The Evolving Nature of DDR

Study on Engaging armed groups across the peace continuum.

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The evolving nature of DDR:
Engaging armed groups across the peace continuum

Experiences, Challenges, Policy Options

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) would like to thank the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) for jointly developing this study with the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section in DPO's Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI). DPO would also like to thank the many practitioners and policymakers from Headquarters, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic who took part in key informant sessions and provided inputs to various iterations of the study. Lastly, this study was made possible through the kind and generous contribution of the Government of Germany

Foreword:

As the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations and overseeing the Department's work on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), I frequently witness how evolving political, security and operational contexts place new demands on DDR practitioners, and on how DDR programmes are designed and delivered.

There are a number of key phenomena and "frontier issues" that DDR practitioners have been encountering over recent years: fewer meaningful political settlements and solutions to conflicts; an increase in violence by non-state actors and an increase in conflicts at local and regional levels; the designation of armed groups as terrorist organizations; the continued fragmentation and multiplication of armed groups; the regionalization of conflict and insecurity, including through the impacts of climate change; and epidemics and pandemics in conflict settings.

Indeed, the constantly and rapidly evolving nature of conflicts has pushed DDR practice to evolve in lockstep. Along the way, new approaches and tools have been developed, and new risks borne out of global trends have been identified. These risks further complicate how the United Nations support Member States to meet the needs of ex-combatants, their dependents and the communities into which they (re)integrate.

This study represents an important effort in analysing new trends in DDR policy and practice while also capturing lessons in a manner that will be useful to policymakers and practitioners alike. In doing so, the study contributes to the operationalization of the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), which now cover peace operations and non-mission settings. Some of the findings presented in this study go beyond DDR and will be useful in shaping the next phase of implementation of key system-wide initiatives, including on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, as well as efforts to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. In particular, the findings of the study also point to how DDR efforts concretely contribute to the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, as well as the A4P+ priorities, across key commitments such as those on politics, WPS, peacebuilding, partnerships and sustaining peace.

This study not only presents an opportunity for national authorities, the United Nations and other stakeholders to take stock of recent valuable DDR interventions, but also constitutes a roadmap which we can use to collectively strengthen our efforts to improve the effectiveness and impact of DDR in the future.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix,
Under-Secretary-General
Department of Peace Operations
United Nations

Executive Summary:

Over the past decade, armed conflict has continued to evolve, becoming increasingly complex and involving a diverse set of non-state armed actors. The latter range from armed groups with political agendas and grievances, to groups designated as terrorist organizations, criminal networks, gangs and local self-defense groups. These actors frequently operate at multiple levels (local, national, regional, international). Although mostly starting off as internal conflicts, domestic armed conflicts often take on regional and international dimensions as conflict actors from within the country collaborate with external forces for mutual benefit. This increased internationalization of domestic armed conflict is hampering the search for peaceful solutions and making these conflicts deadlier, more protracted and more resistant to resolution. This coincides with a geopolitical context that is less conducive to the political settlement of disputes.

These developments in the global landscape of armed conflict are crucial for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) policymakers and practitioners who are tasked to plan, design and implement integrated DDR processes. This study was jointly developed by the Department of Peace Operations' (DPO) Disarmament, Disarmament and Demobilization Section in the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions and the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC). It aims to provide policymakers and practitioners with an overview of how DDR approaches and practices have responded to the evolving nature of armed conflict over the past decade (since the Second-Generation DDR concept was introduced) and shows how these approaches could be further enhanced. As such, this report contributes to operationalizing the renewed commitment to prevention and sustaining peace throughout the conflict cycle, as articulated in the revised Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) and as reflected in the Secretary General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative (A4P).

The study uses a two-prong approach to explore and describe the evolving global landscape of armed conflicts and its impact on DDR policy and practice. First, the study identifies major phenomena that considerably impact DDR policy and practice: I.) Fewer meaningful political settlements and solutions to conflict; and II.) The increase in violence by non-state actors and the prevalence of localized conflict.

Second, the study examines four frontier issues identified by field practitioners as key drivers that are likely to accelerate the need for DDR support and further complicate DDR practice in the coming decades. These are: I.) The designation of armed groups as terrorist organizations; II.) The continued fragmentation and multiplication of armed groups; III.) The regionalization of conflict and insecurity; and IV.) The impact of epidemics and pandemics in conflict settings.

From the outset, however, it must be underlined that the phenomena and frontier issues that this study elaborates on are not necessarily new but have evolved for many years. By the term "frontier issue", this study aims to highlight the fact that DDR practitioners are increasingly called upon to operate in contexts, where these issues are recurrent, and therefore require the development and refinement of new tools and instruments.

In many contexts, these phenomena and frontier issues are interlinked, mutually reinforcing and often cascade from each other, adding yet more complexity to already challenging operating environments. DDR practitioners have been and continue to grapple with complexities that arise when a combination of these challenges manifests in a given context. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, DDR practitioners face challenges resulting from the fragmentation and multiplication of armed groups in addition to complexities linked to regional dimensions precipitated by long-standing ethnic ties, alliances between foreign armed groups in the Great Lakes region and local Congolese armed groups in the DRC, and the frequent incursions of foreign national forces into the DRC in pursuit of rebel elements. These dynamics constitute a threat to regional stability and hamper regional cohesion. Another example is Mali, where the difficulties in finding a political settlement and stability occur in a context characterized by grave risks posed by terrorism, extremism, violence, intercommunal conflicts and climate variation, which serves as a conflict risk multiplier.

For each phenomenon, the study describes the impact on DDR and innovations in practice that have emerged and offers an analysis as to how these approaches and practices can be improved:

1. **Fewer meaningful political settlements and solutions to conflict.** In many contexts where DDR practitioners now operate, no comprehensive peace agreements are in place due, in most part, to a lack of political will or meaningful political processes upon which an effective DDR programme can be built. Even in contexts where peace agreements do exist, they may simply be so fragile that they break down, stall and are eventually abandoned. As a result, DDR chapters or clauses in peace agreements, if they exist, can be very challenging to implement. In such instances where ceasefire or comprehensive peace agreements are unlikely or not yet in place or simply unrealistic to implement, the United Nations has introduced 'DDR-related tools' as flexible transitional instruments that can be used for manifold purposes. They complement – or in some case even entirely substitute – traditional DDR programmes that require an existing peace agreement. These tools can also be used to create more conducive environments for local and national level peace agreements by building trust and confidence among parties to the conflict and thus contributing to meaningful political engagement in the long term. DDR is, therefore, no longer simply seen as a technical process but one that is highly political and thus needs to be anchored in broader political processes and strategies.

2. DDR practitioners have also contended **with the increase in violence perpetrated by non-state actors and the prevalence of conflict manifesting at the local level.** In many contexts, conflicts at the local level have destabilized national political processes, and in turn, they are often manipulated and/or exacerbated by national political actors. In response to this kind of violence, DDR practitioners have developed local, area-based, decentralized, bottom-up DDR approaches such as community violence reduction (CVR). While CVR does allow for tailor-made interventions at the local level, this study underlines that CVR can have a greater impact when embedded within a broader political strategy aligned with local, national and regional peacebuilding approaches as well as coordinated with other ongoing development, recovery and/or stabilization work conducted by other UN entities, local and international partners. This way, CVR has the potential to not only contribute to addressing the immediate needs of ex-combatants but also to supporting efforts that address the underlining drivers and structural dimensions of conflict within communities, in line with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach.

In addition to the phenomena mentioned above, DDR practitioners are also contending with frontier issues that are equally important and impactful to DDR policies and practices. Although DDR practitioners are already facing the operational and policy implications of the aforementioned issues, they will nevertheless be the most prevailing challenges for DDR practitioners in the coming decade. To address them, practitioners will require new and innovative tools, technologies and analytical capacities. The frontier issues are therefore not new *per se* but new to DDR practitioners who continue to test out novel approaches, forge new partnerships, and explore various programmatic tools in contexts where these frontier issues emerge.

1. **DDR practitioners are increasingly faced with situations that involve armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTOs)** (e.g. as in the case of Somalia, Mali and the Lake Chad Basin). These designations, either by the Security Council, Member States or regional organizations, have bearings on the measures that the United Nations can apply to end violence and the instruments used to support individuals formerly associated with AGDTOs to reintegrate into society. This study touches upon different policy frameworks and approaches potentially applicable for addressing armed groups in violent extremist settings and stresses the need for further clarity, coherence, complementarity, and interlinkages between these. The research particularly underscores that it is key to clarify how DDR can strategically link up with activities implemented under other frameworks in the future.

2. In mission and non-mission settings alike, the United Nations is also confronted with **the increasing fragmentation of armed group**s. Armed groups have diverse motives, profiles and different levels of control over territory. The splintering and re-alignment of armed groups often happen at a very fast pace, making it difficult for the United Nations to develop adequate responses in time. This fragmentation and diversification results in new challenges for DDR practitioners, including the need to continuously harmonize incentives used to dismantle structures of armed violence and be better attuned to coherence in public information and strategic communication when engaging with armed groups and communities. While there are strong ongoing efforts (by DPO and other DDR stakeholders) to align DDR responses with context-specific conflict dynamics and better understand the various typologies of armed groups, DDR practitioners still need to improve their understanding of the variety of armed actors they deal with.

3. This study identifies the **regionalization of conflict and insecurity** as another frontier issue that significantly impacts the planning, design and implementation of DDR processes. The rise of regionalized armed violence, transnational criminal networks, climate risks and their impact on conflict, all contribute to the need for DDR to be anchored in regional strategies and approaches that are complemented by cross-border activities. Many armed actors that DDR practitioners seek to address are involved in transnational criminal activities in one way or another —either through direct participation in organized and cross-border criminal activities and/or through direct links with transnational criminal networks—. In addition, climate-driven conflicts related to competition over natural resources, including those witnessed in the Sahel between farmers and transhumant herders, as well as tensions related to natural resource management, also point to the need to more strongly consider DDR beyond the national level and incorporate regional and sub-regional dimensions. This need is most pronounced in contexts, for example, where foreign combatants are active, and there is a need for repatriation and resettlement in addition to DDR.

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has **brought to the fore the linkages between peace and security, peacebuilding, social cohesion, and health** as a critical frontier issue. Areas affected by conflict and violence are often more vulnerable to the spread of infectious diseases, as has been the case with the resurgence of polio in Syria, cholera outbreaks in Yemen, the persistence of Ebola in the DRC as well as the need to mainstream considerations for people living with HIV and AIDS. Insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and mistrust of state institutions are some of the compounding challenges that make the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases difficult. In turn, lack of support and inequity in response to infectious diseases and access to basic services such as health in conflict areas can further exacerbate communities' grievances and the root causes of conflict. These health-related drivers have always been present in DDR contexts. However, the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the pressing need to avoid losing momentum on already fragile peace agreements, provide DDR practitioners with ample impetus to innovate. This has resulted in the repurposing and retooling of CVR projects to support national governments' responses to COVID-19 while maintaining focus on the security objectives. This process has opened up new programmatic entry points that seek to deliver effective DDR outcomes while simultaneously contributing to the improvement of local health systems.

Each of these phenomena and frontier issues entails challenges and opportunities for the success of DDR processes, given their complexities and linkages to issues that go far beyond the remit of traditional DDR programmes deployed decades ago. Faced with these challenges, DDR practice has been steadily evolving to meet these demands by developing new strategic approaches paired with innovative programmatic tools.

Main Findings:

- DDR is primarily a political intervention: Decades of experience in highly complex settings have reinforced the understanding among DDR practitioners that DDR is not simply a technical process but a highly political one, which should be anchored in broader political processes and strategies. DDR practitioners should simultaneously aim to contribute to efforts focused on addressing the root causes of lack of political will, while using technical solutions to address political hurdles.
- The flexibility of CVR should be further explored and leveraged: DDR response options at hand have greatly increased DDR practitioners' flexibility to develop context-specific programming. CVR, in particular, has gained in importance, in large part due to its impact at the local and community levels and as a result of its inclusive and participatory methodology. It is used in many different contexts and conflict stages ranging from supporting and complementing DDR programmes, reinforcing social cohesion and trust-building, to weapons collection and even managing epidemics. CVR thereby increases the United Nations' ability to work under volatile and insecure conditions in order to contribute to the building blocks of sustaining peace efforts. At the same time, this new flexibility may pose some risks if not applied with a focus on beneficiaries, rooted in a clear theory of change, and guided by the IDDRS. Particularly in settings where there is no DDR expertise to guide efforts, there are risks that processes of leading ex-combatants into civilian life can be disjointed. In this regard, it will be important that CVR activities remain focused on ex-combatants, their associates, and communities in which they reside, and that they remain central to all DDR-related programming. The calibration between DDR-related tools used by the UN should therefore be enhanced.

- There is an increased need for analytical capacity: Although missions and UN country teams in the countries examined for this study have a comprehensive understanding of the armed groups they are dealing with, much of the analysis does not necessarily trickle down to the DDR programming level due to the structures of peace operations. In order to enhance DDR outcomes, DDR practitioners should improve their understanding of armed groups—as this is key for identifying potential sources of influence over their behaviour and an important step towards developing a realistic theory of change for DDR. DDR-oriented analysis should also be included in overall analyses produced by the UN system in any given context.

- Greater efforts on strategic communication with armed groups are needed: DDR processes require a mixed approach to strategic communication in which leaders, commanders as well as the rank-and-file on the ground are equally involved. Basic principles for DDR engagement and strategic communication with armed groups are of particular importance, specifically in situations where there is no peace to keep and the preconditions for traditional DDR are not in place. In this context, DDR should explore innovative communication strategies and learn from partners, including humanitarian actors. It is also important for DDR practitioners to explore new and innovative communication strategies rooted in new technologies that facilitate communication approaches.

- Develop new partnerships across the UN system: Against the backdrop of the Secretary General's designation of the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) as system-wide provider, the DDR section will not only need to ensure presence and capacities in non-mission settings but also expand its partnerships in these settings. This will require new partnerships with the Resident Coordinators and Resident Coordinators' Offices, UN agencies funds and programmes, the World Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs), as well as regional organizations (EU, AU, etc.). This work will also require systematic efforts to include DDR and DDR-related entry points (such as CVR, Weapons and Ammunition Management - WAM) in UN strategic and planning processes, notably UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNDSCF), Common Country Assessments (CCA), as well as Peacebuilding Fund eligibility processes, where applicable. Furthermore, it would also require a coordination mechanism aimed at enhancing coherence between actors especially through information-sharing, joint analysis and planning

- Linkages to other frameworks: DDR processes usually take place in settings where international, national or local stakeholders implement a variety of other humanitarian, recovery/stabilization (e.g. rule of law or security sector reform), peacebuilding, counter-insurgency measures. Although these may target the same audience, they are often implemented in isolation from each other. With stronger coordination and structured exchanges on ongoing activities and project opportunities, more comprehensive and sustainable support structures can be promoted. To this end, DDR can also be anchored in, and contribute to, efforts aimed at reinforcing the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in different contexts. DDR practitioners have ample experience working with humanitarian and development actors and can thus play a critical role in advancing the triple nexus.

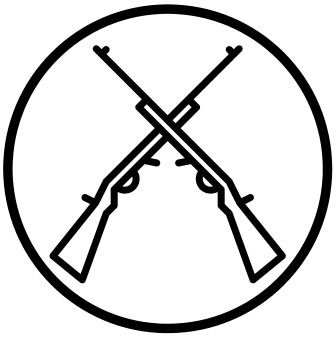
- The need to expand DDR's regional efforts: Armed conflicts and violence are increasingly transnational in nature. Risk multipliers, including criminal networks, weapons proliferation and climate variations, defy national borders. The expansion of these regional security concerns should serve as an impetus for a shift in the DDR approach to more cross-border operations. DDR practitioners already have ample experience working with armed groups that have historically operated across borders. Lessons learned from these efforts should be prioritised to enable DDR practitioners to build upon their cross-border efforts.

Each of these phenomena and frontier issues entails challenges and opportunities for the success of DDR processes, given their complexities and linkages to issues that go far beyond the remit of traditional DDR programmes deployed decades ago. Faced with these challenges, DDR practice has been steadily evolving to meet these demands by developing new strategic approaches paired with innovative programmatic tools.

THE PHENOMENA THAT HAVE UNDERPINNED DDR'S EVOLVING CONTEXTS

These issues underpin the evolving nature of the contexts in which DDR currently takes place and benefit from tried and tested approaches and tools as captured in the revised Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS).

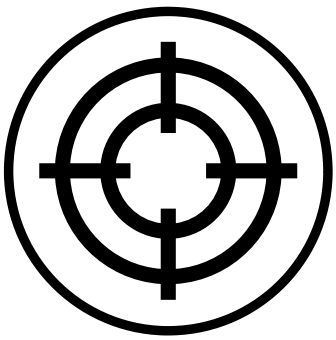
Fewer Meaningful Political Settlements and Solutions to Conflict



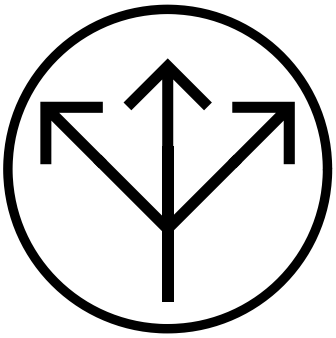
Increase in Violence by Non-State Actors and the Prevalence of Localized Conflict

THE FRONTIER ISSUES THAT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF DDR

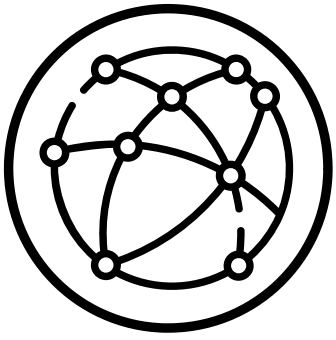
Whereas the two phenomena above represent complexities and ongoing challenges for which DDR practitioners have developed (and continue to develop) concrete tools, approaches, and best practices, such depth in experience and programming to address these frontier issues is either lacking or at a nascent stage. That is, tools, instruments and approaches to tackle these issues have not been adequately and comprehensively developed yet.



Designation of Armed Groups as Terrorist Organizations



Increasing Fragmentation and Multiplication of Armed Groups



The Regionalization of Conflict and Insecurity

Impact of Epidemics and Pandemics in Conflict Settings

Community Violence Reduction Project, Gao, Mali

Introduction:

The nature of armed conflict has evolved over the last decade. It has become even more complex and fluid, involving a vast number of non-state armed groups, regional and international actors. This complexity is—in many contexts—coupled with a rise in transnational organized crime and increased violence by non-state actors. Although violence by non-state actors often manifests itself at the local level, it has far-reaching national and regional implications. For DDR, these phenomena in the evolution of armed conflict have been particularly challenging.

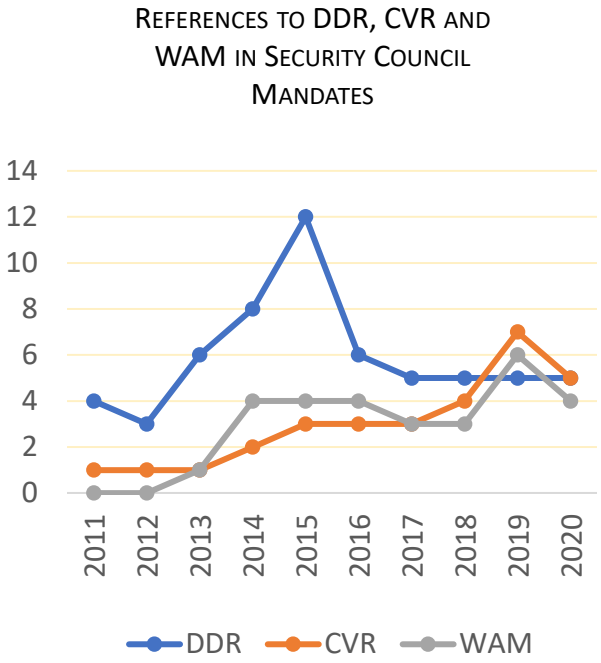
In 2017, one year after its 10th anniversary, the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR (IAWG-DDR) decided to update and revise the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS published in 2006), as it had become increasingly clear that the long-standing principles that underpinned the IDDRS were no longer fit for purpose and thus needed to be adapted. The decision to revise the IDDRS was also informed by various system-wide policy shifts. Notably, the revision was fundamentally influenced by the twin UN resolutions on the 2015 peacebuilding architecture review—General Assembly Resolution 70/262 and Security Council Resolution 2282—which recognize that efforts to sustain peace are necessary at all stages of conflict. Similarly, the revision was also informed by the Women Peace and Security (WPS) as well as the Youth Peace and Security (YPS) as outlined in Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and Security Council Resolution (2535), respectively. In addition to the Sustaining Peace approach, the ensuing process was also informed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015. The revision of the IDDRS also marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of DDR policy and practice. The revision aimed to codify the so-called "Third Generation DDR" and capture new innovations, tools and approaches that have emerged since the "Second Generation DDR" concept was introduced in 2010.

In addition to these policy developments that focus on the Sustaining Peace Agenda and adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, another noteworthy policy development was the call for closer collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors. In September 2016, the international community came together at the World Humanitarian Summit and endorsed the New Way of Working (NWOW), which recognized the importance of closer collaboration across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (HDPN). It was recognized that humanitarian assistance and tools were insufficient to address protracted crises and conflict. Rather, a closer collaboration with the other pillars to address and reduce risks and vulnerabilities was needed. This call urged partners to collaborate in various areas, including formulating collective outcomes and enhancing resilience at the national and local levels while building and reinforcing capacities.

As a result of these policy developments and evolving conflict contexts, DPO's DDR engagement has drastically changed over the past decade. DDR practitioners are increasingly looking beyond DDR programmes as they are required to develop and consolidate innovative responses and confidence-building measures suited for complex and fast-changing conflict dynamics. This has led to an increase in Security Council mandates to support national authorities with alternative DDR approaches such as CVR and WAM. Against this backdrop, this study was jointly developed by the DDR Section of the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) of the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the Bonn International Center for Conversion to examine how the phenomena and frontier issues that have driven the IDDRS revision have impacted DPO's corporate approach to DDR.

Therefore, the objective of the study is twofold: I.) To document and analyse how DDR approaches and practices have responded to the evolving nature of armed conflict over the past decade and II.) To assess how existing DDR responses can be further enhanced and developed to ensure state-of-the-art DDR interventions.

This study focuses on DPO's engagement in DDR responses applied in extremely volatile settings that lack the preconditions for DDR programmes. Here, the analysis is not limited to DDR processes implemented in Security Council-mandated peace operations, but it also examines non-mission settings.[1] While DPO's engagement in the latter has been traditionally limited, it has gained a stronger footprint in recent years. This is due to the implementation of the most recent UN reforms, which came into effect on 1 January 2019—most notably the reform of the UN Peace and Security Architecture. According to this reform, **the DDR Section as part of DPO/OROLSI is now considered a system-wide service provider on DDR and is, therefore, called upon to provide its advisory and technical capacities in non-mission settings.**[2] Finally, from DPO's perspective, the study was also an opportunity to examine how DDR contributes to the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, launched in March 2018 as the core agenda for peacekeeping reform, as well as the A4P+ priorities introduced in March 2021.



1. Non-mission settings are generally considered as situations where there is no UN peace operation deployed, be it a peacekeeping operation, a special political mission or good office arrangements. DDR processes in these contexts are commonly implemented either without any involvement of the United Nations (in the context of programmes solely driven by national actors and assisted by NGOs or private security contractors), or with support from specific UN agencies, funds, and programmes as part of a UN Country Team (UNCT). In the absences of special representatives as would be the case in a special political mission or peacekeeping operation, the Resident Coordinator serves as the highest UN representative.

2. The restructuring of the United Nations Peace and Security Pillar is outlined in the Report of the Secretary General, 13th October 2017 (United Nations 2017a).

In many contexts, these phenomena and frontier issues are interlinked, mutually reinforcing and often cascade from each other, adding yet more complexity to already challenging operating environments.

MINUSMA

Political instability and protracted conflict

Increased threat posed by extremist groups (North and Center)

Spill over of violence (Niger and Burkina Faso)

MINUSCA

New post-electoral rebellion threatens the 2019 peace agreement

Inter-religious and intercommunal violence since 2013

14 armed groups signed the 2019 Peace Agreement

Conflicts in Chad and Darfur aggravated instability in CAR

MONUSCO

Lack of national DDR framework following PNDDR III

Over 140 armed groups, from 80 five year ago

Large number of foreign armed groups in the East of DRC

Suffered 12th outbreaks of Ebola in 2021 ,

UNMISS

Limited implementation of DDR provisions of the peace agreement

Rise in cattle-related intercommunal violence

Increasing fragmentations within SPLM/A-IO

Involvement of neighboring countries in South-Sudanese conflict

THE PHENOMENA THAT UNDERPIN DDR'S EVOLVING CONTEXTS

The increase in violent conflict in recent years has caused immense human suffering, at enormous social and economic costs.[3] Violent conflicts today have become more complex and protracted, involving more non-state armed groups. Conflicts are also increasingly characterized by fewer meaningful political solutions and settlements to conflict. In addition, the proliferation of armed groups, the prevalence of violence they perpetrate and the increase in conflict manifesting at the local level, further compounds challenges to political solutions to conflict. In instances where peace agreements do emerge, they are fragile and precariously held together.

The proliferation of such armed groups, which may fight each other and the state in different configurations at different times, further entrenches violent conflicts and poses challenges to efforts to understand, dismantle and communicate with them. Conflicts are, therefore, rendered complex not only because of the proliferation of armed groups and their perpetration of violence but also because conflicts are manifesting at all levels: international, regional, national and communal. This complexity has made such conflicts resistant to resolution and peace. This is often further complicated by governments' unwillingness and/or inability to protect their people, leading to failing infrastructure and public services, chronic hardship and poverty.[4] These issues underpin the evolving contexts in which DDR takes place.

The following section highlights two major phenomena and describes how DDR practitioners have developed tools and new approaches to adapt to these trends.

PHENOMENON I: FEWER MEANINGFUL POLITICAL SOLUTIONS AND SETTLEMENTS TO CONFLICT

A number of essential preconditions should be in place prior to the onset of a viable DDR programme. These are: the signing of a negotiated peace agreement that provides a legal framework for DDR, trust in the peace process, the willingness of the conflict parties to engage in DDR and a minimum guarantee of security. At their core, the preconditions surrounding successful DDR programmes are political in nature. However, the United Nations has been increasingly mandated to address security challenges in settings where: I.) these preconditions, such as an existing peace agreement or willingness of the conflict parties to engage in DDR, are absent; and/or II.) armed groups have either abandoned or not signed a peace settlement (e.g. Yemen, Nigeria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia or Libya), and/or III.) Armed groups have simply not been included in existing agreements (e.g. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Central African Republic) .[5]

3. Various OCHA Global Humanitarian needs overview
4. United Nations, 2018
5. World Bank, Social Science Research Council, and DPO, 2018

The surge in violent conflict in recent years coincides with a geopolitical context that is less conducive to the settlement of disputes by political means. This resistance to peaceful solutions and settlement is due to numerous factors, including the following:

- The increasing internationalization of domestic armed conflicts makes them deadlier, more protracted and more difficult to resolve due to the multiplicity of vested geopolitical interest that characterize conflict and violence.
- Long-standing grievances due to unequal access to development opportunities, inequities in the access to basic services such as health and education, as well as the unwillingness and/or inability of national authorities to provide these to the most vulnerable communities (marginalization, discrimination, exclusion).
- Criminal activity (including the illicit exploitation of natural resources) and transnational organized crime which lower the incentives of armed actors to agree on a political settlement.

Even in contexts where peace agreements do exist, they are often so fragile that they break down, stall or are eventually abandoned. As a result, DDR chapters or clauses in peace agreements, if they exist, may be very challenging to implement. Despite strong international efforts to support the implementation of peace agreements, they frequently fail to bring the expected results. Over the last decade, a number of peace agreements have been concluded which have not brought lasting peace dividends. Notable examples are the successive fragile peace agreements concluded in the Central African Republic, Mali or South Sudan. The lack of trust between signatory parties and the lack of political will to implement the terms of a peace agreement are in many instances decisive, though not the only factors, in explaining the fragility of existing agreements.

Impact on DDR and innovations that have emerged in practice as a result of fewer meaningful political solutions and settlements to conflict:

DDR is, therefore, not simply a technical process but one that is highly political and thus needs to be anchored in broader political processes and strategies. In this regard, several approaches and innovations have emerged in practice, in instances where ceasefires or comprehensive peace agreements are unlikely or not yet in place. These innovations have been used to create more conducive environments for peace agreements on the local and national level by building trust and confidence among parties to the conflict and thus contributing to meaningful political engagement in the long term. The following approaches have allowed DDR practitioners to simultaneously aim to contribute to efforts focused on addressing the root causes of lack of political will while using technical solutions (capacity-building of national commissions, installation of technical bodies to promote national ownership) to address hurdles that are political in nature:

6. While, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Peace Agreement dataset (1975–2018), the peak in the number of armed conflicts in 1991 correlated with a peak in the number of peace agreements being concluded, the recent peak in armed conflict after 2014 has, however, not been accompanied by a similar rise in the number of agreements being concluded (Pettersson et al., 2019).

- DDR support for mediation: DDR support for mediation has frequently been provided when the terms of a ceasefire or comprehensive peace agreement are still being negotiated. In several countries, DDR officers from DP(K)O were called upon to advise the parties on DDR issues or to help draft DDR-related clauses. Since the management of armed actors is among the key priorities in most areas emerging from conflict, DDR practitioners are among the first UN staff members deployed on the ground with the mandate and expertise to engage directly with armed groups —an engagement they will maintain throughout the negotiation and implementation phases of a political agreement. DDR practitioners are thus in a unique position to help ensure that implementable and realistic provisions on issues of paramount importance to armed groups—including the DDR process itself and power-sharing—are included in a peace agreement.[7]

Example Box: Support to negotiations in Colombia:

During the negotiations of the Colombian peace agreement in 2016, DP(K)O's DDR Section shared lessons learned from UN-supported DDR and peace processes with Colombian Government officials, including the Defence Minister and the High Commissioner for Peace. In one such lesson learned during peacemaking efforts in the Central African Republic (CAR), DDR expertise was brought in when a cessation of hostilities agreement between the ex-Séléka, anti-Balaka and other armed groups was concluded in Brazzaville in July 2014. DDR expertise was also consulted during the Algiers Peace Process for Mali in 2015, the African Union brokered Khartoum Agreement for CAR in 2019 and the Geneva Peace talks for Libya in 2020.

- Support for local peace agreements: Political settlements need not only take place at the national level. In many contexts, DDR officers have facilitated local agreements, ranging from non-aggression pacts between armed groups to agreements regarding access to specific areas and local arrangements for reintegration support for those who have left armed groups. Local-level interventions as outlined above can have a profound impact and add value to help forge local truces and, as such, assist in reducing bloodshed in provinces where armed groups operate.[8] However, relevant research underscores that it is key to not regard these activities in an isolated manner but instead adequately link them to national strategies for peacebuilding and reconstruction. Even if interventions are targeted only at the local level, it is essential that they link to a national political process and that they are underpinned by an overarching national DDR framework. This has proven to be particularly important in settings where national and local conflict dynamics are closely interrelated.

Example Box: DDR measures in support of local peace agreements in the Central African Republic:

Starting in 2018, MINUSCA took an innovative approach to DDR, which entailed the provision of disarmament incentives to several armed groups taking part in the hostilities in CAR. The overall objective was to reduce the number of armed groups in the political process and curtail spoiler potential. This was based on the analysis that several/certain armed groups (e.g. self-defence groups or criminal gangs) in CAR did not have a national agenda and may have had grievances that could be addressed locally. Through local mediation efforts and targeted programming (community violence reduction activities such as income-generation activities and skills development), DDR practitioners attempted to address small armed groups that were thought to be potential spoilers and pose a security risk.[9]

7. Nolte, 2021
8. International Crisis Group, 2019
9. United Nations, 2017 b

- Support to local transitional security arrangements: As part of ongoing negotiations, ceasefire or peace agreements, DDR practitioners have also increasingly provided support to transitional security arrangements, which can include the temporary establishment of legitimate non-state security providers or mixed patrols and units—in some cases even joint operations—consisting of state and non-state actors at the national, regional and/or local levels (IDDRS 2.10). In cases where peace negotiations are ongoing, such measures can assist in working towards establishing the preconditions for a DDR programme and a systematic integration of ex-combatants in national security sectors. Where peace settlements are already in place, these arrangements may serve as confidence-building measures among former belligerents and boost the parties' and their respective constituencies' trust in the peace process.

Example Box: Confidence-building measures in Mali and CAR:

In Mali, one major confidence-building measure has been the establishment of mixed units composed of members of the Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMa) and the signatory armed movements, which are all under the command of the Operational Coordination Mechanism (Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination, MOC). The original purpose of these units was to build confidence through joint patrolling and to secure the cantonment sites, where the DDR process was meant to be initiated. In the Central African Republic (CAR), mixed protection units of the armed forces and armed groups—the Unités Spéciales Mixtes de Sécurité (USMS)— based on the February 2019 Peace Agreement signed between the CAR Government and the representatives of 14 armed groups, were established. The units' main objective is to provide security at mining sites and transhumance corridors. However, their long-term perspective and potential role as forebears of fully integrated new armed forces remain unclear.

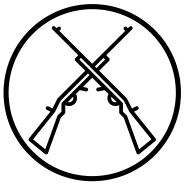
- Pre-DDR to address delays in the implementation of peace agreements: Even when a peace agreement is reached, the implementation of DDR chapters of peace agreements can be delayed due to various reasons (e.g., funding delays, capacity deficits, lack of trust of the signatory parties in the peace process) as seen in CAR and Mali. In such contexts, where security risks may arise due to delays and time lags, DDR practitioners developed a local-level time-limited transitional security arrangements, termed as 'pre-DDR'. Pre-DDR targets ex-combatants who are eligible for a DDR programme. Based on agreements made with the leadership of armed groups, pre-DDR offers members of armed groups a temporary alternative to violence and, in doing so, is meant to contribute to overall security and stabilization.

Example Box: Pre-DDR in CAR:

So far, the Central African Republic is the only example where such 'pre-DDR' measures were tested. This is why the empirical basis, as well as lessons learned, are limited to this context. Pending the launch of the National Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation Programme, pre-DDR activities were implemented from October 2015 to June 2017. Pre-DDR activities entailed the registration of combatants, progressive securing of arms in containers, distribution of food and provision of short-term cash-for-work and short-term vocational training. Individuals qualifying for the pre-DDR programme were combatants with potential eligibility for the national DDR process. With the launch of the DDR pilot project in August 2017, pre-DDR evolved from short-term cash-for-work activities to longer-term income-generating projects. While the programme was used to positively contribute to reducing security threats in the communities, creating a foundation for the DDR programme, supporting the safe conduct of elections and establishing a channel of communication with the armed groups, it also suffered from a lack of strategic guidance.

Key Findings:

1. DDR is political, not only technical. DDR processes are influenced by and will, in turn, influence political dynamics. As such, DDR needs to be firmly anchored in political processes.
2. In settings where conflict is ongoing and peace is being negotiated, DDR provisions in the mandates of peace operations increasingly support political engagement, mediation and outreach. When implemented, these efforts can contribute to ongoing political efforts, thereby culminating in national or sub-national peace settlements.
3. The political anchoring of DDR would also require closer linkages between DDR and the UN's broader work on political affairs and analysis, ensuring that high-level engagement and the use of good offices in political processes reinforce~~s~~ DDR objectives.
4. Future pre-DDR interventions will need to ensure that the political processes upon which a pre-DDR programme is built (e.g. agreements on integrating ex-combatants into the armed forces) are sufficiently clear and well communicated to potential programme participants in a timely manner.
5. Given the manifold activities that can potentially be conducted in a DDR process (e.g. reintegration during ongoing conflict, T-WAM, CVR but also regular DDR programmes), it is even more important to ensure coherence among the various objectives of the different tools used in a particular setting. In order to avoid 'patch-work' interventions and to keep DDR processes harmonized, national and regional strategic frameworks developed in conjunction with national authorities are required.



PHENOMENON II: INCREASE IN VIOLENCE BY NON-STATE ACTORS AND THE PREVALENCE OF LOCALIZED CONFLICT.

Another key trend that strongly affects contemporary DDR operations is the increase in violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups. This form of violence—which is often without direct involvement of the state—includes clashes between communal armed groups and militias or rebel groups, as well as inter/intra-communal conflicts, including tensions between farmers and herders.[10] The past years (2013–2019) have all recorded higher levels of such forms of violence than any other year since 1989.

Local agendas and politics, as well as sheer competition over resources, can be crucial drivers of violence by non-state actors. Therefore, political agreements concluded on the national level are often insufficient to adequately address violence and resolve conflict at the local level (e.g. inter-/intra-communal conflicts). Localized conflicts can destabilize national political processes in various ways, such as by creating a high enough degree of insecurity that implementing a peace agreement is no longer possible. Keeping or attaining control over resources may also represent local incentives for actors to spoil peace processes or simply undermining the signatory parties' confidence in a bid to achieve such control.

Local conflicts are often exacerbated by the proliferation of arms and national political actors who aim to further destabilize a situation. Conflicts at the local level occur in or near ungoverned spaces that lack state presence, basic services and governance. In recent years, drivers of conflict at the local level, such as power struggles and competition over natural resources, have exacerbated community grievances. Additionally, they have been compounded by new and emerging phenomena, including variations and changes in climate, which intensify competition over resources and promote the recruitment, particularly of youth, into armed groups.

In particular, the lack of access to basic services, such as health, mental health, education, water and sanitation, food security, and basic livelihood opportunities, also drive local conflict. There is a growing recognition by policymakers and practitioners at the national and international levels that we must better understand the role that social services can play in fueling instability and conflict and, conversely, the unique value they offer in fostering social cohesion, inclusive development and peaceful societies.[11] Advocates have long argued that peace settlements must prioritize services, so-called "peace dividends", that reach war-weary populations who are often in remote areas and far away from capitals to make the peace agreement's benefits tangible.

In addition, local conflict is often exacerbated by, or in response to, the inability of the state's security sector to protect communities. In some settings, unprofessional conduct in military and security operations by national defence and security forces results in indiscriminate attacks which affect civilians and may result in human rights abuses. Misconduct during operations fuels resentment towards the state, increases local grievances and drives vulnerable communities (particularly youth) to armed groups.

10. Pettersson et al., 2019.

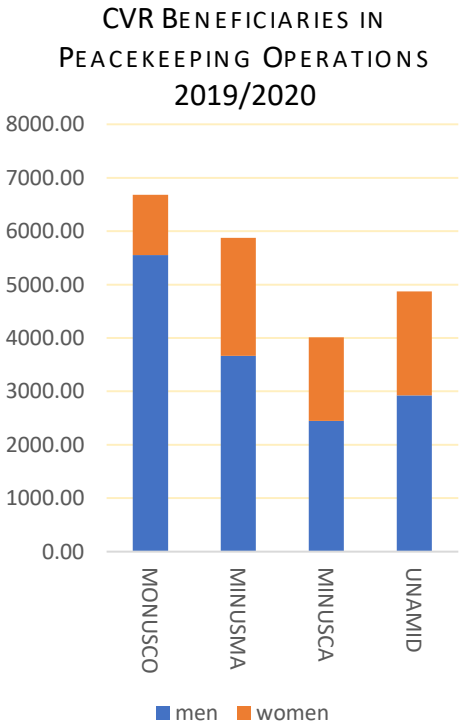
11. McCandless and Rogan, 2013, pp. 1-6

Therefore, DDR practitioners have increasingly realized that localized violence by non-state actors requires specific, locally attuned, decentralized, bottom-up DDR responses. They also acknowledge that they must contend with new drivers of insecurity at the community level, often in remote areas where state authority is lacking, weapons and ammunition are prevalent and are held by, and within, local communities for various reasons, including self-defence.

Impact on DDR and innovations that have emerged in practice as a result of an increase in violence by non-state actors and the prevalence of localized conflict.

In response to occurrences of armed violence at the local level, DDR practitioners have developed and adapted DDR-related tools[12] to be implemented at the community level. **These innovations have been used to build trust between communities. They have also expanded the targets of DDR to go beyond ex-combatants and include victims, dependents and vulnerable community members. They contribute to addressing the drivers of conflicts such as marginalization and exclusions while improving the safety and security of community members through weapons and ammunition management interventions**. The following approaches have allowed DDR practitioners to engage directly with communities and offer new avenues for partnerships:

- Community violence reduction (CVR) to address local conflict: CVR projects aim at preventing and/or reducing violence at the community level and have the same strategic objectives as DDR, namely, to contribute to peace and security, and to help build a secure environment conducive to recovery and development. The CVR approach focuses on working with communities. Through a participatory approach, these projects aim at finding solutions to the causes of armed conflict from within the community itself. CVR also enables DDR practitioners to include vulnerable groups, particularly women and girls, in a meaningful manner, not only as beneficiaries of assistance but as active agents of change. Moreover, in addition to targeting ex-combatants, CVR also explicitly targets youth that are at risk of recruitment. Given such characteristics, CVR has become an important, widely-used instrument for addressing violence and sustaining peace at the community level. Although CVR is not a new form of programming, it has gained considerable attention in recent years, particularly due to its flexibility and potential for being utilized in transition contexts where conditions for DDR are not yet in place, or where DDR programs are essentially complemented by CVR. When properly managed and based on a realistic and measurable theory of change and continuous monitoring, CVR has turned out to be a productive instrument specifically for transition settings. Experience from Mali and the DRC has shown that with this new focus on the local level through CVR, local conflict management can play a more significant role in attaining DDR objectives. However, CVR is neither without its limitation nor is it a silver bullet. What CVR projects can do, at best, is contributing to highlighting cross-cutting linkages to other initiatives and to pursuing overarching strategies for recovery/stabilization and peacebuilding.



Example Box: Focus on local level violence in Mali:

Another illustrative example for the United Nations' stronger focus on local level violence can be drawn from the centre of Mali, a diverse socio-economic region where farmers, pastoralists and traders intermingle, and which has been much affected by lethal ethnic and inter-/intra-communal tension, mounting violent extremism in the past years and increased competition over resources as a result of drastic climate variation and change. To address these conflicts, and in the absence of an overarching DDR framework that would also address violence in the centre, MINUSMA's DDR section, in collaboration with the National DDR Commission, started to implement CVR projects to prevent the recruitment of youth at risk by armed groups in areas most affected by the violence. Based on this initiative, the National DDR Commission with support from the World Bank launched the Community Rehabilitation Programme aiming at promoting the voluntary disarmament of self-defense and militia groups particularly in the Mopti region.

- **Transitional weapons and ammunitions management (WAM):** To address the widespread circulation of weapons, ammunition and explosives among armed groups and within communities, transitional WAM was introduced as a DDR-related tool in the latest IDDRS revision. Transitional WAM is a series of interim arms control measures that can be implemented in transitional settings where traditional disarmament efforts, as part of a DDR programme, are either not feasible or need to be complemented by other activities. The objective in such contexts is to reduce the capacity of individuals and groups to engage in armed conflict and to address the immediate risks related to the illicit possession of weapons, ammunition and explosives, even in the absence of a peace agreement. **Sustained and systematic integration of WAM into the United Nations' work on peace and security, including into peacekeeping and peacebuilding plans and programmes, has shown to be a promising tool for the United Nations for preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.**

Example Box: Comprehensive WAM in Haiti:

In 2019, as part of the WAM-ODA project, DPO deployed a technical assessment mission to Haiti to support the transition to a special political mission, namely the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti. Building on the outcomes of this mission, the United Nations assists the national authorities in establishing a comprehensive arms control framework. This includes support from the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) in drafting the revision of a comprehensive national firearms law. Additionally, a WAM baseline assessment and an arms and ammunition profiling and typology study are planned to be conducted by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in 2021.

12. In addition to DDR programmes, the UN has developed a set of DDR-related tools aiming to provide immediate and targeted responses. These include pre-DDR, transitional weapons and ammunition management (WAM), community violence reduction (CVR), initiatives to prevent individuals from joining armed groups designated as terrorist organizations, DDR support to mediation, and DDR support to transitional security arrangements. In addition, support to programmes for those leaving armed groups labelled and/or designated as terrorist organizations may also be provided by DDR practitioners in compliance with international standards (IDDRS 2.10).

Key Findings:

1. CVR often consists of low-cost interventions that are meant to be time-bound and offers a short-term stimulus for peacemaking on the local level. In the long run, however, CVR alone cannot curtail recruitment into armed groups or prevent recidivism, as programmes are designed to last on average between six to twelve months. In order to have a long-lasting and sustainable impact, it is therefore critical for CVR to make appropriate linkages with wider stabilization and development programming.

2. Despite the benefits of the instrument, CVR is not a panacea. More work is needed to refine the CVR methodology. This can be achieved both in collaboration with academic institutions and through research centers within the Integrated DDR Training Group (IDDRTG),[13] which can play a key role in providing systematic analysis. Additional work is also necessary to identify more meaningful and impactful ways of including vulnerable groups, particularly women, in initiatives as agents of change and peace.

3. The broader theories of change and medium- and long-term impact of CVR interventions should be reviewed regularly and rooted in evidence where applicable to ensure that programmatic designs continue to serve their stated purpose. The gathering of systematic, empirical evidence and monitoring is required to judge whether a theory of change still serves its function.

4. In order to preserve the investments by CVR, integrated and sustainable strategies generating employment and livelihoods, as well as approaches promoting peace dividends, should be put in place from the very beginning of the CVR planning process. Such strategies must be realistic and must reflect the—often harsh—labour market realities.

5. In non-mission settings, it will be important to promote the inclusion of arms and ammunition considerations and CVR entry points into the Common Country Analysis (CCA), UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), and Peacebuilding Fund country eligibility processes, where relevant.

6. The study found that DDR sections in peacekeeping missions have, at times, limited knowledge of WAM and a rather incomplete picture of the weapons and ammunition armed actors are using. However, good knowledge of these technical matters is needed to ensure that transitional WAM and/or disarmament interventions are evidence-based.

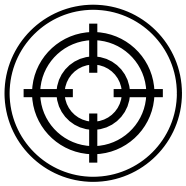
13. The Integrated DDR Training Group (IDDRTG) is composed by international organizations and training institutes with a common goal of developing and sharing training materials based on the United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (UN IDDRS). IDDRTG develops training for DDR practitioners both from international and regional organizations, military, police and NGOs etc. The aim is to provide an integrated approach to the DDR with focus on planning, management and implementation of the process, using the IDDRS as guidance to ensure well trained personnel.

THE FRONTIER ISSUES THAT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF DDR

In addition to the phenomena outlined above, four frontier issues require examination as **they are likely to shape the future of DDR in the coming years**. Whereas the two phenomena presented in the first section represent complexities and ongoing challenges for which DDR practitioners have developed (and continue to develop) concrete tools, approaches, and best practices, such depth in experience and programming is either lacking or at a nascent stage when addressing the impact of these frontier issues. In other words, tools, instruments and approaches to tackle these issues have not been adequately and comprehensively developed yet.

Together, the designation of armed groups as terrorist organizations in response to the proliferation and transnational reach of violent extremist groups with ideologies at odds with international humanitarian law (IHL), the continuing fragmentation and multiplication of armed groups, the increasing regionalization of conflict and insecurity and the impact of epidemics and pandemics in DDR settings, represent a set of obstacles, dynamics, and drivers of insecurity that DDR practitioners are now beginning to grapple. **It is in fact increasingly clear that, going forward, they will become lasting features of DDR practice. They are trends that have already begun to ferment and are likely to further increase in scale and magnitude.** Given the changing nature of DDR, this list of frontier issues is not exhaustive, and invariably, new frontier issues will emerge as DDR continues to evolve.

These frontier issues have been selected on the basis of those promising practices that DDR practitioners, again through innovation, have developed to tackle them, and on which further work, partnerships, and best-practice can be built. What follows is offered as a contribution to ongoing system-wide discussions on the future of peacekeeping.



FRONTIER ISSUE I: DESIGNATION OF ARMED GROUPS AS TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

Contemporary conflicts are increasingly characterized by armed groups designated as terrorist organizations (AGDTOs), with various degrees of affiliation among them. The presence of such groups poses a direct threat to the implementation of DDR processes, as some actors operate as spoilers.[14] At the same time, the United Nations has been increasingly mandated to support DDR processes in contexts where armed groups have been designated as terrorist organizations either by the host government or by a third-party Member State (e.g. Somalia). The UN is also called to support national authorities in voluntary disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts of individuals who voluntarily exit these groups (e.g. Lake Chad Basin).

The scope of interventions and nature of challenges will vary significantly across regions depending on conflict dynamics, institutional capacities and international support. In recent years, the regions most affected by terrorism have been South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa. These regions accounted for 93 percent of all deaths from terrorism between 2002 and 2018.[15] Armed conflict represents

14. On 18 January 2017, the DDR process in Mali was temporarily affected by a terrorist attack perpetrated inside the military camp in Gao, where members of signatory armed groups were advancing the accelerated DDR integration process. As result of the vehicle-borne improvised explosive (VBIED) suicide attack, 54 members of the mixed unit were killed and more than 100 were injured.

15. Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019

a common denominator in contexts vastly affected by violent extremism and terrorism. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (2019), 95 percent of deaths from terrorism occur in countries that are already in conflict. In these scenarios, AGDTOs can exert territorial influence, impose social norms and perpetrate continuous attacks. In many of these settings, AGDTOs exploit 'domestic' conflicts that are connected to a breakdown of the prevailing social contract.[16]

To date, there is no universally agreed definition of 'terrorism' nor of associated terms such as 'violent extremism'. It is also important to note that there are different levels of designation. Groups can be designated either through the formal listing as a terrorist organization by the UN Security Council or through the listing by a Member State (host state and/or third-party state). Regional organizations such as the European Union also maintain lists that set out the individuals, groups and entities subject to restrictive measures aimed at countering terrorism. One must also be aware that broad definitions may be misused to delegitimize social groups and discourage political activities such as the expression of political dissent, human rights advocacy or other manifestations of freedom of expression.

Although DDR programmes cannot be established for individuals who leave AGDTOs in the absence of a peace settlement, DDR practitioners can apply some of the activities that they would typically implement as part of DDR programmes—such as providing education, vocational training and counselling—to assist individuals who have undergone a screening process and been deemed low risk. For such programmatic engagement to bring positive results, some key aspects should be clarified: (I) eligibility and screening criteria (including an understanding of whether an individual is high risk or low risk), (II) the programme content and goal (including reintegration and prevention of re-recruitment), (III) security provisions and safe pathways for those voluntarily leaving the group,as well as the legal and political frameworks in place.

Emerging considerations in DDR policy and practice as a result of designations of armed groups as terrorist organizations.

DDR practitioners face a series of political, legal, operational and programmatic challenges when considering whether to support DDR processes in contexts where AGDTOs operate. Following years of counterinsurgency measures (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia, Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel), there is a growing realization that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through military operations alone and, therefore, requires comprehensive political solutions. Although the nature of the armed group may result in specific approaches such as screening for terrorist acts, and hence trigger a prosecutorial process leading to conviction, the fundamental approaches that underpin DDR, including DDR-related tools, can support national authorities in addressing the presence and activities of AGDTOs. This includes encouraging voluntary exits, managing safe pathways out of AGDTOs and preventing recruitment.

16. Avis, 2019

- Preventing (re)-recruitment into AGDTOs: DDR practitioners can contribute to preventing new recruitment by AGDTOs through community-based programming that addresses the drivers of recruitment. Preventing the latter is extremely complex and requires a multidimensional approach combining a careful analysis of push and pull factors, the AGDTO's recruitment techniques, the root causes of the conflict, as well as a thorough understanding of the grievances that are being exploited for recruitment purposes. Through DDR-related tools, such as CVR programming and reintegration support, DDR practitioners can not only help prevent re-recruitment but can also contribute to preventing first-time recruitment. CVR programmes have, among others, supported local mediation processes between warring groups and thereby assisted in reducing the risk of local tensions being instrumentalized by AGDTOs or other armed groups and spoilers.

- Encouraging voluntary exits from AGDTOs: In some contexts, DDR practitioners provide advisory support to national counterparts whose efforts are aimed at encouraging voluntary exits from AGDTOs. In contexts where these interventions take place, national programmes typically aim to offer safe pathways out of the group and encourage other individuals to leave. A common first step in the process is the screening of individuals, usually by national security services that identify high-risk and low-risk fighters. The screening process determines whether an individual will receive further support (rehabilitation and reintegration) through complementary frameworks or has to undergo further investigation and prosecution. The screening process is, therefore, a key aspect of any support related to rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals formerly associated with AGDTOs.

- Support to individuals who have left AGDTOs: Despite a lack of political solutions, the United Nations, other international and non-governmental organizations and governments have implemented DDR processes targeting groups that are designated as terrorist organizations (e.g., in Somalia for former al-Shabaab members and the Lake Chad basin for former members of Boko Haram). In the absence of a peaceful settlement, DDR practitioners have been called upon to support the use of DDR-related tools and reintegration support targeting individuals who have voluntarily left AGDTOs. The need for such engagement is obvious: a number of governments are already faced with hundreds—if not, in some cases, thousands—of individuals formerly associated with AGDTOs who are currently in prolonged detention but cannot be prosecuted due to various reasons (e.g. lack of evidence or limited national prosecution) and/or would need to be reintegrated into society.[17] DDR-related tools and reintegration support are critical in these circumstances and have played a key role in supporting governments in providing assistance to these individuals.

Example box: DDR processes targeting AGDTOs in Colombia, Somalia, Mali and the Lake Chad Basin:

Prior to the signing of the peace agreement between FARC-EP and the Colombian government, national authorities extensively promoted the disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants. From 2003 to 2006, over 20,000 FARC-EP members individually demobilized following their voluntary exit from the group. In a similar manner, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has supported the rehabilitation and reintegration of former Al-Shabaab members, including children and women, since 2013. In 2019, with the financial support of Peacebuilding Fund, IOM in collaboration with UNSOM promoted the rehabilitation of women formerly associated with Al-Shabaab. This initiative not only consolidated a gender-responsive approach but was catalytic for the mobilization of additional voluntary contributions and the construction of two female rehabilitation centers. Given the deterioration of security conditions and the proliferation of armed actors in Mali, the implementation of CVR has been critical for preventing the recruitment of at-risk youth into extremist groups and building community resilience. Moreover, DDR can serve to address the threat posed

by armed groups beyond national boundaries. Through resolution 2349 (2017), the Security Council called the international community to support national governments towards the implementation of disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives, in line with strategies for prosecution, where appropriate. Overall, the diversity of efforts in Colombia, Somalia, Mali and the Lake Chad Basin region illustrated how DDR processes can be tailored to adapt to local, national and regional conflict dynamics.

Key Findings:

1. The fundamental principles that underpin DDR, including its DDR-related tools, could help support national authorities in developing comprehensive, complementary frameworks for dealing with the presence and activities of AGDTOs. However, greater coherence with other processes and interventions related to AGDTOs are required, including working with national governments and specialized UN entities to provide appropriate pathways and solutions for those who must first be prosecuted before potential participation in a reintegration process.
2. Given the importance of social reintegration of individuals who have left AGDTOs, more work is needed to better understand the reintegration support provided to them, including ways to increase community acceptance. Social reintegration, though equally as important as economic reintegration, has been an underestimated factor in contexts involving AGDTOs. Inherent to the lack of community acceptance and stigmatization is a risk of recidivism. Reintegration programming in these settings is, therefore, well advised to increase community engagement and tie this more closely to traditional reconciliation and justice mechanisms. This may call for greater investments, in mental health and psychosocial support in addition to open and comprehensive dialogue with society about the steps of rehabilitation and reintegration processes, leniency and victims' rights.[18]
3. Despite the improvements made over the past years, significant challenges in promoting voluntary exits of individuals from AGDTOs remain, requiring the attention of DDR policy and practice. One of the most pressing challenges relates to the legal and political frameworks in which these interventions are embedded. As there are no peace agreements in place to function as guiding frameworks, the basis for DDR engagement in violent extremist contexts usually is nonexistent or is based on the domestic legal and political framework (e.g. amnesty agreements, transitional justice mechanisms), which is, however, frequently lacking, ambiguous or incomplete.

17. Boutellis, 2020
18. Felbab-Brown, 2018

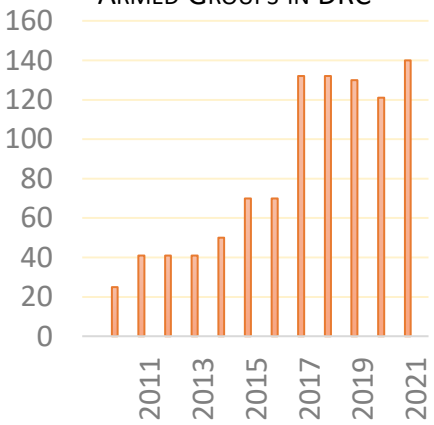
Vocational skills training, North Darfur

FRONTIER ISSUE II: THE CONTINUING FRAGMENTATION AND MULTIPLICATION OF ARMED GROUPS

UN peace operations and DDR actors working in mission and non-mission settings are confronted with a myriad of violent actors with various motives, profiles and different levels of control over territory. They range from, inter alia, non-state armed groups, urban criminal gangs, local militias, civil defence groups, drug traffickers or self-proclaimed jihadists. It is not only the great variance in the profiles of these groups but also their increasing number that is posing a challenge to actors working on DDR. According to International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) data from 2018, in 44 percent of conflicts between three and nine, in 22 percent more than ten, and in some, more than one hundred (e.g. Libya, Syria, DRC) opposing groups were involved.[19] These groups quickly adapt to changing conflict dynamics, splintering and reforming while combining conventional and irregular methods of warfare.

Particularly in multi-party civil wars, fragmentation is a core feature of conflict, often "occurring as hardline or opportunistic factions break away from those willing to keep faith with a peace process".[20] The splintering of armed groups, as seen in civil wars in South Sudan, the DRC, CAR but also in violent extremist contexts like Nigeria or Somalia, is often guided by various opportunistic goals, which are, for instance, to increase the threat these groups pose to their adversaries or to maximize economic benefits. The splintering and re-alignment of armed groups often happens very quickly, making it difficult for the United Nations and other peace actors to develop adequate and timely responses. These splinter groups also complicate efforts that aim at defection and negotiation as their memberships can be fluid.

PROLIFERATION OF NUMBER ARMED GROUPS IN DRC [i]



Example Box: Actor complexity in the Sahel:

The Greater Sahel is a fitting example of the actor complexity and fluidity mentioned above. Numerous armed groups are operating in the region, sometimes sharing the same objectives and sometimes having different ones. Although the discourse on the Sahel is characterized by a dichotomy between jihadist and non-jihadist fighters, the boundaries between these groups are not clear. The distinctions drawn at the international and national level also do not resonate with perceptions of armed groups at the local level.[21] According to a 2019 UN report, "Fighters often pass back and forth between all types of groups, based on geography or local circumstances. This fluidity has led to frequent allegations that both pro-government and formerly separatist or non-jihadist armed groups have collaborated with various jihadist groups".[22] Such collaboration was also mentioned by the Special Panel of Experts which "collected evidence of collusion between individual members of compliant armed groups and terrorist armed groups [...] such connections are mainly opportunistic, either motivated by the local political dynamics and balance of power or by criminal interests".[23] Conflict lines are, therefore, overlapping and blurring the boundaries between conflicts between the government and jihadist groups, between different armed groups or social and ethnic communities.[24]

19. ICRC, 2018
20. Richards, 2016, pp. 1–10
21. Tobié and Sangaré, 2019
22. Lebovich, 2019
23. United Nations, 2019b
24. Lebovich, 2019

[i] Steanrs, 2013; Vogel 2020, 2021, Warren 2011

Despite the challenges mentioned above, some important steps have been taken in the past years to tackle this complexity.

Emerging considerations in DDR policy and practice as a result of the continuing fragmentation and multiplication of armed groups.

As crucial as it is to investigate differences between armed groups, it is equally important to closely examine the differences between members of the same armed group. DDR in its traditional form as well as the more innovative DDR-related tools seem to have their biggest impact on combatants who do not have strong economic or ideological ties to armed groups, are loosely affiliated to the armed group and do not hold any meaningful authority or rank within its structure.[25] Identifying these types of combatants, in addition to those holding senior ranks and harbouring strong ideological ties, becomes all the more complex in settings characterized by fragmentation. Determining the pull and push factors that guide individuals to stay with or leave armed groups also becomes more difficult. At the group level, the objectives of armed groups have become fluid and difficult to ascertain.

Actor fragmentation has aggravated efforts to respond to conflict and makes DDR engagement a challenging endeavour. DDR experiences of the last decade show that DDR processes should ideally be developed in a bottom-up fashion as outlined by the IDDRS. Contexts where multiple armed groups are active often require different approaches to each group. This, in turn, also means that the incentives used to dismantle structures of armed violence need to be harmonized in order to avoid tensions between armed groups over such benefits. These incentives also need to be in line with economic realities and the preferences expressed by ex-combatants themselves. In such settings, the goal of an 'integrated' DDR process is extremely difficult to reach, as lots of disparate elements and approaches might need to be used for various armed actors.

Despite the challenges posed by fragmentation, DDR practitioners are beginning to explore new tools to address the analytical gaps, the need for coherence in communicating to and about armed groups and developing more reintegration options to diversify the range of incentives for those leaving armed groups:

- Analytical tools for armed groups' structures, motivations and means: Actions aimed at reducing or dismantling structures of armed violence and assisting ex-combatants (and associates) in their return to civilian life need to be built on better comprehension of the political, economic and ideological interests of armed groups. Analyzing armed groups and their behaviour is a complex endeavour that requires looking at various components. This includes, but is not limited to, the armed groups' internal structures (including leadership structures), principles of action and modus operandi, finance modalities, motivation and incentives for fighting, reproduction and recruitment techniques, international outreach, strength of opposition[26] as well as constituency and control of population and territory. An assessment of these aspects, including an

25. Zena, 2013

26. Mackinlay, 2002

examination of factors that drive people in and out of these groups (which may be structural, ideological, economic, social or individual), is vital to a DDR process. It allows for better judgement on the efficiency of a specific DDR instrument to be applied in a DDR setting, a group's willingness to engage in a DDR process, and its trustworthiness to stick to agreements. It also assists in avoiding recidivism or re-recruitment. This assessment is not only useful for DDR practitioners, but it is also informative for the UN system in specific contexts and can contribute to a common and shared analysis and understanding of the risks posed by armed groups.

Example Box: Armed actor analysis In Burkina Faso:

In 2020, in response to the need to better understand the drivers of armed group activity, DPO initiated a project in collaboration with the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) which aims to produce an analytical tool to better understand the motivations, structures, and incentives of armed groups. This tool will eventually guide DDR practitioners in designing country-level DDR implementation strategies.

Besides developing the analysis tool mentioned above, DPO has also provided practical support to armed group analysis in Burkina Faso. DPO was requested to support the Emergency Task Force, established by the Executive Committee in April 2019, under the leadership of DPPA-DPO Assistant Secretary-General to guide the UN response. Through this framework, the Task Force developed and adopted an action plan that comprised a short-term deployment of a DDR officer to strengthen the monitoring and analysis capacity of the Office of the Resident Coordinator, as well as to conduct a threat analysis of the non-state armed actors. This analysis included developing a typology of armed groups and identified options for programmatic support in line with the Task Force action plan.

- Public information and strategic communication (PI/SC): Splintering armed groups, increased actor fragmentation but also divisions among armed groups in contemporary DDR contexts highly affect how DDR practitioners can and should engage from a public information and strategic communication perspective. **The fragmentation of armed groups coupled with the advent of social media and other digital communication channels have resulted in disinformation and misinformation gaining more prominence in settings where DDR process are taking place.** DDR practitioners are faced with a communication landscape that is inundated by misleading or inaccurate information related to the objectives of ongoing DDR processes. In many cases, armed forces and groups also engage in public information activities to promote their objectives, perceptions and goals. Their messaging, however, is often fraught with rumours, disinformation and misinformation intended to undermine DDR processes. In volatile conflict and post-conflict contexts in which DDR takes place, those who profit(ed) from war or who believe their political objectives have not been met may not wish to see the DDR process succeed. In response to PI/SC considerations above, developing an off-the-shelf analytical product that can support country teams in understanding, monitoring and mitigating the impact of misinformation and disinformation stemming from armed groups in DDR contexts is necessary.

- Providing more reintegration options and solutions: In light of the diverse set of violent actors that DDR policy and practice needs to deal with in conflict and post-conflict situations, the revised IDDRS (2019/2020) (in particular IDDRS 2.10, 2.40 and 4.30) have introduced additional flexibility in supporting ex-combatants in their reintegration. As mentioned before, DDR practitioners can now select from a broad range of DDR instruments that are tailored to the local context and, ideally, respond to the different grievances and needs of the armed group(s) and ex-combatants that inhabit such context. This additional flexibility coincides with an increased understanding that vocational training alone will not be sufficient to bring members of armed forces and groups into employment if these are not linked to broader employment initiatives, including private sector development. It also requires a community-driven and community-centred approach able to build and sustain trust during both demobilization and reintegration. Such an approach should include creative thinking about reintegration projects that give ex-combatants the freedom to choose their own paths to civilian life, followed by investment in such projects. Currently, through a suite of studies, DPO is exploring new and innovative forms of reintegration solutions, including a) greater involvement of the private sector;[27] b) the integration of ex-combatants in the security forces (army, police, gendarmerie, border police, etc.);[28] c) reintegration of ex-combatants in the public workforce (administration, non-uniformed services, park rangers, health sector); d) CVR and DDR opportunities in the artisanal mining sector; e) the transformation of armed groups into political organizations/parties.

Example Box: Understanding Reintegration preferences in DRC:

In addition to the provision of reinsertion kits, a central component of reintegration programmes during Congo's DDR cycles was skills training. The EDRP offered training in agriculture, fishing, sewing, woodwork, bricklaying, and other revenue-generating activities. An independent evaluation estimated that 30,000 ex-combatants benefited from these activities.[29] Yet, much research points towards the questionable adequacy of these individual-centred training programs in eastern Congo's socio-economic setting and their desirability amongst ex-combatants.[30] Indeed, the EDRP, for instance, provided little to no support for the most sought-after occupations, such as taxi services and artisanal mining. PNDDR III offered training in agriculture, auto mechanics, and carpentry, as well as in literacy, financial management, and entrepreneurship. However, a (methodologically questionable) survey of ex-combatants suggested that only 8.4% "were working in the sector of their professional orientation and 91.6% [were] working on unrelated jobs or were still unemployed".[31]

27. While IDDRS 4.30 labels partnership with the private sector as indispensable, and previous DDR processes have attempted to establish linkages with the private sector (e.g. Sudan, DRC and Afghanistan) (Strachan 2017, UNDP 2012), there is limited evidence of structured and comprehensive engagement—this is despite the fact that business actors (local and international) can potentially play a key role in terms of job creation and sustainable employment for ex-combatants.

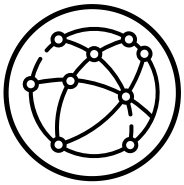
28. In recent years, calls for more effective strategic and programmatic linkages between SSR and DDR have become louder. While past interventions and research have mostly focused on supply-side considerations related to the SSR–DDR nexus (e.g. surrounding coordination, financing and programming), demand-side considerations (connected to how DDR and SSR interact in local political and state formation processes after war) received less attention (Von Dyck, 2016). In order to build more effective synergies between SSR and DDR in the future, a stronger focus would need to be put on the demand side. This implies taking a closer look at "the political and economic interests of the most powerful actors involved; how likely specific measures are to destabilize the system, and who are the likely political losers; the extent to which DDR and SSR practices can place constraints on the exercise of power by powerful actors; and how DDR and SSR activities are used instrumentally by the state to pursue its political interests" (Von Dyck, 2016, p. 61).

Key Findings:

1. The cases examined for this study demonstrate the need for DDR practitioners to engage in systematic and rigorous actor and threat analysis. DDR practitioners should collaborate with UNCT, national authorities and/or academic research centres to map the diverse armed actors operating in different contexts in order to better understand each group, their needs and interests and hence ascertain the best way forward with regard to planning and programming. This analysis should also feed into wider UN system analysis of each given context.
2. The advent of social media coupled with the fragmentation of armed groups will result in an even more crowded communicative space. Additional tools need to be developed to analyse, anticipate, and monitor armed group behaviour (including misinformation and disinformation) as part of a comprehensive public information and strategic communication DDR strategy. This addresses increasing focus on the importance of linkages between DDR and technology, data, and cyberspace.
3. UN DDR actors should, moreover, consider exploring the development of more concrete guidance on response instruments targeting the top and mid-level management structures of armed groups, especially when it comes to reintegration. Preliminary studies—which require further research—point to the idea of "associative reintegration", that is, a process focused on promoting connections amongst ex-combatants, and between them and community members, in order to foster ideas of home, solidarity and a sense of belonging.

29. IEG, 2013, p. 6
30. See Carayannis and Pangburn, 2020; Perazzone, 2016; Vogel and Musamba, 2016
31. World Bank, 2020, p. 10


UNMACC-DRC



FRONTIER ISSUE III: THE REGIONALIZATION OF CONFLICT AND INSECURITY

As a result of the greater interconnectedness of countries and porous borders, armed groups frequently operate across national borders and regions, even though local allegiances remain central to the organization of violence. Regionalized armed violence, transnational criminal networks, and climate risks contribute to the need for DDR to be anchored in regional approaches and complemented by cross-border activities.

Organized crime,[32] which can entail arms trafficking, human trafficking, illegal natural resource exploitation, drug trafficking, piracy or migrant smuggling, finds a perfect breeding ground in these conflict or post-conflict environments. Lack of governance and state presence, as well as widespread insecurity, are both causes and consequences of the expansion of criminal activities.[33] Over the past decades, organized crime has emerged as a major factor of insecurity. It undermines state legitimacy and prospects for peace and lowers the incentives of armed groups to enter political settlements. In the countries examined for this study, many armed actors are involved in criminal activities in one way or another—either through participation in cross-border and organized criminal activities or through direct links with transnational criminal networks.

The regional dimensions of conflict and insecurity also manifest in the field of weapons and ammunition management. In settings such as Mali, Chad, Republic of the Congo and the DRC, amongst others, a combination of porous borders, weak governance outdated and/or non-existent national legislation as well as criminal networks all contribute to the illicit cross-border flows of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Beyond the transnational supply lines and flows of weapons and ammunition, recruitment of foreign fighters and the involvement of mercenaries are also a hallmark of the regionalization of conflict and insecurity. Yemen's conflict for example, has drawn combatants from around the region, including combatants from Sudan.

Many United Nations peacekeeping operations have been deployed in countries where natural resources have fuelled or financed conflict. The issue of natural resources management is a key factor all along the conflict-to-peace continuum: from contributing to the root cause of grievances by financing armed groups to supporting livelihoods and recovery through sound management of natural resources. Furthermore, the economies of countries suffering from armed conflict are often marked by unsustainable or illicit trade in natural resources, thereby tying conflict areas to the rest of the world through global supply chains. In these cases, natural resources are exploited and traded directly by armed groups, organized crime groups or even members of the security sector and are eventually placed on national and international markets through trade with multinational companies.

32. Organized crime is defined as a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, financial or other material benefit. This definition is taken from the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Article 2(a). See Carayannis and Pangburn, 2020; Perazzone, 2016; Vogel and Musamba, 2016

33. International Alert, 2016

Furthermore, climate variation and change defy national borders and occur across regions. Climate change is a risk multiplier that has induced conflict between groups competing over resources. Conflicts, often linked to climate change, between farmers and transhumance herders in the Sahel are a case in point. These regionalized conflicts have resulted in numerous casualties primarily because they occur within the vicinity of violence perpetrated by violent extremist organizations and other armed groups. As violent extremist groups continue to expand their geographic operations in the Sahel, they manipulate the growing conflicts over resources between farmers and herders and other occupational groups. Particularly, armed groups target herders for intelligence-gathering and recruitment. And at the same time, farming and sedentary communities witness a reinforcement of armed self-defence groups in their midst. These are just few examples of the interlinkages of climate and security and their contribution to violence at the regional level.

These dynamics, which are transitional and transboundary, impact the most vulnerable individuals in fragile communities and point to the necessity for DDR to adopt regional approaches building on promising practice.

Emerging considerations in DDR policy and practice as a result of the regionalization of DDR.

The above factors point to the need to increasingly consider DDR programming beyond the national level. Particularly in protracted conflicts with a transnational dimension, multilateral efforts to help dismantle armed group structures, both foreign and domestic, are required to help return former combatants to civilian life. In these instances, regionalized political and economic strategies should support effective DDR programming.[34]

- Programmes targeting foreign combatants: DDR practitioners are currently responding in serval contexts that involve foreign combatants. The Great Lakes region, for example, is a complex and interconnected region where DDR has needed to take a regional dimension. Foreign rebel groups fighting the Armed Forces of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi worsen regional instability. Taking into account the region's history and geopolitical dynamics, there is a persistent risk that both Rwandan and Burundian forces might suddenly consider the current dynamics in eastern DRC as an overt justification for armed engagement. In turn, these incursions of foreign national forces into the DRC in pursuit of rebel elements could trigger a further deterioration of regional cooperation. In other contexts, such as Libya, Chad and Yemen, mercenaries and other foreign fighters have been drawn to conflicts selling their services and in search of other economic incentives, including the control over natural resources. These foreign combatants also increase the circulation and cross-border movement of weapons and ammunition. Over the past few years, new regional DDR contexts have emerged in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. These contexts require similar Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration, Repatriation and Resettlement efforts (DDRRR), as well as new mechanisms for regional institutions' political engagement.

34. Cockayne/O'Neil 2015).

Example Box: Programmes targeting foreign combatants in the Great Lakes Region:

The Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDRRR) programme in the DRC has focused on the return of individuals associated with foreign armed groups in the DRC mainly including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda) but also Forces démocratiques alliées (ADF) (Allied Democratic Forces), Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the Front de Libération Nationale (FROLINA) (National Front for Liberation–Burundi). The programme has been supported and financed by the World Bank and MONUSCO.[35] The backbone of the programme are sensitization efforts aimed at convincing combatants to return. Activities include radio broadcasts, the circulation of leaflets with messages from ex-combatants as well as details about the repatriation and demobilization processes including the conducting of video interviews. This is complemented by efforts to open safe corridors across Eastern DRC for increased surrenders.[36] According to the Special report of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of MONUSCO the mission's DDRRR programme "has achieved considerable progress in disarming and reintegrating FDLR and other foreign ex-combatants; more than 32,000 foreign ex-combatants and their dependents, mainly ex-FDLR, have repatriated to Rwanda since 2002".[37]

- Climate risks and insecurity: The link between climate and security has become increasingly pronounced, and the consequence of climate-induced conflict have been dire, particularly in the Sahel. A recent survey of practices conducted by DPO showed that "climate change which resulted in desertification, soil erosion and drought has exasperated competition over natural resources, pushing herders to venture into new areas to seek pasture for their herds".[38] The study argued that "drifting away from traditional migratory routes and encroaching on farming lands has fueled negative perceptions, pitting sedentary communities against nomadic ones, often stigmatizing the latter as cultural and/or religious intruders".[39] An additional factor is the protracted regional conflicts, which have further challenged pastoralism by either forcing nomadic herders to change migratory routes—therefore increasing the risks of triggering conflicts with sedentary communities—or by being coopted into those conflicts and becoming the vehicle for illegal trade and arms smuggling. In either case, this has resulted in a proliferation of small weapons among herder communities.[40] Both herder and farmer communities increasingly possess weapons, which leads to deadly clashes between the two groups. Armed groups often capitalize on the impact of climate change and manipulate climate-induced conflicts. Additionally, armed groups do not only target herders in the Sahel; they also target community members to recruit individuals whose livelihoods have been lost as a result of climate change and variations. DDR practitioners' experience working with communities can be instrumental in addressing risks associated with climate change. A variety of tools, including mediation, brokering of communal and local peace agreements and activities aimed at reducing violence and preventing (re-)recruitment can be used in these contexts. In addition, these tools should ensure to include women's participation as key agents of change and transformation.

35. United Nations, 2019e
36. OIOS, 2018
37. United Nations, 2017d
38. United Nations, 2021
39. Ibid
40. Ibid

- Illicit exploitation of natural resources and natural resources governance: When promoting good governance practices, transparent policies and community engagement around natural resources management, DDR processes can address conflict drivers and the impacts of conflict on the environment and host communities at the same time. Issues of land rights, unequal access to natural resources for livelihoods, unbalanced distribution of benefits and socio-cultural disparities may all be underpinning drivers of conflict that motivate individuals and groups to take up arms. DDR practitioners must take these linkages into account to avoid exacerbating existing grievances or creating new conflicts and to effectively use natural resources management to contribute to sustainable peace.[41]

Key Findings:

1. More analysis is required on the climate-security nexus and its implications for DDR efforts and potential interventions; the Sahel is a context from which such analysis can be derived.
2. The issues of climate-induced and transhumance-related conflict—especially the proliferation of weapons among herder and farmer communities and interactions between armed groups and these communities—are intricately connected to DDR-related issues and could benefit from DDR-related programming and activities.
3. DDR cross-border initiatives, multi-country efforts and regional programming are required to address the regional dimensions of conflict. These efforts require a coordinated approach between countries and buy-in from regional institutions such as the African Union and ECOWAS, as well as support from international financial institutions (IFIs) including the World Bank.
4. The issue of organized crime brings to the fore the need to better understand what leverage, programmes and incentives are available to the United Nations to support national authorities in providing viable alternatives to the gains armed groups generate through their illicit activities, especially when ex-combatants maintain ties to organized criminal networks even after demobilization.
5. The evidence shows the growing importance of regional confidence-building efforts in security cooperation and joint action on repatriation, resettlement, and reintegration of foreign armed groups. To this end, it will be crucial for DDR practitioners to support regional and subregional Member States'-driven mediation mechanisms, which in turn can be the platform for DDRRR efforts in collaboration with IFIs.

41. In the DRC, for example, an IOM-funded study, entitled the "Mapping artisanal mining areas and mineral supply chains in eastern DRC (2019)" detected a dynamic whereby active combatants self-demobilize and seek livelihood opportunities in artisanal mining sites that are not under the control of armed groups.

6. The illicit flow of weapons across borders also points to new avenues for expanding DPO's work in weapons and ammunition management, including supporting the development of regional frameworks that address the illicit trafficking, lack of regulation and circulation of WAM.

7. There is a need to identify programmatic entry points on how natural resources management can be integrated into the community-based interventions that have become the hallmark of DDR practice.

MINUSMA, SSR-DDR Section support community level food security activities

FRONTIER ISSUE IV: HEALTH, EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the linkages between peace and security, peacebuilding, social cohesion and health. Areas affected by conflict and violence are often more vulnerable to the spread of infectious diseases, as has been the case with the resurgence of polio in Syria, outbreaks of cholera in Yemen and Haiti and the persistence of Ebola in the DRC. Insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure and mistrust of state institutions are some of the compounding challenges that make the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases difficult. In turn, lack of support and inequity in response to infectious diseases in conflict areas can further exacerbate communities' grievances and the root causes of conflict.

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is therefore also a crucial aspect for ex-combatants in the context of DDR processes that warrants further examination. Ex-combatants' and associated groups' long-term exposure to armed conflict and violence, separation from their families and communities, low standards of living and possible social exclusion and community stigma directly affect their mental health. Combatants may still experience psychological stress or develop mental health and substance use issues long after demobilization and reintegration. Beyond the group of combatants, common mental health conditions in communities living in fragile, conflict-affected, and vulnerable settings that are also relevant to the DDR population of concern (ex-combatants and persons associated with armed forces and groups) include: acute stress, grief, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychosis, epilepsy, seizures, intellectual impairment, disability, harmful use of alcohol and drugs, and suicide.

Emerging considerations in DDR policy and practice as a result of health risks, epidemics and pandemics in conflict settings.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions and subsequent restrictions affected the implementation of mandated DDR/ CVR activities in all mission settings. DDR programmes and CVR projects implemented by MINUSMA, MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNAMID experienced delays and faced significant restrictions. These included delays due to various virus prevention protocols, restricted freedom of movement of personnel and limited monitoring of projects. In addition, for MONUSCO, which is mandated with DDRRR, travel restrictions between the countries of the Great Lakes region substantially hampered repatriation and resettlement efforts of demobilized ex-combatants from foreign armed groups.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, DDR practitioners entered an unfamiliar operational landscape that required new programmatic tools related to health, mental health, health-risk communication and infectious disease prevention. While this work was originally designed as a way of mitigating the spread of diseases within DDR programming and to ensure that DDR practitioners and their activities did not become vectors of the disease, DDR practitioners later started to innovate and develop programming and activities looking at the health and peace intersection.

- Managing infectious diseases through CVR: In several settings, DDR–CVR components repurposed and retooled CVR projects to support national government's response to COVID-19. In contexts such as CAR and Mali, this included sensitization and risk communication with conflict-affected communities, as well as the production of personal protective equipment (PPE). The repurposing of CVR has also allowed for the implementation of projects with immediate impact on the health response, leveraging the capacities of ex-combatants and community members in building critical health and sanitation infrastructure, such as water wells and isolation centres. In addition to using COVID-19 as an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion and reduce violence in the short term, another guiding principle of DDR–CVR interventions was to ensure sustainability in the long term. Looking ahead to the end of the pandemic, missions such as MINUSCA (CAR) designed convertible projects from the outset.

Example box: Lessons from the COVID-19 response in CAR and DRC:

In CAR, the COVID-19 screening and isolation centres built with the help of youth, thus reducing the risk of recruitment by armed groups during the crisis, could be converted to maternity halls to enhance the capacity of local health facilities. Maintaining the wells in a post-COVID community could contribute to reducing inter-communal conflicts that often emerge due to competition over scarce resources. The health checkpoints established at the Cameroon border will eventually be turned into border control facilities, strengthening national security capacities further. In the DRC, MONUSCO convened a consortium of local NGOs in Kazumba territory (central Kasai) to discuss projects to strengthen social cohesion through the rehabilitation of health infrastructure and projects related to the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in local communities.

- Opportunities for confidence-building in epidemic/pandemic contexts: The lack of access to basic social services such as health care for specific populations (e.g. ethnic, regional, religious) can be a result of real or perceived exclusion and unfair or unequal treatment. In many contexts, these inequities lead to grievances which may boil over into protests and, subsequently, violence. Health is often viewed as a superordinate goal for all sides in a conflict, allowing health initiatives to serve as a neutral starting point for bringing rival parties together as they work towards mutually beneficial objectives.[42] In this regard, through their support of national authorities in COVID-19 response, new entry points for DDR components and their engagement with armed groups and communities have emerged. In particular, DDR practitioners were able to leverage the -sometimes apolitical- nature of the health emergency as an opportunity for confidence-building, collaboration and cooperation between parties to the conflict. The lessons drawn from these experiences are currently being applied in non-mission contexts.

- Mental health and psychosocial support in DDR: Past DDR processes have incorporated these aspects to some degree through basic psychosocial screening during cantonment, for example, or by ensuring that referral pathways are in place

42. WHO, Health and Peace Initiative, 2019

throughout a DDR programme. However, it is widely recognised, including amongst DDR practitioners, that much more can be done to better understand the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)-related elements in DDR and see where a redoubling of efforts is needed to improve mental health outcomes and ex-combatants' well-being and that of the communities into which they reintegrate. In this regard, the revision of the IDDRS and the new UN approach to DDR outlined therein, as well as shifts towards a holistic mental health approach in dealing with mental health issues, provide new avenues for strengthening MHPSS in DDR processes. Against this backdrop, this paper has been prepared with the view of identifying such strategic and programmatic entry points.

Key Findings:

1. DDR practitioners have CVR and other DDR-related tools at their disposal, allowing for new innovations in using health as a neutral entry point to enhance DDR outcomes, as well as wider peacebuilding and sustaining peace objectives, including localized ceasefires and confidence-building measures.
2. The overall integration of MHPSS in DDR programming is lacking. One particular aspect that deserves immediate attention is the need to increase the understanding of strong social ties and low-intensity MHPSS interventions' role in improving social cohesion and supporting social reintegration.
3. In partnership with relevant UNCT entities specialized in health, DPO can build on preliminary lessons learned related to the health and peace nexus to develop predictable programmatic activities, potentially even applying them to non-mission settings.

Conclusion:

This study has outlined the various ways in which the everchanging nature of conflict in various contexts has led DDR practitioners to develop different innovative tools, approaches and practices. It has attempted to demonstrate that while the nature of conflict is not static and continues to evolve, DDR has evolved along with it. The tools and practices that have emerged in response to the evolving nature of conflict have now been captured in the revised IDDRS. Looking forward, this tradition of innovation will enable DDR practitioners to be better equipped to address the frontier issues that will shape the future of DDR, in very much the same way they have adapted to the phenomena that underpin DDR's current practice.

However, DDR practitioners cannot do this alone. The phenomena and frontier issues outlined in this document also point to the fact that DDR itself can be catalytic. Through its tools and community-based approaches, it can serve as a platform for other mission components, agencies funds and programmes as well as civil society working in the areas of justice and corrections, police, SSR, stabilization, humanitarian action, peacebuilding and recovery to gain a foothold in settings that may be politically sensitive.

Finally, it is important to note that this report is not exhaustive, many other frontier issues are likely to materialize and or accelerate. Issues such as cyber warfare, climate change and climate induced displacement, the urbanization of conflict are all issues which this report has touched on briefly but that certainly require more thinking and examination. Until then, it is the DPO's hope that what has been captured in this study will be of benefit to practitioners and policy makers alike, including in support of wider policy processes such as A4P, WPS, YPS, and the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus discussions.

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CVR vocational skills training, MINUSCA

Annexes

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGDTOs	Armed groups designated as terrorist organizations
APPR-RCA	Accord politique pour la paix et la réconciliation en République centrafricaine
BINUH	United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti
CAR	Central African Republic
CCS	Comité consultatif de suivi
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CVR	community violence reduction
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Repatriation
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIB	Force Interventions Brigade
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
FPRC	Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central Africa
HCREC	High-Commissioner for the Reintegration of Ex-combatants
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IATG	International Ammunition Technical Guidelines
IAWG-DDR	Interagency Working Group on DDR
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDDRS	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JMAC	Joint Mission Analysis Centre
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
MNJTF	Multi National Joint Task Force
MOC	Operational Coordination Mechanism
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MOSAIC	Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium
MPC	Central African Patriotic Movement
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NISA	National Intelligence and Security Agency
ONSA	Office of the National Security Advisor
OROLSI	Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions
OSC	Operation Save Corridor
OSESGY	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
PI	public information
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
QIP	Quick Impact Project

SALW	small arms and light weapons
SC	strategic communication
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPM	Special Political Mission
SCAEF	Strategic Communications Actions and Effects Framework
TAM	Technical Assessment Mission
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme
UNAMID	African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAMS	United Nations Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
UNMC	United Nations Mission in Columbia
UNOCA	United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UNSOM	United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
UPC	Union for Peace in the Central African Republic
USMS	Joint Special Mixed Security Units
WAM	weapons and ammunition management

Methodology

The research process involved examining academic, policy and project documents related to DDR processes around the world. A major focus of the desk research was put on contemporary challenges that DDR practitioners face and the innovative pathways that they have taken to deal with violence inflicted by armed groups. This global mapping of DDR responses was complemented by a total of 116 semi-structured interviews. These were conducted remotely (via skype and telephone) with DDR experts and UN staff in New York and Geneva or face-to-face in select countries where DDR processes are underway (Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia) both in the capitals and in the field (Bouar and Baroro in the Central African Republic, the Pool region in the Republic of Congo, Goma in Mali, Maiduguri in Nigeria). In order to capture the regional dimension of the Boko Haram conflict, additional interviews were conducted remotely with interlocutors in Cameroon (to allow for cross-case comparison with Nigeria). Given the unprecedented nature of the global pandemic, frequent meetings in the field were held, and information from these meetings served as the basis for analysing the innovative ways in which DDR practitioners worked on health-related programming.

Interview partners were international and national stakeholders involved in DDR processes, country and thematic experts, as well as beneficiaries of DDR programmes and community violence reduction activities. The case selection was driven by the objective to cover mission (Mali and the Central African Republic, special political mission in Somalia) and non-mission settings (Nigeria, Republic of Congo and Cameroon). The selected cases illustrate key dynamics associated with fragile and complex conflict contexts characterised by extreme insecurity, the prevalence of groups associated with violent extremism and/or lack of preconditions for the implementation of viable DDR programmes.

In terms of data analysis, the study made use of within-case and cross-case comparison. Within-case comparison was applied in those contexts where DDR activities have been implemented after successive peace agreements in the same country (e.g. CAR). The study examined what was done in each instance, why changes/adaptations were made and whether the intervention achieved its intended outcomes. While early attempts at DDR are not described in depth within the study itself, these early interventions often influence later DDR processes and are therefore important to understand. For those cases that show contextual similarities, cross-case comparison was applied, and lessons learned generated (e.g. Cameroon, Nigeria, and Somalia).

Despite its advantages, the chosen research design was accompanied by certain research limitations, which should also be noted. First and foremost, lessons learned from case study research cannot necessarily be applied easily to other DDR contexts around the globe. Where recommendations are being provided, the study indicates their empirical basis and also outlines to which set of circumstances these are likely to be most applicable.

A second key challenge of the research was connected to the data collection process. Given the tense security situation in several countries where empirical fieldwork took place and the sensitive nature of the research topic, the researchers faced access restrictions. While much effort was put in talking to interlocutors on field level, certain key locations relevant to the research (such as the DDR camp in Gombe state, Nigeria) could not be visited. The study has attempted to mitigate this shortcoming by triangulating data from various (background) sources.

Authors and Organizations Interviewed

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Central African Republic

Bangui

Acted (NGO)
Association des victims, Bangui, Gbongo district
CVR beneficiaries in three locations
CVR committees
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
MINUSCA Civil Affairs Section
MINUSCA DDR Section
MINUSCA Justice and Corrections Section
MINUSCA Political Affairs
MINUSCA SSR Section
'Sewa no limit' (local NGO)
UEPNDDR
University Bangui
UNOPS

Bouar/Baroro

CVR beneficiaries
CVR committees
Local women's association (OFCA)
Local youth association

Republic of Congo

European Union
French Embassy
Commission Ad hoc Mixed Paritaire (CAMP)
German ambassador, German Embassy
Group of ex-combatants in Kinkala town, Département du Pool
Haut Commissariat à la reinsertion des ex-combatants, HCREC
Mayor of Kinkala, Département du Pool
Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (NGO)
Peace and Development Advisor (PDA), United Nations
UNDP
UN Resident Coordinator
US Ambassador, Embassy of the United States of America

Mali

Bamako

Commission Nationale de DDR (CNDDR)
German Ambassador, German Embassy
MINUSMA, Stabilization & Recovery Unit
MINUSMA, SSR-DDR Section
MINUSMA, Strategic Planning Unit
MINUSMA, Command Control
MINUSMA, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator
Think Peace (national NGO)

Gao

Community members in a peripheral district of Gao city
Community members of the Gounzoureye community
German contingent MINUSMA, Camp Castor
Implementing organizations of CVR projects (local NGO representatives)
Members of MOC (Mécanisme opérationnel de coordination)
MOC (Mécanisme opérationnel de coordination) Coordination Office
Regional MINUSMA Office, DDR/SSR Section
Regional MINUSMA Office, Head of Office
Regional MINUSMA Office, Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC)
Regional MINUSMA Office, Political Affairs Division
Regional MINUSMA Office, Sector Force Command
Regional MINUSMA Office, Stabilization & Recovery
Regional MINUSMA Office, UNPOL

Nigeria

Abuja

"Creative" (NGO)
EU Delegation to Nigeria & ECOWAS
German Embassy
Institute for Security Studies (ISS)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Kukah Centre
Search for Common Ground (SFCG)
Swiss Foreign Ministry
UNDP Governance & Peacebuilding Unit
UNODC

Maiduguri

Herwa Foundation
House Committee on emergency and disaster preparedness
INGO Forum
IOM
Neem Foundation
St. Patrick's Catholic Cathedral, Maiduguri

Somalia

UNSOM DDR
UNSOM P/CVE
UNSOM Justice and Corrections
Adam Smith International
UNODC
IOM
NISA

Other peacekeeping missions

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSGSEY)
United Nations - African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)
United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)
United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC)

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