

**University of Alberta**

**How to Reintegrate Former Girl Soldiers in African Countries Back to their**

**Societies**

by

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It also dedicated to all my great supporters: My sister, Mona, and my brother, Keyvan.

I would also like to thank my uncle and aunt, Ali and Sheri; and my great friends, Ali Ovlia, Sodiq Sulaiman, Neda Naqvi, Manal El-Meligi, Rachel Dolores, Rashmi Chopra, Rebecca Welling, Siamak Modaresi and Pegah Salari. These people have supported me through all tough times in my life.

## **Abstract**

Studies show that 40 percent of existing child soldiers are girls. In order to make and sustain peace in war-affected countries, it is important to ensure that all members of a community, including women and girls, are reintegrated successfully. Failure of successful reintegration of former girl soldiers may result in a collapse back into war. This research attempts to find current gaps in reintegration programs for girl combatants. Numerous research papers, related articles, and filed studies have been consulted. This thesis proposes that women involved in rebel forces are a microcosm of what is happening in society. Therefore, in order to have a successful reintegration program, it is important to receive direct feedback from these girls so the programs can be implemented successfully in the society.

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## List of Acronyms

DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
FARDA	Friends of Africa Relief and Development Agency
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (The Liberation Front of Mozambique)
ICC	International Criminal Court
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RENAMO	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana(The Mozambican National Resistance)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
PAR	Participatory Action Research
UNDP	United Nations Development Programs



## **Introduction**

In January 1998, Ajita Kadigamar published an article on a Tamil Canadian website with the following title, "Women as Soldiers and Fighters." In this article, she claimed that the world is witnessing a new phenomenon of young women's participation in the social sphere, by which she meant women and young girl participation in wars as soldiers. Although the phenomenon of women and girls' soldiers may appear to be a new role for modern women, history shows otherwise. The truth is that this phenomenon is certainly not a new development. It has been around for centuries. In some cases women and girls have joined army forces willingly to rise against their own countries, but in some cases they have joined by force because they were threatened with death. However, this paper argues specifically on the African child female soldiers who have been involved in rebel forces are a microcosm of what is happening in their society.

Vidyamali Samarasinghe claims, "All along the course of human history, women are known to have incited men to ferocity at the fighting front" (203-228). Women have accompanied men on marauding expeditions. They have also enlisted in the fighting ranks. They have, furthermore, nursed wounded men on the battle front and continued to keep households going while men were in battle. In addition, women have looked after the wounded when they returned from conflict. Samarasinghe adds, "It does not seem to be any type of war in which women do not participate"(203-228). However, the participation of women in wars has not been limited to supporting the men who fight in wars.

Women have also fought for centuries alongside men in armies on the frontlines. The Kingdom of Dahomey (today's Benin) is famous for having an elite female soldier corps named Ahosi,

which means “our mothers” in the Fongbe language (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 107). Some scholars have suggested that “the most intriguing historical female army comes from the African Kingdom of Dahomey” (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 107). During the 18th and 19th centuries, female warriors in Dahomey were considered superior to their male counterparts in the battlefields. During that period, fathers were expected to bring their daughters to the king of Dahomey when they were between the age of 9 and 15, so that the head of the army could select the strongest from among them to the military force. Thus, we have evidence in history of young girls enlisting in armies at a very young age (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 107).

Evidence of the presence of young female combatants in the battlefield can be found throughout history in different parts of the world. Some of these women, especially those participating on the frontlines, have had their names etched into history. According to Edmunds, Joan of Arc is the most famous Western girl combatant in history (1-3). Joan of Arc was a sixteen-year-old French girl that led a group of 4,000 soldiers against the British. She succeeded in expelling the English from Orleans in 1429. She was captured a year later by Burgundian soldiers and sold to the British (Edmunds 4-7). A female member of the Voluntary Ukraine Legion at the age of 19, Helen Ruz also fought on the frontlines of all major battles of her division next to her fiancé, two brothers, and her father (Jones 136). At the end of WW I, she received two medals for her bravery. Around the same time, a girl in the Austrian-Hungarian army, Corporal Marie von Fery-Bognar, showed such courage and bravery in battlefields that Emperor Franz Josef gave her a special medal (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 105-106).

However, many more women didn't survive war to receive such accolades. For example, the famous female Yugoslav warrior, Mira, fought in numerous battles in WW II. However, she was killed when her army was trapped by the Nazis (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 106). Other girls were captured and tortured to death, such as the Soviet teenage girl Liza Ivanova, who joined the main guerrilla regiment against the Germans in WW II. She organized 68 guerrilla forces but was captured and tortured, and in the end shot in the head and was killed. Nevertheless, the ugly nature of war did not stop women from joining armies (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 107).

By the 1940s, Soviet women were enlisting in all branches of the military, including the Russian "naval infantry" (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 108). Today in many countries, women can receive military training and enlist in different branches of the military. For example, in some countries like Israel, women have to serve at least two years in the army, while their male counterparts are required to undergo three years of military training. In other countries, like the United States and Canada, women like men can choose if they want to join the army (Kopel and D'Andrilli). In Switzerland, men are required to enlist in the military, while women have an option to join or not (Kopel and D'Andrilli). In Iran, women cannot join the army, but they can become police officers. ("Iran military Service age and obligation") The presence of women in conflict zones has become more prevalent in the 21st century. For instance, more women soldiers have died in the recent Iraq war than the entire WWII (Benedict).

In today's world, the participation of children<sup>1</sup> in wars is not permitted under International Law, and perpetrators are condemned under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and can be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Yet, this legal norm does not protect children, especially young girls, from joining armies or rebel militias. Currently, a considerable number of female soldiers under the age 18 are recruited into armed forces and militias around the world (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. Out of approximately 250,000 child soldiers in the world, 40 percent are girls (Kaplan). According to the latest Security-General documents on children and armed conflict, children are being recruited in 20 countries. These countries are as follows: Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Occupied Palestinian Territory/Israel, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, and Uganda (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers).

Countries where girls are currently involved in fighting forces are Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. However, it is important to mention that in the past other countries like Algeria, El Salvador, Namibia, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Zimbabwe (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), have also fought wars with female child soldiers. For example, in a country like Eritrea, 30 percent of soldiers are women (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers) In Uganda, girls also comprise one-third of all child soldiers. Figures in Angola and Sierra Leone are 30 percent to 40 percent. Young female soldiers made up 10 percent of all soldiers in Iraq ("Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers"). However, in most cases, the numbers of young

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<sup>1</sup> "A child is defined in the Convention as a person under the age of 18", See United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

female soldiers are not as high as in these countries; nonetheless, their important roles in such movements are undeniable (“Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers”).

The phenomenon of girl soldiers has existed on different continents, but according to the figures reported to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, Africa has had the most child soldiers, including girl soldiers. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on the continent of Africa.

Today, females who join armies at an illegal age are called girl soldiers. They are the subject of this study. Some of these girls, like famous female soldiers throughout history, have exhibited bravery. However, many of these girls experience horrible memories as a result of their involvement in war. Studies have shown that almost all the girls who join armies or rebel militias are raped (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 97). Some of them are forced to marry their combatants. Many face major challenges once the armed conflict is over. A big challenge, for example, is their reintegration into their communities (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 110). These girls often have experienced a different lifestyle while they were members of the armed groups, and the gap between military life and community life is immense. This in itself makes it difficult for them to return to their traditional life, and some of these girls do not want to return to their traditional routine (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 117). Furthermore, in numerous cases, the community may refuse to accept these women, especially those who are victims of rape. For such traditional communities, having sex outside of marriage, even if this occurs through rape, is considered a major sin (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 122). At the same time, a post-conflict community cannot function properly without the successful reintegration of former combatants (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 122). Therefore, one important question of this study is, “What is the best way to ensure the reintegration of girls,

who once were in armed forces or militia groups, back into their communities?” (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 123). This paper will examine reasons for girls’ involvement in war, consider their responsibilities during conflict, and analyze challenges during the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program (DDR) and solutions that can help in avoiding further gender discrimination and prevent communities from entering war again.

Why do these girls get involved in war at the first place and what roles do they have during war? Do their responsibilities during war have an impact on the girls’ reintegration later on? Is the DDR program a fair reintegration program? Or is it discriminatory? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this program? This paper will examine these questions.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Why Young Girls Become Soldiers**

### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with the reasons why young girls become soldiers. The reasons are diverse and complex. A number of push and pull factors can be identified as being responsible for this phenomenon.

### **1.1 Push Factors**

Push factors are those factors that “lead children to either join or be vulnerable to exploitation” (Eisele). Poverty, domestic violence, insecure environments, unemployment, and war are factors that push girls into becoming members of armed forces. Such factors drive girls away from their home because of a set of circumstances that are beyond their control.

#### **1.1.1 Poverty and Deprivation**

Poverty is the most common reason why children are driven into the arms of the military or militia forces. In most war-affected countries, families cannot afford to provide for the basic needs of their children. People, therefore, suffer from hunger, and lack of clothing and shelter.

Sometimes, families send their kids into the military because of the extra income children bring home from the army. In such cases, girls join military forces in order to survive and help their families survive as well. In cases of extreme poverty, families may sell their kids for money to military bases; for example, in Uganda, some parents sell or give their children as a form of a tax payment or because of social rejection.

### **1.1.2 Domestic Violence**

Poverty is not the only well-known factor that pushes girls into becoming soldiers. Sometimes joining armed forces may be a way to get away from exploitation and abuse that occurs in their homes. Vanessa from the DRC explains her reason to join the army:

Home life was difficult. My father [step father, in fact] was a heavy drinker; he didn't work. He drank and then he struck us all. [Silence] Mom often went to the fields, she left us with him, and he drank and struck us. [Silence] When he drank a lot, he did as if I was his wife. [...] I left because he beat us, he drank, and then he took me as his wife. I preferred to die in the war rather than to stay at home and to keep on suffering. (Brett and Specht 40)

### **1.1.3 Insecure Environment and Community**

Apart from poverty and domestic violence, living in an insecure environment can push girls to join army forces, because they search for protection and use violence to survive. Christine, from the DRC, explains this situation as follows: “When it is a war and you are a woman, you risk your life; you risk your life because you are a woman and men will rape you if you don't protect yourself” (Brett and Specht 40). Large volumes of light weapons, such as guns and landmines, also flow easily throughout Africa and add to the problems of violence and insecurity.

An insecure environment can also increase the possibility of abductions or gang pressing in conflict zones (McKay 62). There is evidence of abductions and kidnappings of girls in Angola, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone (McKay 62). In northern Uganda, for example, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) abducted 130 girls on 10 Oct. 1996 from St. Mary's College at Aboke in the Apas



district (McKay 63). Gender played a main role in this abduction, because the LRA forces wanted to use these girls as sex slaves and captive wives (McKay 63).

#### **1.1.4 Unemployment**

When there is a high rate of unemployment, military forces become an available source of income. Sometimes, it is even the only option of employment for many youth, including young girls. The war in Sierra Leone ended in 2002, but the unemployment rate is high and there is a concern about the possible recurrence of war. Wahab Shaw, youth program specialist in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Sierra Leone capital of Freetown, expresses his opinion as follows. “There is so much unemployment, marginalisation, so many school dropouts; and all these factors helped fuel the war in the first place” ( qtd. in Sesay).

#### **1.1.5 War**

A recent increase in the incidence of war, especially civil war, has resulted in the growth of the phenomenon of female soldiers. The number of civil wars on the continent of Africa has grown drastically since the end of the Cold War. For example, the following African countries have been embroiled in civil wars or some form of low-level internal conflict over the past 50 years: Angola (1975-1991, 1992-1994, 1998-2002); Chad (1965-Present, ); Cote D'Ivoire and Djibouti (1992-1994); Democratic Republic of Congo (1998- present), Eritrea (1998-2000); Ethiopia (1998-2000); Guinea-Bissau (1998-1999); Kenya (1963 -1967 & 2005 massacre); Mozambique (1977-1992); Niger (1961-1964, 1990-1995, 2007-2009); Nigeria ( 1967-1970 & 2004 massacre); Rwanda (1994-1999); Senegal (1999-2005); Sierra Leone (1991-2002); Somalia (2006-present); South Africa (1989); Sudan (Darfur) (2003-present); Zimbabwe (1997-1994) (Gertzel).

Furthermore, war can trigger other push factors such as poverty, unemployment and insecurity, which promote the involvement of children in conflict. Wars not only collapse women's long-established roles, but also force them into new roles in a society. When a society becomes more militarized, the number of soldiers naturally increases. Therefore, it results in a declining number of workers because the majority of men and women serve military-based jobs as soldiers instead of working in civilian sectors to build their economies and societies (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 123).

In cases where there is an increase in the level of violence and social disorder, women's fundamental roles have been negatively affected both in their families, as mothers and daughters, and in their societies. Girls' roles both in their families and societies are vital in order to keep them functioning, but the importance of their roles is usually underestimated.

## **1.2 Pull Factors**

Protection, employment, food and family are pull factors that attract African girls to the military or to militia groups.

### **1.2.1 Protection**

When there is a conflict in a country, women in particular are very vulnerable. Some women look to weapons as a means of protection under those circumstances. Christine, from the DRC, expresses her opinion as follows: "If you have weapons, you can defend yourself. If you do not have any, you are beaten, one kills you, and one rapes you, even the boys."(Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 123) Therefore, some women make the active choice to join military forces because they can have access to guns as a means of protection.

### **1.2.2 Employment**

When people are living in poverty, any employment opportunity becomes attractive to them.

Afua Twum-Daso explains that women decide to work in military forces because serving in the military provides them with a different career, and in certain periods and places, military services is the only available job opportunity. Some military groups attract children by offering a monthly wage, or in some cases, by providing scholarships. For example, one armed group in Mozambique called RENAMO (The Mozambican National Resistance) promised to provide scholarships to those women that joined the army. However, the Mozambique government did not keep its promise completely and gave out very few scholarships (Gertzel).

### **1.2.3 Food**

During some conflicts when all sources of income are cut off and civilians are struggling to find food to eat, the members of the military force may be the only group to have access to food. This is a very important pull factor for children to join the army. Elisabeth from Sierra Leone represents a good example of a child soldier who joined the army for food. She explains: “I was in my village when they attacked, then we all ran out of town. Then I was given information that RUF (Revolutionary United Front) had a lot of food. We had no rice so, I decided to go to the town and I lived with RUF” (Brett and Specht 20).

### **1.2.3 Family Tradition**

In the lives of children, family plays a major role both in terms of their development and in their decision making process. Many children are easily drawn into military forces because it is a normal and acceptable tradition in their family’s life and history. When some family members, such as parents, siblings, or relatives, are in the armed forces, it becomes normal and natural for children to become involved as well. Catherine, an ex-combatant from the DRC, explains: “I

come from a warrior family; as far as I remember, my father has always been in a rebellion” (Brett and Specht 20). She adds, “My father was a warlord. [...] We were four children; three boys and me. [...] Yes, I was the last one. But I always wanted to be with my father [...] and then my brothers, they were with him also” (Brett and Specht 20).

Some children also adopt strong ideological motivations for joining armed forces from their parents (Brett and Specht 23). Kathryn of South Africa explains: “It is more than you have to - what you want to change- you have to make and bring some changes towards a just society, that is the main reason” (Brett and Specht 27).

## **Conclusion**

Reasons behind young girls’ participation in armed forces include various push and pull factors that play a vital role in involving young African girls in war. Push factors drive away these girls from their homes and communities with the promise of finding a better life in the military or in militias. Push factors are poverty, domestic violence, insecure environment and community, unemployment, and war. Pull factors draw these young girls into a military lifestyle. Pull factors include the promise of protection, employment, food, and family tradition.

A combination of push and pull factors is responsible for two-thirds of child soldiers volunteering for the armed forces or militia groups, or in other words, joining without coercion. The rest are likely to be involuntarily part of the armed forces due to kidnapping and other forcible measures. Christine, a former girl soldier in the DRC, gives the following statement in support of this argument: “It’s because of the war. When it’s the war, you don’t choose....” (Brett and Specht 20) Understanding why girls join armed forces and militia groups is the first step to developing policies that counter this trend.

McKay and Mazurana consider these women as war slaves because they do not enter the fighting forces with free will; moreover, they do not have the power to leave (42). Even if they tried, it could cost them their lives. Many girls join the military because they hope it will offer them a better life, receive protection, or simply allow them to survive. However, most of the time, these women are poorly fed and clothed. Sometimes, women soldiers are thought to be so worthless that they are left to die when injured, because using medicine on their wounds is considered as waste (McKay and Mazurana 43).



## **Chapter 2**

### **Girls' Roles during War**

#### **Introduction**

Now that we have a better understanding of some of the reasons why girls join or are recruited into armed forces and militias, it is important to discuss the roles that girls play once they are members of these groups.

Girl soldiers fulfill at least three different roles during war. The first and most recognized one is their role as sex slaves, concubines, or wives. Obtaining a sex slave is recognized as the greatest motivation of kidnappers that abduct girls and force them into armed forces or militia (Coulter and Persson). Another role is holding second-level jobs, such as cooks, porters, messengers, spies, and food and light missiles suppliers. These are responsible for providing assistance to other soldiers, mainly male. The third role is as fighters at frontlines in wars.

#### **2.1 Sex Slaves**

An examination of the wars occurring in Africa over the past ten years reveals a large number of cases of sexual exploitation of young girls, including girl soldiers. Recent research conducted in 20 African war-affected countries between the years 1987 and 2007 shows that sexual exploitation of girls has occurred in all of them (Coulter and Persson). In several of these cases, it would seem that men were looking for younger and younger women to have sex with in the belief that they will become immune to the HIV/AIDS virus. According to Erika Terburgh, "Such rebels are forcibly 'recruiting' young girls with no minimum age of recruitment. Once a girl shows emerging breasts, she is considered ripe for recruitment and for being handed over to a rebel as a 'wife'" (Twum-Danso 38)

Moreover, in some cases, commanders have claimed to have built strong bonds with female ex-soldiers and therefore wanted to marry them. Some former female combatants also claimed that they were in love with their captors and that they wanted to stay with them (McKay and Mazurana 121). However, it is important to remember, this happens only in some cases. In the majority of cases, such marriages to young girls, so-called “bush marriages,” stop during peace time (Morse). It is true that sexual exploitation of women is sadly common among African women in war-affected countries, but it is important to know that not all female fighters have been sexually abused (Brett and Specht 80).

## **2.2 Second-Level Jobs**

Girls are abducted not only for sexual purposes, but also for their productive labour. Women’s productive labour is labelled here as “second-level jobs.” The types of labour vary among countries and from war to war. In most Africa countries, girls are primarily assigned to agricultural work. During war, commanders cannot be dependant exclusively on looting or on local cooperation when the majority of villagers flee. Therefore, there is a need for girls to harvest and prepare food. As a result, girls’ labour in the fields becomes a very important reason for abduction, something that has received little attention in the literature so far. Girls are also often responsible for providing assistance to male soldiers and for helping them with what they need. For example, in Guinea-Bissau, girls were responsible for ensuring that food and war supplies reached soldiers. Besides preparing food, girls have also been responsible for other chores in everyday life such as cleaning, trading, and doing laundry for soldiers (Twum-Danso 40). For example, in Angola, girls are used as porters and camp followers (Twum-Danso 40). Furthermore, in warfare, there is a need for some underground and secret activities, so there is a



demand for individuals who look innocent, and girls are excellent candidates to fill such positions.

Other second-level jobs have included cooks, porters, nurses, food producers, spies, and messengers between rebel camps ("Girls in fighting forces and groups: Their recruitment, participation, demobilization and reintegration" 92). Thus, the roles played by African girls performed in military forces are more varied than simply being sex slaves. Some feminist scholars like Jan Jindy Pettmann highlight the important role of women in conflicts. Pettmann goes as far as to raise the following question: "Without women's activities, would wars be possible" (127)?

### **2.3 Fighters on the Frontlines**

Because of the variety of second-level jobs for girls in wars, there is a stereotype belief that while men are on the frontlines, women stay away from war zones. However, in many of today's conflicts, women are also working alongside men on the frontlines of the battle. Half to almost all women have been trained to fight (McKay and Mazurana 116). Even pregnant women or women with children have been expected to fight in emergency situations (McKay and Mazurana 116). While it is true that in African societies, men hold the leading positions in wars, the existence of female fighters on the frontlines cannot be ignored. Some women fighters have been commanders of small armies of only female soldiers, while other women have commanded both men and women. According to Barth, female fighters on frontlines are often girls with "strength, independence, courage, persistence, and character" (13). Historically and traditionally, men have shown and proved their manhood in war. Judith Hicks Stiehm, a researcher in area of women soldiers, argues that when female soldiers join the army, it changes cross-cultural

perceptions (44). Therefore, military services can no longer be seen as only male work. Not only has an increase in wars pushed girls to a new role as soldiers, but also confronted the "anchored preconceptions of gender identity"(Cooke 60) in wars.

In Eritrea, female fighters filled high-level military positions within the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Barth argues that the overall opinion on women's roles as fighters has been positive (Barth 92). Both men and women combatants in the EPLF had one common goal which was to liberate Eritrea. Whenever men attempted to suppress female fighters because of their gender, the girls would complain to the leaders, and those men would later be criticized for their wrong attitude and behaviour. This system highly supported the rights of female fighters in the EPLF (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 97-123).

Both the status positions and roles of female fighters vary from war to war. Women benefited from high status positions in countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Mozambique, because their participation was looked at as strengthening the goal of liberation in the army forces. However, in other African countries, like Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and in the Mozambique war between FRELIMO and RENAMO, few women enjoyed high positions in armies. The general status of women was low and many of them had been abducted, forced to work, or physically and sexually abused (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 97-123).

## **Conclusion**

Girls either choose to join the army or are abducted and forced by another person to join fighting forces. In addition, girls are recruited to serve unique roles related to their gender. Recognizing the three different roles that girls play in wars can help to minimize the difficulties in the DDR

process, as well as provide essential services during reintegration. The DDR process will be covered in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: DDR Programs**

#### ***Introduction***

In recent years, numerous African countries have emerged from war and conflict. Therefore, it is important to undertake programs that prevent violence, as well as provide and maintain peace and development. The United Nations provides a program to build and maintain peace and also provides assistance to help ex-fighters reintegrate into their communities. This program is called the DDR program: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program. (“What is DDR program?”) The root of the DDR process comes from Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s idea of post-conflict peace-building that ensures violence does not break out again. The DDR program also comes from the Brahimi report for the UN, which "explicitly linked peacekeeping, peace-building and socio-economic development functions of the UN system" (*Introduction to the IDDRS*). The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) defines disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs as "the contribution to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin. The DDR of ex-combatants is a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian, and socio-economic dimensions. It aims to deal with the post-conflict security problem that arises when ex-combatants are left without livelihoods or support networks, other than their former comrades, during the vital transition period from conflict to peace and development. Through a process of removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures, and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society, DDR seeks to

support ex-combatants so that they can become active participants in the peace process" ("What is DDR program?").

When one program finishes, the other one starts. For example, when the disarmament program ends, demobilization starts, and when demobilization terminates, the reintegration program commences. The DDR programs are complex, sensitive, and important linked-processes, which need significant human and monetary resources to plan implement and monitor. ("What is DDR program?") However, current DDR practices do not accomplish their goals completely because evidence shows that 50 percent of post-conflict African countries relapse into conflict and violence (Barth 5). This chapter analyzes this program step-by-step and highlights the strengths and shortcomings of each stage of the DDR program, with the goal to improve this important program in helping girls associated with armed conflict.

### ***DDR Program Steps***

All DDR programs have three important stages: disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. However, reintegration can be further divided into more specific steps that make the DDR program even more complex. These steps include reinsertion, reintegration, rehabilitation and remedy (reconciliation). ("What is DDR program?")

### **3.1 Disarmament**

The UN defines disarmament as a process for "control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. It includes the development of responsible arms management programmes"("What is DDR program?"). In order to have sustainable peace there is a need to have a disarmament and weapons management program to bring peace for the short term as well as peace consolidation in the long

term. There are two main steps in the disarmament process. The first step is to disarm all ex-soldiers and the second step is to prevent weapon's smuggling (Barth 42).

### **3.1.1 Disarming Ex-soldiers**

In order to disarm ex-soldiers properly, there is a need to have appropriate techniques for physical disarmament. Such techniques can vary because they depend on the strength of fighters as well as the types of the weapons they have. The United Nations' DDR program suggests collecting all weapons or related materials from ex-soldiers right away upon their arrival to the assembly area. (Colleta et al. 235) However, experience shows that such a simple course of action does not guarantee all the weapons have been compiled. Some soldiers do not give up their weapons easily. Therefore, another suggested method is to offer soldiers money for their weapons in order to attract them to hand in their weapons. However, this method frustrates those people that do not have weapons, especially those women soldiers that were highly involved in the army but were doing second-level jobs (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 32).

It is a very complicated process to get all weapons from ex-soldiers, but one that is vital to give confidence to ex-soldiers that they no longer need weapons for protection, especially for young women soldiers that carried weapons to protect themselves from abuse. Peacekeepers need to plan for parallel processes of disarmament in various opposing parties, to ensure that while one party is being disarmed, the opposing party is getting disarmed as well. They also need to set a realistic schedule for the process and realize the possibility of delays in ending disarmament (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 32).

When the weapons have been collected, it is important that each weapon is registered and a record is kept of all weapons' identifications. Identifications includes "serial number of weapon(s); serviceability of weapon(s), including any modifications; site where handed in; handed in by whom (name, rank, unit and military ID # or equivalent); handed in to whom (representative of the international or regional force responsible for the security of the weapons); verified by whom (signature and identification number of international monitors and monitors of each of the parties); and weapon history if known, including manufacturer, details of export and import, and details regarding its issuance to the ex-combatant in question" (Twum-Danso 81). However, a known issue is the complexity of data collection from soldiers. Problems arise because of language barriers, which result in incorrect data. One known example is where a number of veterans had their names or military ID misspelled on their registration cards because clerks spelled the names according to their own origin, which resulted in misspelling (McKay and Mazurana 88). This results in a lot of confusions later on. For example, one cannot be sure who has been disarmed and who has not.

### **3.1.2 Prevent weapons' smuggling**

When attempting to demilitarize the community, it is vital to stop weapons' smuggling. First, either a UN operation or regional peacekeeping operation should monitor all the borders, while ensuring permanent ceasefire within the schedule in the peace agreement. Then, there should be a joint measure with neighbouring countries and weapons suppliers to commence arms management. Furthermore, certain rules should be established in terms of carrying weapons in public. Either a UN or regional peace operation needs to control compliance with all military sides of the agreement, especially the disarmament regulations. The UN also needs to supervise the disbanding of armed forces, alongside the withdrawal of any foreign army forces and their

missiles in order to build primary confidence with local commanders. In addition, UN military observers need to begin working with these local commanding officers as well as their units that will have to be demobilized. Furthermore, the international civilian police should monitor and control public security forces (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 32). However, such an approach may seem straightforward in theory, but to implement it fully is a complex process.

### **3.2 Demobilization**

Demobilization is a broader part of transformation of war into peace. It includes "the assembly, quartering, disarmament, administration and discharge of former combatants, who may receive some form of compensation and other assistance to encourage their transition to civilian life." (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 32) Successful demobilization should have the following steps: identification of female ex-combatants and abducted girls, setting up cantonment sites, and implementing a registration process.

#### **3.2.1 Identification of Female Ex-Combatants and Abducted Girls**

One very important step in the demobilization procedure is to identify female ex-combatants. Studies show that girl soldiers are often forgotten, ignored and dismissed. Afua Twum-Danso, in his article, "Girl Soldiers and Participation in Hostilities" argues that if these girls are identified as soldiers, they will not be marginalized or ignored during the reintegration process (81). Historically, not much attention has been given to young women soldiers in DDR programs, and as a result, numerous of female ex-soldiers have not been recognized as soldiers. Therefore, female ex-soldiers have not usually benefitted from ex-soldier benefit packages. However, there have recently been some concrete studies on women's identification issues and challenges since 2005 (Twum-Danso 81).



One problem with targeting female soldiers is that women themselves do not want to be recognized as ex-combatants because of the stigma attached to it in their societies. For instance, a majority of female soldiers are sexually abused during their soldiering experience, and in traditional societies, it is believed that raped women lose their value for marriage. Thus, because of the strong impact of some traditional beliefs, women have a tougher time reintegrating back to their societies compared to men. The result is that communities reject these young women. (McKay and Mazurana 88) For example, counsellors at World Vision in Uganda have been faced with this issue; they reported that a father rejected his daughters because “they had been ‘tainted’ by their abusers” (Twum-Danso 81). The father believed his daughters have lost their value for marriage (Twum-Danso 81). Such rejections from families and communities leave these girls with no support. Therefore, they have no place to go and they usually become sex workers. These women are afraid to be identified as former soldiers, and it becomes very hard to identify them. Bennett wrote in his book, "You can't find them, it's like they never existed" (Bennett et al. 23). When they don't come forward as ex-soldiers, they can never benefit from reintegration programs. As a result, young former girl soldiers not only give up reintegration benefits, but also do their best to hide their past. One suggested solution put forward by international organizations and international NGOs is to keep female soldiers' data highly confidential in order to persuade women soldiers (rape survivors) to come to demobilization centres and seek help; they have designed a “confidential” program to this end. The goal of this project is to "respect the survivor's decision not to disclose an attack and protecting their anonymity while they are receiving treatment” (Barth 62).

Another issue is the level of dependency of women on men. For example, women often need men to speak on their behalf to prove their veteran status (de Watteville 24). Men are the ones

who can confirm the women's rank as soldiers and the level of their contribution to the war. Because of this dependency of women on men, women stay in a weak position. Figures show many ranks of women soldiers have not been officially confirmed. Therefore, their chance to access veteran's benefits depends on the good will of their superior (Barth 13). UN peacekeepers can play an effective role to demolish this problem by not requiring men's confirmation for women's ranks as soldiers.

Along with these problems, McKay and Mazurana, in their research study "Where are the girls?" point out the governments' part in hiding the girls' roles in fighting forces (10). They claim governments conceal the presence of women soldiers in their own military, while they point out the presence of female soldiers in opposition forces (10). This concealment and manipulation of information have a negative impact on the process of peace building and reconstruction of the society. As a result, the UN has to push governments to cooperate with women's demobilization programs, criticize those with false and unrealistic data on female soldiers, as well as praise those that collaborate with the programs (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 3).

Experience also indicates that information on demobilization programs is less accessible to women compared to men (de Watteville 14). Barth claims in order for women to receive such information, informal information channels such as health centers and women's networks are more useful than formal information channels such as newspapers and radio (10). The UN has had to persuade the government to open up their formal channels for female demobilization programs as well as strengthen informal channels for spreading data on demobilization programs (Barth10).

### **3.2.2 Cantonment Sites**

Demobilization starts when the disarmament process finishes. After years of holding roles as fighters and rebels, people are guided into an orientation phase to get prepared for a new life as civilians and unarmed members of the community. In order for this orientation phase to be successful, all relevant groups need to participate in the formal demobilization process, which takes place at designed sites known as assembly sites or cantonment sites. The existence of cantonment sites is very important, especially during the time when ex-soldiers have to wait before their transportation for resettlement. Therefore, peacekeeping missions and other implementing agencies need to be well informed and directed for building and preparing cantonment sites (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 36).

According to the UN DDR program, cantonment sites should have recreation facilities, “including sports, TV/video viewing facilities; training facilities and lecture rooms for guest speakers and counsellors invited to give talks on topics such as resettlement, reintegration and other social issues; and specific programs to address gender-specific needs as well as to address the needs of child soldiers” (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 37). There is also a need for a secured and guarded storage facility/armoury for temporary storage of guns and weapons, before a system is organized to deliver these weapons for destruction. Finally, a communications infrastructure is needed (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 38).

Women at camps are still vulnerable and can become victims of rape again. Sadly, peacekeepers are among the rapists. As peacekeepers are the ones that have access to food, they receive power over women, and women in order to get extra food have to sleep with them. Currently, the International Criminal Court (ICC) ratifies and implements a strong international law against this

action (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, and Parpart 60). However, it is still very important to ensure hiring reliable peacekeepers in the camps.

According to UN research, the period that ex-combatants spend in cantonment sites should be short; otherwise boredom can lead to rioting, attacking peacekeeper workers, and stealing food and other supplies (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 38). However, one of the rules of these sites poses a major issue. Once an ex-soldier leaves the site, he or she cannot return to it. This can be problematic, especially for female soldiers, because they might be rejected by their families and communities once they return to civilian life.

### **3.2.3 Registration**

The next step in demobilization is documenting the personal data of ex-fighters. According to the UN, these personal data include, "name, date of birth, sex, marital status, immediate family such as spouse, children, next of kin, home address, educational background, pre-service occupation, newly acquired skills/vocation, resettlement plans, and physical disabilities/health problems" (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, and Parpart 81). Besides personal data, military data is collected as well. Military data should include, "rank, regiment number, regiment/movement of service, date and place of recruitment, date of demobilization/discharge, and conduct on demobilization/discharge" (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, and Parpart 82). Extra information might be needed depending on the specific situation or environment (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, and Parpart 82). Such information can be used for different purposes later on. For example, it can be used for the process of reunification of female ex-combatants and their families.

Ex-soldiers come from a variety of political, social, and economic backgrounds, and here once again the complexities of data collection arise. Barth argues that numerous female ex-soldiers do

not know their own date of birth. She also adds that the existence of different calendars and of different systems in reading time increases the chances of errors in entering data (63).

### **3.3 Reintegration**

While the two processes of disarmament and demobilization collect information on weapons and forces, reintegration procedures need to collect data on skills, aptitudes, intentions, and expectations. Reintegration programs can happen at the same time as other long-term peace building programs. On the other hand, reintegration programs offer assistance such as vocational training and cash assistance for ex-fighters that help and facilitate economic and social reintegration. The goal of reintegration programs is to have "a component of the national strategic plan for reconciliation, reconstruction, and development" (Barth 63) A successful reintegration process includes the needs of child soldiers. In order to provide appropriate assistance for child soldiers, it is vital that those involved in peace negotiations, donors, and child advocates decide what is adequate reintegration assistance for those children and for how long such assistance needs to be provided (McKay and Mazurana 57).

The reintegration program is a very important step. All the ex-soldiers, whether they are male or female, child or adult, need to be included in reintegration. Male soldiers receive the most attention in reintegration. However, research studies show that reintegration is not complete without the involvement of women, and communities will not function well without them (McKay and Mazurana 57). Historically, DDR programs have not shown enough attention to this fact. The UN DDR program states that the programs must respond to the best interest of the child. Such programs should focus on promoting the self-esteem of these victims. All the activities need to take into account the age and developmental age of each child. Furthermore, programs

should be based on ongoing trust relationships along with an adequate time and resource commitment as well as continuous collaboration among all relevant participants (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 90). However, some scholars argue that in order for DDR programs to be successful, the reintegration procedures need to be divided into clearer steps (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 90). These steps are known as “R” steps and include Reinsertion, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Remedy.

### **3.3.1 Reinsertion**

In the reinsertion process, the first step is to stop ex-combatants from returning to the military by providing services such as medical care, counselling, and education.

#### **3.3.1.1 Medical Care Adapted to Female Needs**

Knowing the physical challenges of female soldiers can help in providing medical care adapted to women. Female ex-combatants suffer from physical injuries such as loss of limbs and hands, which limits their abilities for future economic productivity and an independent life. Some lose their sight and hearing, which results in difficulties in educational and social development. Such physical issues have a negative impact on their reintegration, because if their families or communities reject them, they cannot lean solely on themselves to survive (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 121).

Pregnancy-related issues have an impact not only on these girls' current life, but also on their reintegration process. There is a significant amount of cases of pregnancy among these women and girls. Some families do not accept pregnant girls because they want to protect their family's image. This is not the only pregnancy-related issue that young girls have to deal with; there are also risks of birth complications, especially among African women because of the widespread

practice of genital mutilation. Genital mutilation puts the life of these girls in danger because women have experienced numerous complications after circumcisions such as infection and urinary retention. Abortion is another issue in which the mothers themselves have little decision-making power. As many abortions do not happen in a clean environment by professional people, they risk these girls' wellbeing and become a barrier to the reintegration process (McKay and Mazurana 90).

In addition to physical and pregnancy issues, sexually transmitted infections (STI) issues are very problematic for these girls' reintegration process. Because of the widespread use of women and girls as sex slaves and 'wives,' the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS dramatically increases. For example, almost all the girls that were abducted and escaped by the LRA in Uganda showed symptoms of STIs. Unfortunately, STIs could lead to pelvic inflammatory disease. These diseases and infections can pass onto the next generation during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 121).

Besides sexually transmitted infections, female victims of rape also show other health-related issues resulting from forced sex. For example, there are reports that girl soldiers frequently lose their monthly menstruation because of trauma and malnutrition. In addition to losing menstruation, these women suffer from abdominal pains, cervical tearing, and bleeding. Families reject these girls, sometimes because they cannot afford their treatment costs. All these health-related issues make it more complex to reintegrate girl soldiers (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 123).

### **3.3.1.2 Counselling (Psychosocial)**

Next to physical problems, girl soldiers can also suffer from different psychological trauma such as shock, shame, low self-esteem, poor concentration, constant nightmares, and depression. The majority of these psychological issues are due to the shocking experience of rape (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 124). However, these psychological traumas are not only the result of rape, but also from other horrifying experiences in military life, which stay with them for several years. These traumas make reintegration of these women more challenging. However, studies prove that women show better results and improvement in dealing with such psychological problems than men (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 124), and this is a very important factor that impacts the reintegration process. Women with such complex needs require special assistance in order to cope with traumas and be prepared for returning to their communities.

Different programs are developed to help these women. Some researchers argue that the best way to help these women to cope with such problems is through counselling, or in other words, "listening to them"(De Watteville 87). However, according to McKay and Mazurana, only 5 percent of girl ex-soldiers claim that counselling sessions actually help them (32). Why do these programs show such little success? Mazurana et al. argue that main problem is there is not much follow up by social workers after these young women have left the centers (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Kasper 10). Vanessa Farr also challenges existing programs in that "one size does not fit all" (45). In her book *Gendering Demilitarization as a Peacebuilding Tool*; she argues that it is very important to keep in mind that not all female ex-soldiers face the same psychological challenges in reintegration. Farr believes characteristics such as "women's capacities, experience, length of service, connection to or disconnection from communities of origin, number of dependants, geographic location after demoralization, and level of physical



and psychological stress (45)." All have direct impact on how well these women can psychologically deal with their new lives (45). Each woman has a different experience and the level of the trauma they have to deal with is different (45). Therefore, some women need longer psychological support and counselling sessions even after they reintegrate to their societies.

Wessels is a researcher in the area of reintegration counselling, and he works with the Christian Children's Fund and 10 other agencies in Participatory Action Research (PAR). He argues that, unfortunately, the international community does not do a good job of listening to young victims. He blames international organizations for the problems of reintegration programs of child soldiers, because he believes they ignore how children themselves perceive their needs and instead plan programs according to what they themselves consider to be proper. He adds that the goal should be "to put the power in the hands of girls; to have them go through a process wherein they organize themselves, define what reintegration means to them; ask what's missing, and then design small actions and steps"( as qtd. in McKay and Mazurana 87).

Putting Wessels' and Farr's arguments together, one can conclude that there is a need to hear from victims directly in order to be able to provide effective assistance to them.

### **3.3.1.3 Education**

Education for these young girls is very important. It stops them from returning to military forces by teaching basic skills to earn some income. Skills training can vary and depends on the interest of each woman and existing possibilities. For example, training in opening and running a business can be done if loans and appropriate land are available (McKay and Mazurana 88). In addition, other educational programs, such as safer sex for females, should be provided (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts, Parpart 36).

### **3.3.2 Reintegration**

The next step in the process is reintegration. In this step, it is vital to support economic integration and provide access to reintegration benefits, with programs such as access to credit and income generation projects, employment opportunities, and access to land.

#### **3.3.2.1 Access to Reintegration Benefits**

It is very important to ensure that all ex-soldiers, including former female soldiers, have access to reintegration benefit packages. These packages may include skills training, job placement, and loans. Studies show there are certain factors that make it difficult to target those soldiers who are eligible for reintegration. Some of these problems are not gender-based. For example, the issues that soldiers from the defeated group deal with are not the same issues that soldiers from the victorious group deal with. Sometimes, governments do not recognize certain groups, even if they are on the victorious side, and, therefore, those groups are not entitled to receive benefits. Even those groups that are recognized by officials can receive varying benefits. On the other hand, soldiers from the losing side are not usually recognized by officials, and as a result, are not entitled to receive certain benefits (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 11).

Let us take two opposing liberation movements, FRELIMO and RENAMO, in Mozambique as examples for this argument. In 1975, Mozambique declared its dependence from Portugal, which was the starting point of conflict between the FRELIMO government and the opposition RENAMO party. The conflict lasted for 16 years. There are no official records on numbers of male and female soldiers participating in this war (Barth 11).

After the conflict, the government decided to provide pensions for former soldiers, but in order for soldiers to receive their pensions, they had to have been 18 or above when they had joined

the army. Unfortunately, this law resulted in the exclusion of many RENAMO soldiers, both men and women, who had joined the army at a younger age. Moreover, the government of Mozambique excluded children under the age of 15 from the demobilization process. It seemed that the demobilization of children was a very sensitive issue politically in this country, as in many other places. The case is clear that including children as soldiers is against international children's rights law, and it seemed that the government of Mozambique did not want to be accused of breaking international law. As a result, in most cases, soldiers under the age of 18 failed to receive required attention. Because not every ex-soldier received benefits after the war, the exact numbers of soldiers that participated is unknown, but it is estimated to range from 90,000 to 150,000 (Fredrikke 18).

The underage RENAMO soldiers of Mozambique are not the only soldiers who have been excluded from their pensions, and there are many other known cases where soldiers were denied their benefits around the world, especially in Africa. Namibia's case is another example where the numbers of male and female soldiers remains unknown. One estimate is that 40 percent of ex-soldiers have not benefited from any demobilization programs because of what is called "targeting leakage" (Coletta et al. 36). "These leakages occur at all stages of the demobilization process." (Coletta et al. 36)

There are many examples of targeting leakage. One example of targeting leakage is the case of the Ethiopian Derg soldiers (Dercon and Ayalew 1661-1675); what is interesting about this case is that when they were called to come forward to receive demobilization assistance after the war, 15 percent did not show up. This case shows that some soldiers, even if they are eligible to receive assistance, prefer not to benefit from it in order to avoid dealing with soldiers from other

parts of the conflict. Soldiers that supported the “wrong” side have a harder time reintegrating into their communities, and they were in the majority that refused to receive demobilization assistance in order not to confront the soldiers from “right” side. There have also been cases when less disabled combatants that are eligible for receiving assistance have failed to show up at the centers. Ethiopia has such a case for example (Dercon and Ayalew 1661-1675).

Ernest Harsch in his article for the UN, "Women: Africa's ignored combatant. Gradual progress towards a greater role in DDR," mentions that in some countries like Sierra Leone and Angola, women were classified as "dependent." As a result, female ex-soldiers could claim none of the benefit packages for combatants. In recent years, international attention has greatly focused on child soldier issues, but female soldiers do not benefit from similar attention. In the DDR programs in Sierra Leone, only 6.5% of participants are women, while it is believed there were more actual female combatants. This program refused some women because they did not have a weapon in hand, which is one of the criteria of participation. Furthermore, many women were afraid to be harassed and stigmatized, so they never stepped forward (Harsh).

Women are usually proud of their contribution to war as soldiers, but traditional society still rejects them. For example, in Zimbabwe, female ex-soldiers explained how proud they were of their roles in war and how they expect to be seen as superwomen in their society, but everything changed upon their return because they were looked down upon (Harsh). This shows that the values of civil society and the army are at opposite ends of one another, and women that were persuaded at the time of war to join the army need to hold back their identity after leaving the army.

Christiana Lebbie, national coordinator of the non-governmental Friends of Africa Relief and Development Agency (FARDA) reports that rejection of these women from their societies also leads to failure in finding jobs. She adds that in order for them to survive, they have to engage in "commercial sex work." She points out that, for example in Sierra Leone, there is an area on top of Freetown's hills where some of these women build a hovel and earn some little money at the capital's bars, night clubs and hotels around the area. Therefore, these women continue suffering from sexual exploitation and abuse after war (Harsh).

The majority of states see ex-combatants as a threat to the stability of their nation. Therefore, after war, male combatants become a priority target, but female ex-combatants do not seem to be a great threat and are usually marginalized (de Watteville 10). However, some researchers in this area, such as Nathalie de Watteville, believe that women can be a great threat to the stability of a nation, as the majority of these women resist and reject returning to traditional roles in their societies (10). Therefore, reintegrating female ex-combatants is more challenging compared to men. After war, the experiences of female combatants in communities imply that "even more than men, these women have become unsuited to their former civilian environment because the change in their pattern of life was more radical" (Campbell 125). There are many other explanations as to why women soldiers are often ignored.

Female ex-combatants face manifold and widespread problems in being recognized as veterans and fail to benefit from demobilization programs. The wartime roles of these women are different from place to place. In some places, women have fought alongside with men on the frontlines of conflict zones. In other places, women had permission to work only in supplementary areas such as nursing, cooking, communications, and carrying supplies. Often,

men have refused to carry the same status—veteran status—as women, especially those women that have not fought on the frontlines with them. Sometimes, governments do recognize female soldiers’ contributions during conflict, but that does not mean women enjoyed the same benefits as men (McKay and Mazurana 10).

However, some argue that women do not qualify for the same benefits as men, especially when these women did not fight on the frontlines. However, female soldiers in general have difficulty proving their contribution in wars (de Watteville 23).

Some of the discriminatory routines in such societies should be stopped or at least weakened, because they have a negative effect on programs that are designed to benefit ex-combatants. Fredrikke believes that some discriminations against women can be controlled by sending out “serious warning” against promotion of some groups while devaluing some other groups with the same qualifications (31). Here, the writer actually asks for giving same benefits to female ex-combatants as given to male ex-combatants.

### **3.3.2.2 Support Economic Reintegration**

Facilitating access to jobs and receiving sufficient income are very useful in preventing former soldiers from going back to armed conflict. There are three basic programs present in this section to support economic reintegration: access to credit and income-generation projects, increased employment opportunity, and access to land projects.

### **3.3.2.3 Access to Credit and Income-Generation Projects**

It is important to facilitate ready access to loans in order to support an individual’s income-generating activities because in most cases, ex-fighters do not have enough funding to start businesses. Furthermore, because of high interest rates in the banking system, they are not able to

secure loans. Easy access to group loan projects is useful to increase the spirit of settlement and should be promoted by securing a funding mechanism (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 83).

#### **3.3.2.4 Employment Opportunity**

Furthermore, it is vital to provide communities with benefits such as employment opportunities and economic trade to facilitate reintegration processes as well as lessen poverty. However, an issue with employment opportunities is that sometimes simply training ex-combatants with new skills do not secure them a job. They also have to compete with experienced civilians for limited job opportunities in their communities' market. Therefore, ex-soldiers can become frustrated and pose a danger to the security of the society. As part of peace-building, the government should start development projects such as building new schools, hospitals, roads, telecommunication, drainage, and state-building to not only reconstruct community services, but also create jobs for veterans (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 84-85).

#### **3.3.2.5 Access to Land**

The majority of demobilized ex-combatants settle for cultivation of land for agricultural activities—it is the most popular and often only option. In some communities, it is difficult for civilians to access land because only community leaders and chiefs have privileged access to it. As a result, for the promotion of such projects, people at the head of communities need to become involved in the reintegration project and make land accessible to ex-soldiers in their communities. Another issue is landmines. Landmines and unexploded bombs cause various serious issues, and they usually exist in countries that have experienced instabilities for a long period of time. Landmines are not only the cause death of civilians, but also bring restriction on the movement of people, as well as farming and growing food in these lands. Therefore, it is

important to educate civilians about the danger of these areas through school and media, as well as start a project of mine cleaning with the help of civilians and ex-soldiers. As a result, these two projects—promoting agricultural activities and cleaning land mines—should be a leading component of reintegration process.

### **3.3.3 Rehabilitation (Rehabilitation and Reunification)**

The next R step in the process is rehabilitation (reunification). It is widely agreed upon that reunification of child soldiers with their parents must take place, but a heavily discussed issue is the best time for reunification. Some believe in immediate reunification of child soldiers with their parents as soon as family members are found and show willingness to accept the child and deal with the challenges as a family and society. Others believe that before family reunification can happen, it is necessary to provide a stable and protected temporary environment for child ex-soldiers, for example, setting up a temporary care center known as a rehabilitation centre for treating some particular health issues, as well as identification of any other special needs. These centres can provide a needed break between military life and new community life. These centers should be programmed carefully to provide such services (McKay and Mazurana 10). Susan McKay argues that the main focus of rehabilitation centers run by international organizations and local NGOs is on developing psychological programs that "support healing and build upon community strengths and resiliency" (10). Ex-soldiers attend rituals and traditional practices to feel cleansed and forgiven from their past and prepare for returning to their communities.

According to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children 2000 Annual Report, these centers provide "crucial and reliable medical care, including mental health care, hygiene and material assistance for returnee children and adolescents." However, a survey on young



women who went through these centers shows that these centers have not been quite successful. Sometimes, these centers' programs do not work at all for these young girls. For example, Mazurana et al.'s research indicates 29 percent of them claim that they did not find any programs helpful. The main reason is that these centers do not welcome returnees (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, and Parpart 34) Rehabilitation centers also need to be open to receive returnees and assist them with their problems (McKay and Mazurana 84).

### **3.3.4 Reconciliation (Remedy)**

The last step in the process is remedy, which is also known as reconciliation. In the remedy process, people who perpetrated crimes against ex-soldiers, for example, those that kidnapped children or forced them in different ways to join the armed forces need to go on trial; this is in order for criminals to know that they cannot get away with their sins. Furthermore, justice will stop other criminals from doing such crimes in future.

### **Conclusion**

The DDR program is known to be the best and most widely used program to reintegrate former soldiers back to society and bring peace and stability back to the community. The DDR program has three steps: disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. The reintegration program is further divided into more specific steps to make it more effective. These steps, known as R steps, are reinsertion, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconciliation. However, even though the purpose of each step is to facilitate reintegration of female soldiers back into society, it is noted that the reintegration of all soldiers is not receiving the attention it should. Programs have mainly focused on men rather than women. Therefore, more projects need to be designed based on the needs of these women. Furthermore, there is a need for proper counselling. The DDR program tries to provide counselling sessions for female ex-soldiers, but most women have reported them

as unsuccessful, because the program is short-term, while these women, especially those that are also victims of rape and violence, need long-term counselling services.

Next to the complexities of collecting data and health-related issues, the lack of collaboration by involved people makes reintegration of these girls even more complicated. People involved include the girls themselves, people in their communities, and officials. Girls' lack of interest in collaboration comes from their fear of being marginalized by their communities because of their past. People in communities show negative reactions to these girls, and girls are expected to rely on men in everyday life. Discriminatory behaviours have a root in communities' cultures and traditions. Furthermore, officials do not show enough collaboration: they either hide the existence of these girls from international eyes or, as McKay and Mazurana state in their book, organizations have in the past not recognized the phenomenon of female soldiers because they did not recognize their participations in army forces and their horrifying experience (33).

Therefore, the first step in a good demobilization and reintegration program is to identify female ex-soldiers. As was explained in the previous chapter, participants may attempt to limit the possibility of getting ex-combatant status for women. To solve this matter, de Watteville, in her research, "Addressing Gender Issues in Demobilization and Reintegration Programs" for World Bank (2002), suggests one solution for this issue: "chooses selection criteria that do not discriminate" (27). The DDR program is not a perfect program for reintegrating former female soldiers, but it is the best program that exists. However, constant research, especially on the contribution of female soldiers, can help to improve the process.

## **Final Conclusion**

Women's participation in wars is a phenomenon that has been around for centuries. Well-known female soldiers have fought in many different places throughout history. Currently, in some countries military training is mandatory for women, while in others women have the option to choose whether to join or not. However, participation of people younger than eighteen is prohibited in all countries under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Unfortunately, this law is not universally enforced, and, especially in Africa, boys and girls regularly fight in wars.

This paper examined the plight of young African women soldiers over the past twenty years. In chapter one, the factors that guide young African women to armed forces were divided into two types: push and pull.

Poverty, domestic violence, insecure community environment, unemployment and war were noted as push factors, conditions that drive young women away from their homes or cause their families or communities to do so. Poverty is the most common reason for girls to become soldiers. Sometimes they join armed forces because they have lost all their guardians and an army will provide their basic needs. Sometimes they are sold to military forces by their families in order to pay their debt. Domestic violence is also a common reason for girls soldiering as joining armed forces solves problems of physical or sexual abuse by guardians or relatives. An insecure community environment filled with weapons and conflict pushes women to seek safety. In armed forces, women have access to guns which give them confidence that they can protect themselves from any abuse. That same lack of safety may see them removed from their homes without their consent, kidnapped for use in the military as second line workers or sex slaves. This

is quite common in Africa. Many young women join armed forces because it is the best employment they can find in an unstable country. War itself is an important push factor. Many girls join armed forces simply because war is happening. Not surprisingly, as a community becomes more militarized, the number of young women joining military action increases.

Pull factors are conditions that attract young girls to military forces. Protection, employment, food and family are all pull factors. When there is conflict and instability in society, women seek protection, and in a war-affected country, the best place to find it is in the army where they have access to weapons. There, they also find employment. Serving military forces provides women different job opportunities and sometimes soldiering is the only job available within a community. Food is a powerful pull factor as well, as military forces are sometimes the only group with access to sufficient food in times of conflict when most other sources of income have been cut. Therefore, girls join armies to survive. This also helps their families, which play important roles in girls' development and decision making. It is quite normal for young women to join an army if some family members are already involved or if strong family ideologies motivate them. Identifying push and pull factors helps to clarify why women become soldiers and to understand issues that can threaten sustainable peace.

The roles of women in wars fall into three categories: sex slaves, second-level workers, and frontline fighters. Incidents of sexual exploitation of women in wars in Africa are common and sex slavery is recognized as the highest motivation for kidnapping girls. Because fear of HIV/AIDS continues to be high in Africa, men look for ever-younger sexual partners believing them to be uninfected. Sometimes, these girls become "wives" of their captors and provide them additional services. Women and girls are popular for their labour at second-level jobs such as

cooks, messengers, spies and more. Though these jobs are labelled as second-level, they are crucial, and military forces cannot function without them. Because of their importance in second-level jobs, women are often mistakenly stereotyped as support workers, not combatants. In some African countries, women train to fight. Even pregnant women are expected to fight in emergencies. Some women even become commanders. And when the fighting ends, those who survive face new challenges in the reintegration process.

In order to help women back into their communities, the most widely used international program in Africa is called DDR, which stands for its three steps of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Its goal is to foster sustainable peace and development by successfully reintegrating soldiers to society. Many DDR programs in place over the last twenty years failed, sending countries back into conflict. However, since it is so widely used, Chapter 3 of this research paper studied the DDR program with a view to introducing it fully, highlighting its weaknesses, and offering possible solutions for it. This was done by looking at each of its three steps.

Disarmament is a complex process to disarm former soldiers by collecting and disposing of weapons and preventing weapons smuggling. Peacekeepers cannot expect all soldiers to hand in their weapons, so they may encourage them to exchange guns for money, a practice that disfavors second-level workers without weapons, most of whom are women or girls. Weapons also bring a sense of safety to a soldier. A parallel disarmament, in which opposing forces surrender their weapons at the same time, is intended to satisfy that need for protection so weapons are easier to give up. Here, the theory is easier than the application. Complexities of collecting data because of language barriers add to the problem of effective disarmament. Proper

methods keeping track of collected weapons and their disposal are critical and might hinder if weapons continue to be smuggled in from neighbouring countries. Demobilization is the next step toward transforming war into peace. Within this process, as it pertains specifically to women, is the need to identify female ex-combatants and abducted girls and set up cantonment sites in which they may be housed and registered. Identification of female former soldiers is important because studies show that they are often ignored or dismissed, and when they are not recognized as soldiers, they cannot benefit from reintegration packages. Among challenges to identification is the women themselves, who feel they will be stigmatized by their families and communities due to a belief that women soldiers, who are commonly raped, lose their value for marriage. One way around this is to keep their identities completely confidential and give them assurance that their identities will never be revealed. Another issue is the level of dependence of women on men. In many African countries, women need men to speak on their behalf and confirm their military involvement. Therefore, peacekeepers should work on eliminating this discrimination by treating women as independent people. In addition, there have been cases in Africa in which governments conceal the presence of women on their side while they point out the women present in rival groups. The UN must take a strong role in pushing governments to cooperate with the program instead of hiding the problems. Furthermore, experience shows that information on demobilization is less accessible to women than men. To solve this, it was suggested that governments be encouraged to use formal channels to broadcast information and strengthen informal channels like health centers to spread the word. In demobilization, cantonment sites are very important as places to prepare former soldiers for their new lives. Cantonment sites should have recreation and training facilities and should provide a safe environment. Unfortunately, there are numerous cases in Africa in which former female soldiers

were sexually abused during their settlements in these sites. This highlights a need to build higher security for these sites. The last important step in demobilization is registration. In this process, information on ex-soldiers is registered and the information from former girl soldiers is used to find their parents or guardians for the process of reunification. However, complexities of data collection because of language barriers among soldiers with various backgrounds negatively affect registration. Reintegration is the final process of DDR programs. In this process, information on skills, aptitudes and expectations is collected. Unfortunately, male soldiers usually receive the most attention in reintegration programs and women are often ignored or underestimated. Therefore, there should be serious attempts to include female soldiers in this program because achieving sustainable peace and development is not possible without participation of all members of the community. In order to make reintegration more manageable and effective, it is divided into specific steps known as R steps, which are reinsertion, reintegration, rehabilitation and remedy.

Reinsertion encourages female soldiers to return to their communities by providing sex education, medical care for women with physical challenges, and counselling for women affected by horrors of war and violence. Studies show that these sessions are often too short to make them helpful.

Reintegration's main focus is on economics. As such, it needs to provide access to reintegration packages that transcend current gender discrimination. Such packages may include skill training, job placement, and loans. Economic reintegration programs such as access to credit and income generation projects, employment opportunities, and access to land can give new life to former combatants. Providing easy access to loans in income-generation projects can assist ex-soldiers



to start their own businesses. Assisting former female soldiers in accessing land can be a big help to young women whose primary occupation prior to soldiering was usually farming. As farmers once again, they will not only be able to feed themselves and their dependents, but also generate income. Often, though, landmines render otherwise good agricultural land useless, highlighting a need for more landmine clearing projects.

The next step to reintegration is rehabilitation or reunification. Some researchers suggest reuniting young children with their parents as soon as possible, while others believe these children need to stay in rehabilitation centers and prepare themselves for their new lives. These centers provide programs to relieve a soldier's guilt and pain by participating in rituals and traditional practices, for example. Studies show that these centers are not as effective as they could be if they accepted returnee girls and provided longer term counselling.

Once all other reintegration steps are achieved, the process moves to remedy or reconciliation. It is here that criminals receive punishment for crimes like kidnapping and rape, and the community learns that there is no escaping justice. A factor that may affect the success of reconciliation programs is weakness in involving women directly in the program. There is also need for longer-term counselling sessions. Therefore, this paper supports direct involvement of female ex-soldiers in designing projects for their own reintegration process and insists on using these women's feedbacks to improve the projects. In order to assist these young girls effectively, it is important to learn about all the experiences female soldiers go through.

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