants from groups that had been fighting

each other worked together on a project site and appointed a mediator from within the group, who then addressed issues that arose. In another town, the community made such progress within the framework of their local dialogue that MINUSCA brought in a professional facilitator specializing in mediation to work with them. This was very well received and helped the community address some long-standing hostilities.

5. HOW COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION ADAPTS TO STATE FRAGILITY

The reason why community violence reduction is easier to implement and produces more results in the short and medium term is that it uses a bottom-up approach to reducing armed group violence. It is therefore independent from two obstacles to DDR that were identified above.

First, **community violence reduction does not require a peace agreement to be in place,** nor do the parties to an agreement need to be committed to its implementation. It does not usually even feature in the terms of a peace agreement.

Second, **community violence reduction does not require the involvement of the central State.** In countries with extremely weak institutions, this approach makes it possible to build infrastructure, collect weapons and ammunition and facilitate local dialogues with armed groups without having to rely on central State institutions.

³⁶ IDDRS Module 2.30 ("Community Violence Reduction") states on p. 8: "Developing the agency of women, girls and youth will enhance their political and social influence in civic associations and their authority in relation to economic productivity, thereby reducing violence." ³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, OROLSI, DDR Section, "DDR: community violence reduction – creating space for peace".

At the same time, community violence reduction may help strengthen existing local authorities. One community violence reduction programme manager working in the Central African Republic reported that the design and implementation of community violence reduction projects had helped enhance cooperation with the local authorities. It had helped representatives of these authorities, who had been hesitant to reach out to communities due to security and trust issues, to engage more directly with the local population.³⁹

It should be noted, however, that the flexibility and adaptability of community violence reduction is also one of its weaknesses: the progress that is achieved at the local level is the result of a fragile and often temporary local consensus on improving security and the economy in a situation of distress, rather than the result of political negotiations at the national level that could put an end to the overall conflict.⁴⁰ While community violence reduction programmes are ongoing, national level peace talks may be under way or being prepared. Armed groups will only tolerate the implementation of community violence reduction and transitional justice initiatives in areas under their control for as long as they do not weaken their position in the peace talks.

One of the challenges that has been encountered in peace processes where community violence reduction has been implemented is how to link the results of the local dialogue



Unsplash/Jason Leung

that it fosters to the national-level peace talks. Frustrations have emerged at the community level when a local committee has made significant progress in building a peaceful environment and in addressing the root causes of conflict, only then to witness the negotiation or adoption of a national-level peace agreement that did not feature any of their key issues. This disconnect is a significant challenge that will require solutions to be identified, as local mediation initiatives are on the rise, including in contexts where there are peace operations (see part F below).⁴¹

³⁹ It is important to note that, in contexts such as the Central African Republic and Mali, local judicial authorities have often been relocated for their own protection. In Mali, MINUSMA is supporting such relocated authorities to conduct missions for their assigned areas. Regular exchanges such as these are aimed at creating a relationship of trust between officials and the local populations. Interview with MINUSMA justice and corrections staff, August 2021. ⁴⁰ Rusch, *Peace Agreements and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, p. 26. ⁴¹ Arthur Boutellis, Delphine Mechoulan and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, “Parallel tracks or connected pieces? UN peace operations, local mediation, and peace processes” (New York, International Peace Institute, December 2020).

6. COMMUNITY-BASED REINTEGRATION SUPPORT (INCLUDING FOR FORMER MEMBERS OF GROUPS DESIGNATED AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS)

Community-based approaches to tackling armed groups are not limited to community violence reduction. UNDP has a track record of experience in working with communities to reintegrate former combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups into society, with a focus on economic and social reintegration. United Nations peacekeeping personnel and UNDP formed a key partnership in DDR for a time, with peace operations leading on the disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion phases and UNDP leading on the reintegration phase. However, conflict-affected, protracted DDR, with little by way of results or prospects for sustainable reintegration and donor support, coupled with structural reforms within UNDP, have led to a situation where this division of roles is no longer so pronounced in mission settings. At the time of writing, UNDP is supporting community-based reintegration in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Philippines through smaller-scale programmes that are helping to reintegrate former members of armed groups who voluntarily disarm. This is often done as part of wider reintegration efforts, in particular for internally displaced people and migrants who return to a community. Ex-combatants who voluntarily dis-



UN Photo/Martine Perret

arm may include members of armed groups designated as terrorist organizations by the Security Council (such as Boko Haram in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria).⁴²

The overall goal of these programmes is twofold: they are meant to send a message that exiting an armed group is feasible, while preventing the re-recruitment of former combatants and the first-time recruitment of youth at risk.⁴³

Like community violence reduction, reintegration support works at the local level. Inherent in the project design is support to the community as a whole to create the conditions for the reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed groups, and of those in other conflict-affected groups. Transitional justice thereby features as a key UNDP project in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo⁴⁴ (see below).

⁴² The provision of rehabilitation support for former members of groups designated as terrorist organizations requires the adoption of a clear legal framework. Although it distinguishes itself from a DDR programme, as it is not based on a peace agreement but on a national policy and institutional framework developed by the national authorities with support from the United Nations, the support provided to these ex-combatants corresponds to that of traditional DDR (psychosocial support, education and livelihoods). ⁴³ IDDRS, Module 2.40, “Reintegration as part of sustaining peace”.

⁴⁴ On the UNDP approach to transitional justice, linked with community-based reintegration, see UNDP, *From Justice for the Past to Peace and Inclusion for the Future: A Development Approach to Transitional Justice* (New York, 2020), p. 55.

D. Addressing justice issues in community-based DDR/community violence reduction programmes



The community-based approach to DDR that is used in community violence reduction and reintegration support programmes has opened up space to engage with communities on questions of justice in contexts where the United Nations is implementing such programmes. As these projects are designed for and with local communities, the project teams directly interact with community members on a daily basis. Such interactions may include more formal project assessments, but also less formal dialogues. Due to the multidimensional mandate of the United Nations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, United Nations DDR staff based in field offices, especially in locations where fighting was or is still ongoing, are often approached by community members on issues that are outside their specific area of work. Justice is one of those issues.

1. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE UNDP-OHCHR-IOM PROJECT IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, members of an armed group voluntarily disarmed and demobilized and expressed their intention to regain productive lives in their communities. Transitional justice efforts

in the same region were ongoing and were being supported by OHCHR and other partners, when UNDP was requested to implement a project to support the reintegration of these ex-combatants. The Kasai region has no institutional justice capacity in place, and the local population is not familiar with any services a justice system could provide to them. Furthermore, communities are highly fragmented.

In 2019, UNDP, OHCHR and IOM joined forces and designed a project aimed at linking DDR and transitional justice efforts by focusing on reparations. The main objective of the project is to combine reparations with violence reduction by engaging former members of armed groups and youth at risk in restoring infrastructure that was destroyed during the conflict.

Previous UNDP experience in assisting individual combatants who exited an armed group had shown that community members in general and victims of abuses in particular may resent combatants receiving reintegration assistance in order to be reintegrated by the community, while community members, including victims of violence perpetrated by armed groups, were not receiving adequate support or compensation. In order to avoid tension arising in the community once the



interested in the project for building a health facility, something the community had never had but urgently needed. The focus did not match the immediate justice needs of the local population. Reparations usually occur after a process of acknowledging and documenting injustice that was committed, for example as part of truth-telling. This step was missing in the project design. The experience with this project shows the importance of closely working with victims and their communities to design a transitional justice approach that is sensitive to their needs and context.

ex-combatants returned, the project, which was launched in December 2019, combined community-based reintegration with a transitional justice component by engaging former combatants in labour-intensive work. This work has mainly consisted of rehabilitating infrastructure as a means of providing collective reparation to the communities affected. The design of the project foresees that material “reparations” will occur as a conscious act of acknowledging that abuses were committed, thereby strengthening victims’ rights.

When the project was launched in the second half of 2020, after a pandemic-related delay, it was immediately challenged by community members. The project design had foreseen that “DDR participants” would rehabilitate infrastructure, such as houses, that were destroyed by members of the local armed group during recent conflict violence. Although the community had a say in who would get to participate in the project, victims and other community members showed little support for the idea. They pointed out that they were more

2. INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROJECTS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND MALI

Questions of justice and reparations have arisen as part of local dialogues that have taken place in the framework of community violence reduction in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. As part of the review process, DDR officers based at the field offices of MINUS-CA, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and MONUSCO shared insights with the project team into how communities raise questions of justice in the framework of community violence reduction projects.⁴⁵

In line with the experiences of UNDP and OHCHR, DDR and community violence reduction field officers in peace operations reported that the priorities of community members with regard to justice are often different from

⁴⁵ Consultations with the DDR field components on 6 May 2021 (online).

those identified in the international community's approach to peacebuilding. One member of United Nations staff working in the Central African Republic pointed out that a community-based approach to justice had been met with resistance because community members were still operating in survival mode and according to a logic of war, and were "only interested in their own personal gains". Their traumatic experiences during the war had eroded their trust in others, including in fellow community members. They were focused on ensuring their own survival before anything else. Furthermore, they said that their most significant grievances were related to family members being killed. Such crimes cannot be repaired by rebuilding a home or infrastructure, as is commonly done as part of a community violence reduction project.

A community violence reduction/DDR Officer working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo noted that engaging with communities on questions of justice was a particularly sensitive matter when there was no remedy available, as the national justice system was not present in the project area. Since trust is the basis for working with communities on community violence reduction projects, project staff are keen not to raise any false hopes among the community regarding justice provision. Even in rare cases where courts remain "operative" in territory controlled by armed groups, this does not mean that they will be able to deliver justice to the population. Court officers and security forces often do not report to work, as they fear

repression from armed groups and community members. This intimidation can take the form of security threats or social pressure.

What is even more challenging for United Nations field staff working in the Central African Republic and Mali is that **the victims are "scared to talk"** – not only to the court, but also to each other. In Mali in August 2021, 61 civilians were killed by armed groups in four attacks on Ouattagouna, Karou, Dirgua and Deouteguef (Gao Region), in what appeared to be reprisals against local communities in an area under the control of armed groups for allegedly providing information to or collaborating with national and international forces. This resulted in the displacement of more than 3,000 people.⁴⁶

Attempts at United Nations-led reconciliation have been met with significant obstacles, according to community violence reduction/DDR officers, as they all foresee group-based exchanges on the conflict. People in several hot-spot locations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali were not ready to speak about traumatizing experiences in front of other community members. They often preferred to turn to religious leaders, who would receive them on an individual basis. While this made it possible to identify a significant need for psychosocial assistance, it was difficult to respond to this demand, as religious leaders had only limited access to professional support and were not necessarily integrated in psychosocial assistance programmes supported by the

⁴⁶ Interview with MINUSMA DDR officer, August 2021. ⁴⁷ Generally speaking, CVR/DDR field staff noted that, while a keen interest in justice and mental health was present in the communities they were working in, the communities and the organizations supporting them lacked the means and expertise to respond to this demand appropriately. For transitional justice-related insights on this issue, see the thematic paper on psychosocial questions and transitional justice prepared as part of this review process.

United Nations.⁴⁷ In the Ituri province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, requests by victims for reparations only emerged after a local dialogue in the framework of a community violence reduction project, which organized individual and group therapy sessions with psychosocial experts.⁴⁸

DDR/community violence reduction officers recommended that any transitional justice interventions in their project area should ideally start with individualized assistance and should be preceded by trust-building measures to encourage people to talk to each other. Religious leaders could play a part in such processes. In Mali, for example, traditional authorities such as qadis are widely accepted as local justice authorities by the local population.⁴⁹ In other communities, women leaders play key roles in creating a space for reconciliation.

As is often the case in regions where State authority has been chronically absent, it may also be important to inform communities about concepts of justice and the various means that they have at their disposal to pursue justice. The MINUSCA field office in Ouham, for example, launched a project in mid-February 2021 to build the capacity of community members.

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In mid-February 2021, MINUSCA organized a workshop to sensitize members of local committees, women's associations, journalists, teachers and armed group members about questions of misinformation, rumours and justice.⁵⁰ This initiative was part of broader efforts to help communities develop a common understanding of the root causes of conflict. Participants discussed how misinformation created an environment of fear and eroded trust within the community. They voiced their frustration with the culture of impunity that was present in the country and agreed on the importance of sharing sensitive information only if it was verified. They learned about the role of national and international justice institutions in the context of the fight against impunity. The proceedings of the workshop revealed a significant demand for justice among participants, which would lend itself to a new initiative with a transitional justice component.



⁴⁸ Interview with MONUSCO DDR/RR officer, 15 August 2021. ⁴⁹ A draft law in Mali is aimed at strengthening the role of qadis and traditional authorities, in accordance with the Algiers peace accord. However, the bill sets out a restricted role for qadis: they would only speak on a limited number of legal issues, and not on criminal ones. Interviews with MINUSMA human rights and judicial affairs officers, 24 and 25 August 2021.

⁵⁰ MINUSCA, *Actualités*, 19 February 2021.

E. Recommendations for community based transitional justice initiatives in DDR/ community violence reduction project areas



Over the past six years, United Nations field missions and UNDP country offices that were mandated to support national DDR and transitional justice processes had to innovate in order to adapt their programmes to an active conflict environment. While more “traditional” DDR programmes have still been ongoing, they are now considered as long-term processes, whose ambition can no longer be to demobilize all those who are expected to disarm as per the terms of a peace agreement, as these agreements may fail to get the support of major armed groups.

A coordination of transitional justice initiatives with DDR processes therefore needs to take into account the fact that United Nations field missions, agencies, funds and programmes are now focusing considerable efforts on community-based projects that have been shown to reduce armed group violence and to create opportunities for local dialogue by engaging with a diverse range of members of the community, including women and young people, who have often been excluded from traditional DDR programmes.

The community-based, “bottom-up” approach

adopted by community violence reduction and community-based reintegration programmes offers a range of opportunities to integrate transitional justice and DDR efforts, especially those transitional justice initiatives that do not require the involvement of the central State. **As they put the community at the centre of the decision-making process, community violence reduction and community-based reintegration projects provide a suitable set-up for the implementation of context-specific, local transitional justice initiatives that pay particular attention to the dynamic within a community and to the rights, voices and desires of marginalized groups (including women and youth).**

In weakly institutionalized settings such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, **there may be opportunities to assist local communities in progressing on the path of justice and reconciliation through a prudent approach to transitional justice/DDR coordination that is not only context-specific but also conflict-sensitive.** This is especially the case in the absence of nationally led transitional justice processes or as a complement to processes that may be slow moving.⁵¹

⁵¹ In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA is supporting the implementation of a national reconciliation strategy, which mainly draws on formal consultations being held across the country. However, one MINUSCA human rights officer interviewed for this project pointed out that people are usually reluctant to share information and traumatic experiences in a bigger group, which makes less formal bottom-up initiatives more promising.

What could such an approach look like?

In order to ensure that transitional justice/DDR coordination is conflict-sensitive, the role of field offices and of United Nations staff based in these offices will be key. They will work with communities to support them in assessing whether there is a demand to address justice issues (broadly conceived) and, if so, whether community violence reduction/community-based reintegration projects may provide an entry point. Depending on the outcome of this assessment, transitional justice initiatives could be considered according to the following model.

STAGE 1: Trust building combined with local capacity-building

The first objective that should form the basis of any community-based transitional justice/DDR initiative should be for United Nations field offices to establish a relationship of trust with community members (including women, young people and marginalized groups) while being receptive to the struggles that individual community members or affected communities as a whole may have because questions of justice have remained unaddressed.

Once a relationship of trust is established, community violence reduction/DDR officers may suggest to local committees that they appoint a justice focal point from the community.⁵² This could be done in combination with providing psychological expertise to address

trauma related to crimes that were committed during the civil war. The justice focal point would be assigned a counterpart (human rights officer) who could help them acquire basic transitional justice capacity and support them for the task of identifying and formulating the justice needs of the community. The justice focal point would then be offered the opportunity to be trained as a paralegal. Such training would enable them to further advise the local committee and individual community members on possible transitional justice responses and on how these could be framed in support of reconciliation and preventing recurrence.

The advantage of this approach is that it acknowledges the existing demand for justice without making any promises for external remedies, and it starts by building local capacity. It empowers the community without imposing a timetable according to which questions of justice need to be tackled.

STAGE 2: Assessing justice needs and encouraging locally owned processes

When a community has basic local justice capacity⁵³ and psychosocial support, the justice focal point(s), with support from the United Nations, can further sensitize community members on realizing their rights to truth, justice and reparation in ways that help heal society, foster social cohesion, contribute to reconciliation and prevent further human rights abuse.

⁵² Depending on the security situation in a given community, such appointments may take time. The community may also decide to appoint two focal points (representatives of different ethnic groups, one man and one woman). ⁵³ The question of what constitutes “basic local justice capacity”, how it can be acquired and by whom will be an important part of the design of a transitional justice-community violence reduction project.

The community may discuss their options for dealing with their abusive past. Where customary approaches to justice exist, new initiatives may take experiences with these traditional processes into account, while ensuring that they meet international human rights norms and standards, including with regard to women's rights. It is important that the initiatives prioritize the rights, needs and priorities of victims, including by creating an environment conducive to the meaningful participation of victims in design and delivery. They should take the specific justice needs of women, men, girls and boys into consideration.

STAGE 3: Establishing a transitional justice initiative at the local level

Once a more comprehensive understanding of justice requirements has emerged among the community and once individual members have built trust in a project and among their fellow community members, the United Nations field office, together with the community's justice focal point, may assist in the development of a specific transitional justice initiative or measure and explore options on how to communicate justice claims or experiences to national authorities or to national- or international-level processes, as appropriate.

Community violence reduction and community-based reintegration projects could pertain to localized truth-seeking processes, for

example. "Truth-telling" is a powerful and important step in transitional justice and reconciliation efforts, as it makes it possible to reveal and acknowledge the large-scale abuses that have occurred during a conflict.⁵⁴ **The opportunity for victims and other community members to tell their stories in public is often key for transitional justice and reconciliation.**⁵⁵ Truth-telling, as part of community violence reduction and community-based reintegration, can first and foremost give victims a voice. It also presents an opportunity for combatants to tell their stories. This may help break down rigid perceptions of perpetrator and victim identities and enable a more nuanced understanding of why individuals joined armed groups, how they may have been forced to join and what actions they were involved in.⁵⁶ In this way, truth-telling processes can help a community heal by acknowledging the motives, and identifying structural social issues and other causes, that led to the formation of armed groups. While truth-telling in itself can help address past violations and abuses, it can also be built into forward-looking strategies aimed at preventing the spread of rumours and manipulated information, which can be used by spoilers to spark new conflict-related violence. The joint project by the DDR/Community Violence Reduction, Human Rights and Civil Affairs Sections in Bossangoa in the Central African Republic (see above) is an example of how such efforts could start.

⁵⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff, 28 August 2013 ([A/HRC/24/42](#)); see also OHCHR, "Rule-of-law tools for post-conflict States: truth commissions" (New York and Geneva, United Nations, 2006). ⁵⁵ Interview with MINUSMA human rights staff who underlined that, as part of such processes, it was important that victims could designate which group (not necessarily which individual) was responsible – or the State. ⁵⁶ This can be particularly important for women combatants, who often straddle the line between victim and perpetrator and who are often left out of both traditional DDR processes and transitional justice processes.

In communities where little or no resources are available and courts are not functioning, potential initiatives could creatively explore how harms can be repaired, giving some measure of satisfaction to victims and affected communities. This could be in the form of symbolic reparations, such as official apologies, changing the names of public spaces, the establishment of days of commemoration, or the naming of streets dedicated to victims.⁵⁷ However, reparations are only one part of a transitional justice response. They need to be preceded by rounds of local dialogue with diverse representation, and agreement is required on a model that works for a given community. As the experience of the UNDP project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrates, a community's priority needs may be very different from what donors imagine them to be, and they might change over time. A consensus-based decision by victims and community members is therefore key.

Similarly, community violence reduction projects could explore how traditional justice and reconciliation ceremonies can help to rebuild trust among community members or how they could help identify measures to avoid a repeat of past human rights abuse.

It is important that human rights and DDR/community violence reduction and community-based reintegration teams jointly identify the objectives of the transitional justice/DDR initiatives, and that they openly share their assessments and analysis with each other. This

should include jointly identifying financial and political support needs and communicating these to mission, agency, programme and funds headquarters.



In order to ensure that such community-based initiatives are part of a coherent peacebuilding process, it is recommended to start by formulating a strategy based on thorough context analysis. This strategy needs to take the different needs of each region and community into account, as well as the underlying root causes of the conflict. Since cyclical violence often causes shifts in the power and military dynamic, as well as in the humanitarian situation on the ground, the strategy needs to be regularly updated.⁵⁸ A system could be developed that collects structured data in order to monitor the strategy's implementation and analyse its impact.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Working Group of Reparations for Parliamentary Committee A, Timor-Leste, "Concept paper on a national reparations program for Timor-Leste" (July 2008). ⁵⁸ Interview with MINUSMA human rights staff, 25 August 2021. ⁵⁹ Interview with Chief of Information Management and Data Analysis Unit, OHCHR, 13 September 2021.

**OVERVIEW: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN JOINT TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE-COMMUNITY
BASED DDR/COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION PROJECTS**

<p>Community justice focal point</p>	<p>United Nations human rights officer (field office), rule of law or justice specialist (agency, fund, programme)</p>	<p>United Nations DDR/ community violence reduction officer (field office) or reintegration support specialist (UNDP)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified by the community. • Interested in questions of justice. • Enjoys the trust of community members across conflict lines. • Interested in working with a variety of actors. • Experienced in assisting victims of serious human rights violations and war crimes. • Has the required skills to complete training as a paralegal. • Advises community members on questions of transitional justice. • Provides information on local, traditional, national and possibly international justice mechanisms. • Connects victims of serious human rights violations to relevant partners, psycho-social services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Jointly with DDR/ community violence reduction officer) identifies needs and potential objectives for transitional justice/community violence reduction initiatives. • Builds trust with local committee members. • Builds working relationship with community member identified as justice focal point. • Identifies paralegal training options. • Raises funds for paralegal training. • (Jointly with a community violence reduction/DDR officer) briefs mission headquarters on progress, financial needs and political challenges. • Communicates needs identified by the community to relevant partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefs human rights officers on community violence reduction or community-based reintegration project modalities. • Introduces the human rights officer as transitional justice expert to the local committee. • (Jointly with human rights officer) identifies objectives for transitional justice/ community violence reduction or community-based reintegration initiatives. • Advises on implications for the political process. • Provides the human rights officer with information and best practices from joint initiatives in other field missions.

F. Linking innovative local-level approaches to existing national-level processes



The United Nations has been at the forefront of developing a community-based approach to addressing insecurity, although most processes that are supported by donors are still happening under the State-based peacebuilding paradigm. National-level programmes such as DDR and security sector reform continue to be implemented, either in parallel or following the implementation of community violence reduction and reintegration support programmes. The same is true for peace negotiations that take place at the national level and that address questions of transitional justice and DDR. As discussed above, it is therefore essential to ensure that the above-mentioned innovative approaches to transitional

justice and DDR coordination are linked to national-level processes to the extent possible.

The disconnect between local- and national-level dialogues has already been reported by DDR/community violence reduction staff engaging in regular dialogues with local populations as part of community violence reduction. **While they sometimes make significant progress within the community they are supporting, their success will remain fragile for as long as it is not acknowledged or linked to the national-level peace process, as major armed groups whose leaders are interested in power and wealth sharing pursue a strategy focused on national-level**



UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran

political negotiations. It is important to keep in mind that community violence reduction was conceived as a temporary, complementary, stop-gap measure. It is not a replacement for DDR, nor can it replace wider inclusive peace talks that address the root causes of the conflict a society is dealing with in a comprehensive manner. Similarly, the incorporation of a transitional justice lens or element in a community violence reduction project should not be seen as a replacement for comprehensive, national-level transitional justice processes.

In the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, there are no formal mechanisms in place that allow representatives of local committees to participate in national-level peace negotiations. The same applies to national-level reform processes, for example in the security and justice sector. As a consequence, community members have expressed their frustration vis-à-vis the United Nations when learning about a new national-level peace deal or the reform of defence and security forces when these developments have not taken any outcomes of their local dialogues into consideration – and may even undermine their achievements.

In this scenario it is irrelevant for local committees whether or not the United Nations actor supporting community violence reduction or human rights work is the same as the one supporting national-level peace talks or reform processes. **When local committees feel that their work is undermined, the important progress they make and the relationship of trust they may have developed with DDR and human rights practitioners is at risk.**

The disconnect between local dialogues and national-level reform processes

A local dialogue supported by the United Nations in the framework of community violence reduction may have identified the need for an equitable representation of ethnic groups in the security forces and developed a model on how this could work in the community. A few weeks later, a United Nations actor is building a new police station or providing police cars to the same community or in a town nearby. This is followed by the deployment of police officers from the capital, who are all from the same ethnic group that dominates representation in central State institutions. They will use the new police stations and cars, but they may find it challenging to engage with the community. As a consequence, community members may feel not only frustrated but potentially disempowered and discouraged about continuing the challenging work of discussing traumatizing experiences.

To honour this trust and make use of the potential of local dialogues, the role of local committees needs to be strengthened. In some places, local committees already take on a number of activities that go beyond community violence reduction. However in “hot-spot” areas of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, committees still very much rely on the conceptual community violence reduction framework provided by the United Nations Mission. One way to strengthen the

role of local committees could be to recognize them as formal actors in the peace process and establish an official reporting mechanism to national-level peace mediation forums or follow-up committees.⁶⁰ This would make it possible to officially report on progress achieved and challenges encountered, and would help national bodies respond to concrete conflict situations. It would also “decentralize” the implementation of peace agreements and give marginalized populations a voice.

A more ambitious approach would be to link the work of local committees to ongoing national reform processes that aim to extend State authority and build State institutions, including in the justice and security sector. **Research has shown that, in weakly institutionalized States, neither top-down institution building nor bottom-up peacebuilding efforts such as community violence reduction can succeed if they are implemented separately. It has therefore been proposed that local committees are made key actors in peace processes in weakly institutionalized States, bringing community representatives, members of armed groups and central State representatives together to deliver basic services to the population.**⁶¹ This would make it possible to progressively reintroduce the central State into territory controlled by armed groups and would build the trust of the local population and armed groups in the peace process.⁶²

Should the United Nations decide to actively encourage the design of community-based transitional justice/DDR initiatives, the roles of local committees may evolve. This, in turn, could lead to a more comprehensive review of the role of local committees, thereby addressing a key challenge in ongoing peace processes: connecting the local to the national level.



⁶⁰ Rusch, *Peace Agreements and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, pp. 71–72. ⁶¹ One human rights officer in MONUSCO gave another argument in favour of this approach: where national authorities eye local-level transitional justice processes with mistrust and could potentially try to undermine them, involving them by assigning a role on a local committee could help to bring them on board. ⁶² Rusch, *Peace Agreements and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, pp. 65 and 67–68.

G. Conclusion



Since the 2010 guidance note on the United Nations approach to transitional justice was issued by the Secretary-General, an awareness of transitional justice and DDR coordination has developed among DDR and human rights staff. The question now is how the United Nations system can transform this awareness into concrete initiatives that address the justice needs of local populations in countries where the United Nations system is supporting DDR efforts.

With the introduction of community violence reduction into the mandates of United Nations peace operations in Africa, an important part of the work of United Nations peace operations, agencies, funds and programmes on reducing armed group violence is taking place at the community level. Local committees have become key partners in these programming efforts to address security threats through projects that also enhance social cohesion, boost economic development and advance gender equality.

The conceptual approach that forms the basis for community violence reduction and community-based reintegration presents an opportunity for the United Nations to address the justice needs of local populations at the

community level. To this end, this note proposes a positive approach to transitional justice and DDR coordination, resulting in the design and implementation of concrete initiatives that not only reduce armed group violence but also provide people in zones of active conflict or in the immediate aftermath of war with opportunities for justice and reconciliation.

However, as first-hand reports from United Nations staff on the ground show, questions of transitional justice need to be introduced into the fragile security environments of contexts where the United Nations system is implementing DDR, community violence reduction and community-based reintegration programmes in a gradual and conflict-sensitive manner. The pace and extent of transitional justice and DDR integration needs to be adapted to the dynamic within each local community and should be driven by the needs of its diverse members, rather than by political agendas. Only in this way can communities build much-needed trust in the peace process and be willing to embark on the path to reconciliation.

Building on the momentum that the discussion of transitional justice and DDR coordination



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has created, including as part of the revision of the IDDRS module on transitional justice, the United Nations system could explore a community-based approach to transitional justice and DDR coordination by bringing relevant actors within and beyond the United Nations system together. Four levels of consultation for this process seem relevant and timely:

- Given the lack of awareness on the potential of community-based transitional justice and DDR coordination, it is recommended that, as a first step, a series of informal consultations are organized, bringing together relevant and interested departments, agencies, funds and programmes such as the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, IOM, OHCHR, UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Discussions could start by exploring the complex victim-perpetrator relationships that exist in a context that is transitioning from war to peace. Human rights, DDR, justice, judicial affairs and security sector reform practitioners all read a conflict from different angles. This can sometimes lead to a multiplicity of approaches that may run in parallel. It will therefore be important to bring different groups of practitioners on to the same page. A joint context analysis exercise could be one way to do this.

- As a next step, outreach is suggested to those Member States that are interested in supporting justice initiatives (including transitional justice initiatives) and those that already support DDR/community violence reduction/community-based reintegration programmes. This can help gain financial support for training paralegals and hiring human rights officers who match the profile presented above. Looking ahead, the Secretariat could also consider discussing with Member States the possibility of linking transitional justice and community violence reduction in the mandates of United Nations peace operations in order to create a basis for funding requests.

- Strategic discussions at the level of senior mission leadership, resident coordinators and department heads are important to familiarize leadership with the potential of incorporating a transitional justice lens into community violence reduction and community-based reintegration. Such discussions can also ensure that senior mission leadership and resident coordinators are aware of the sensitive character of transitional justice/DDR coordination and that the full potential of closer coordination of these processes is incorporated into the strategies of United Nations missions or, in non-mission contexts, country teams.

- Lastly, questions of funding need to be clarified. For peacekeeping operations, OHCHR is advised to consult all relevant departments and offices on what type of funding needs to be allocated to missions in order to implement the proposed model. For non-mission contexts, separate funding mechanisms and partnerships need to be explored. Additional funds and capacities (including for training) could be raised from donors.



