

LIBERIA

Gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

Women's activism for peace and disarmament

At the end of the civil war in Liberia in 1993, the Security Council authorised the then-UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) to monitor the cease-fire between the parties and assist with the cantonment, disarmament and demobilisation of the combatants. During the mandate of UNOMIL, women's groups were active in organising around disarmament. The Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) began a campaign in 1993 that called for the factions to be disarmed prior to the installation of the transitional government.¹ In March 1994, LWI and other women's groups organised a march and wrote an open letter to the UN Special Representative calling for disarmament to start before the handover of power to the transitional government. Women's groups also started an organisation called Funds for Disarmament which raised money to purchase weapons from combatants in order to destroy them.²

Unresolved insecurity, poor governance and slow development plunged Liberia back into turmoil in 1997, with new conflicts erupting among the Government of Liberia, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). Women and girls actively participated as combatants, supporters, peace-builders and political actors in every stage of the armed conflict. They joined the ranks of armed groups, in some cases voluntarily and in some cases not, in order to survive harsh economic conditions or because they believed in the cause for which a particular side was fighting. In total, women and children are thought to have comprised up to 38 percent of the 38,000 to 53,000 Liberian combatants eligible for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) in 2004.

In April 2003, Liberian women began a Mass Action for Peace campaign which drew in "women from the market place, churches, mosques, civil society, refugee camps and the government."³ President Charles Taylor granted them an audience and allowed them to read their statement. When the factions signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Ghana on 18 August 2003, the women took their Mass Action to Accra, "bodily blocking the delegates in the hall and blocking the entrance" when rebel leaders threatened to walk out.⁴ Their actions succeeded in giving them entry to key meetings. As a result, the Accra Agreement, which came into force on 18 August 2003, not only outlined the provisions for the establishment of a DDR programme, but also included language on the protection and promotion of women's human rights.⁵

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process

Planning gender-sensitive DDR: The World Bank, the United Nations and other actors developed a Results-Focused Transition Framework (RFTF) in order to implement the political and development objectives of the Accra Accords. Not only did the RFTF consider DDR a priority cluster, but it also specifically stated the need for disarmament and demobilisation of female and male ex-combatants, including children and disabled people. The RFTF set an initial target of only 2,000 female combatants to be demobilised. Nevertheless, the establishment of a clear target number for these beneficiaries marked an improvement compared to earlier DDR processes which did not even consider female combatants, supporters and dependents to belong to a target group.⁶

On 19 September 2003, the Security Council adopted resolution 1509, which established the

1 African Women and Peace Support Group, "Liberian Women Peacemakers: Fighting for the Right to be Seen, Heard and Counted," *Africa World Press*, New Jersey, 2004.

2 UNIFEM, "Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration," New York, October 2004.

3 "Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace," *WIPNET Journal*, 12 December 2003.

4 Ibid.

5 UNDP, "Strategic and Operational Framework of Reintegration Support of Ex-Combatants," Monrovia, 20 April 2004.

6 UNIFEM, "Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration".

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United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); the resolution tasked UNMIL with incorporating a gender perspective into its activities in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.⁷ Resolution 1509 requested that UNMIL develop a DDR Action Plan that would pay “particular attention to the needs of child combatants and women.”⁸ Like the RFTF’s progress in having been able to set gender-sensitive targets for the first time, UNMIL’s mandate and scope also marked progress compared to other missions in that UNMIL was able to recognise the need for separate facilities and services for women, girls, boys and men in the DDR process.

A false start: Despite UNMIL’s mandate and DDR Action Plan, the DDR process in Liberia suffered a false start. Over 12,000 fighters presented themselves to be demobilised at a cantonment site in Monrovia that was only intended to accommodate 1,000. The camp could not provide adequate services for the unexpected numbers. Overwhelmed by the large numbers of combatants who arrived eager to trade their weapons for the US\$ 300 cash payment, UNMIL was unable to provide the payments.⁹ Thus the combatants, who came with high expectations, were neither able to fulfil their basic needs nor receive the promised benefits. As a result, riots erupted and many male and female combatants were injured.

The first DDR process was officially suspended on 17 December 2003, after 12,664 combatants had been disarmed and 8,686 weapons collected.

Support for DDR by women’s civil society organisations: The Liberian Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) was called upon to assist UNMIL cope with the chaotic conditions in the cantonment site. Women came to the site to calm the combatants, provide them with essential services and safeguard the underage combatants. WIPNET members and volunteers, who were largely civilian women without formal training or equipment, performed essential tasks at the cantonment site that would normally have been the responsibility of armed military personnel.

Shortly before the suspension of the DDR programme, Liberian women’s groups held a press conference to identify key flaws they had observed in the DDR process. WIPNET, along with the LWI, the Christian Community, the Government of Liberia and local NGOs, acted under the banner “Concerned Women of Liberia” to identify the gaps they thought had contributed to the chaos in the cantonment sites. These included:

- The lack of clarity surrounding how information on the disarmament package was being given to combatants
- Inadequate transportation and logistical arrangements, in particular the shortage of vehicles and adequate lodging facilities
- The fact that the DDR process was not localised, which created cultural and language barriers between the combatants and the peacekeepers¹⁰

The women’s groups expressed a “ready-to-help” posture, highlighting that the abovementioned flaws could have been mitigated if citizens with expertise and experience in the field, including women, had been brought into the process.¹¹ As a consequence of the Concerned Women of Liberia’s work, Liberian women worked with UNMIL and the Ministry of Gender and Development to design an awareness campaign that used print media and

7 Security Council Resolution 1509 (S/RES/2003/1509) “reaffirms the importance of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peace-building in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000)” and “recalls the need to address violence against women and girls as a tool of warfare, and encourages UNMIL as well as the Liberian parties to actively address these issues.”

8 Ibid.

9 “Second Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia”, 22 March 2004 (S/2004/229); and IRIN News, “Liberia: Former Fighters in Second Day of Riots, UNMIL Offers Initial Payment,” 9 December 2003, http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=38318&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=LIBERIA.

10 Nelson, Estella, “Women Identify Flaws in DDDR Program, Want to Assist,” The NEWS, Monrovia, 12 December 2003, <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200312120184.html>.

11 Ibid.

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radio to encourage women and girls to participate in the DDR process.¹²

The re-launched DDR process: DDR was officially re-launched on 15 April 2004.¹³ During the interim period and partly in response to the problems identified by Concerned Women of Liberia, UNMIL created a Joint Operational Plan which articulated specific provisions and services that were to be made available to women and girls in the DDR process. These included separate transport; separate registration lines; and separate medical examination, dining, sleeping and recreation areas for male and female ex-combatants. In addition, reproductive health and gender-based violence screening and services were identified as priority activities while combatants remained in the camps.¹⁴ Access to DDR was not based on the holding of weapons: “Women Associated with Fighting Forces” were eligible for enrolment. With its mandate to mainstream gender in all the activities of the Mission, UNMIL’s Office of the Gender Advisor undertook a comprehensive assessment on reintegration opportunities for men and women and identified specific requirements of female vis-à-vis male beneficiaries during the process.

Despite these preparations, UN IRIN News reported that during the first week of the re-launched process, UNMIL had disarmed and demobilised fewer than 130 women out of a total of 1,789. As the weeks went on, however, more women presented themselves for disarmament and demobilisation.¹⁵ By February 2005, 22,370 women and 2,440 girls (24% of all participants in the DDR programme) had been disarmed and demobilised. By the end of 2006, 13,223 of the women had been ‘reinserted’, mainly into agriculture, formal education and vocational training.¹⁶

► Gender-responsive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) is discussed in section 5.1 of the *Defence Reform and Gender Tool*, and in section 7.1 of the *Security Sector Reform and Gender Tool*.

12 UN DPKO, *Gender Mainstreaming in Peacekeeping Operations: Progress Report*, (New York: 2005), <http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/PBPS/Library/Gender%20Mainstreaming%20Progress%20report.pdf>.

13 “Second Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia”; and IRIN News, “Liberia: Former Fighters in Second Day of Riots, UNMIL Offers Initial Payment.”

14 Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, “Joint Operational Plan,” UNMIL, April 15, 2004.

15 “Third Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia,” May 26, 2004 (S/2003/430).

16 UNMIL web-page, <http://www.unmil.org/>.