

**UNMAKING A CHILD SOLDIER: TOWARDS A FEMALE CONSCIOUS DDR PROGRAMME****Bulbul Prakash**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The inclusion of child soldiers in DDR programmes is not a new area to the researchers and various aspects have been already explored in literature. This article aims to provide a qualitative analysis into the current literature on the eligibility criteria for female combatants to join DDR programmes, their underrepresentation in existing programmes, and finally on the need for a feminist conscious DDR. As the research requires analysis of existing data on the matter, document analysis and secondary data analysis constitute the key methodology in this work. The social identity is a self-perceived notion from the social cognition which shapes according to the surrounding and its influences. Hence the Social Identity theory (SIT) is also applied to understand the discrepancies in the DDR narrative of the girl child soldiers. The review also identifies the different forms of masculinities emerging in violent conflicts and the type of constraints that are to be enforced in conflict zones.*

**Keywords:** Soldiers, Child abuse, DDR, Gendered security.**INTRODUCTION**

The current global definition of girl soldiers came from Paris principles (2007) where a child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to:

“any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities (UNICEF, 2007)”

Girls recruited and used for sexual purposes and forced marriage comes under the definition. There are variant definitions for the term's 'girlhood' and 'womanhood' in many societies and clear cultural understanding exists, to underpin the expression. In Western societies, girlhood may extend into adolescence, during which time girls frequently involve in a variety of exploratory behaviours which are not traditionally considered 'feminine' (Strang, Wessels: 2006). In many cultures, giving birth to a child is interpreted as an indication that a woman has 'shed' her girlhood and entered into womanhood. From this point onward, researchers and international agencies started to recognize the flexibility and sensitivity of cultural activities related to age (Tonheim, 2010) in the issue of girl soldiers.

**PARTICIPATION OF GIRL SOLDIERS IN ARMED CONFLICT**

The participation of girl soldiers into armed groups includes a multitude of reasons ranging from poverty, shelter, political allegiance, security etc. (Mckay 1998: Denov and Alexandra 2013: Brett 2014). Child soldiers Global report 2004 stated that in many parts of South and Southeast Asia, girls join armed group to escape from the domestic slavery, forced marriage and other forms of gender based discrimination from communities. Thambelu Lakshmi and Pangi Shieli, who joined the Naxal movement in India's Vishakhapatnam district, cited forced marriage and domestic abuse as a reason for joining the movement (The Hindu, 2018). The Maoist organization's conscious efforts in Dandakaranya to abolish different forms of patriarchy assisted in the recruiting process as well. The Maoists were mostly successful in preventing 'forced marriages' and marriages between cousins (Ramana, 2015). Brett (2014) in her report from Democratic Republic of Congo commented that a minority of girls who voluntarily join the armed group gets to choose which commander she shall be physically involved with, rather than waiting to be abducted and raped. However voluntary enlistment does not protect them from rape and other exploitations.

The role played by girls differs according to the armed groups. In African countries, 40 percent of the girls recruited are often active combatants

engaged in hostilities (Fore, 2020). In Nigeria and Chad Basin, they are used for suicide attacks whereas some armed groups in West Asia train them for tactical weapon use'. Seventy percent of the girls abducted by armed groups experience rape, sexual slavery and other exploitations. Depending upon the characteristics of the armed group, ideology etc. certain armed groups recruit girls whereas others do not (Haer, 2019). The Taliban in Afghanistan never recruit girls into soldiering as they are confined to the domestic sphere and are supposed to fulfil the goals of taking care of the menfolk in the family. There has been a widespread separation of gender from childhood itself and this increases their affinity towards the opposite gender. Everything within the 'talib land' belongs to them and this does not exclude the women. They are the properties for their sexual pleasures. The baby soldier living in mountainous regions has no idea about what is happening in the outside world. Everything is within "But I am the man narrative" (RHC, 2019).

Although we know that women and girls are used by armed groups, only a tiny percentage of them are formally identified. This suggests that, as a result of the stigma associated with their membership in armed organisations, they are far less likely to be liberated through official DDR than the men and are substantially less likely to be separated informally. For example, during their partnership with armed groups, some females become pregnant, generally due to rape. When they return to their community with one or more of its own children and even their own families, they experience severe humiliation and stigmatisation.

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR DDR PROGRAMMES

Though women and girl soldiers make up at least half of the population in the post conflict situation, (African Union 2014), they were not perceived as a security threat and hence there was no specific provision on their entry into the DDR process. Only those female combatants possibly possessing a weapon are considered eligible. Their weapons, ammunition, uniform etc. will be then handed over, demobilized by commanders and shall be provided with an ID card and demobilization certificate to access the successive processes (Maya, 2007). A major reason for the exclusion of women and girls' soldiers according to the reports by Coulter (2008), Denov (2009) and Maya (2007) stated that female

participants were not identified as combatants, sidelining them as mere 'camp followers' or dependents. This is generally due to their usage of weapons such as machetes that do not fit the eligibility criteria, female soldiers who self-demobilise before the commencement of DDR programs and commanders' reluctance to access the DDR benefits as the latter serve as domestic workers, 'wives' sexual slaves, cooks, child keepers, informants etc.

### INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS ON WOMEN AND GIRL SOLDIERS

**(i) UN Security Council Resolution 1325:** It recognises women's role to conflict resolution and sustainable peace and underlines that women must be included in conflict prevention, peace building and post conflict reconstruction. It urges "all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts" (resolution (S/RES/1325). It tried to fill a gap in the global peace keeping processes by addressing the key concerns of women and trying to reach the gender mainstreaming policies in conflict and peacebuilding processes (Binder et. al., 2008). It also assures women and girls their right, in an atmosphere free from violence and threats, to carry out post conflict reconstruction activities. However, women and girls continue to endure marginalisation and insecurity, despite such well-intended endeavours. This raises questions not just about the effectiveness of such programmes, but also about the impact this marginalisation, on the long-term social reconstruction, especially on the establishment of democratic institutions in keeping with fundamental human rights.

**(ii) Integrated DDR Standards:** The Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration established an integrated framework for the development and improvement of DDR programmes in response to Resolution 1325 and other UN policies on DDR, called Integrated DDR standards (IDDRS) while taking into account the needs of special groups including women and girls. The IDDRS 2006 delineates the gender responsive DDR process. It says that each phase of the DDR should have a gender-sensitive approach. This begins with discussions about the ways of conducting the DDR during the peace talks. DDR advisors involved in such discussions should guarantee adequate integration of women's

interests and concerns (IDDRS, 2006). The participation of female combatants where they could comprehend the clauses and provisions of the programme at the peace table is necessary. Everyone should be aware of the gender issues of distinct communities or cultures and be willing to take suggestions from female representatives. The partners to this DDR process should include women local councillors, female representatives from NGOs and local agencies, women community leaders, etc. The recent operational guide published in 2014 moves further and speaks of two categories in DDR programmes: (i) Gender responsive and (ii) female specific DDR planning and programming.

- **Gender-responsive intervention:** This address both the problem of male and female, for example by analysing the different life choices of women vs. men or general safety issues.
- **Female interventions:** address the unique needs of women in order to benefit equally from DDR programmes as men, for example, via child care and trauma counselling for sexual abuse survivors.

The definition of female soldiers and eligibility conditions for joining DDR programme seem to be the most significant contribution of the IDDRS. The new definition of female combatants includes both women and girls in the term of 'females associated with armed forces and groups' (FAAFG). Adding to it, the section on women differentiates between FAAFG and female combatants and dependents who relies on ex combatants socially and financially.

Therefore, the IDDRS play an important role in the present gender and DDR discussions, highlighting the variables that cause marginalization of women in each phase of DDR programmes; featuring female specific interventions such as the role of women's organisations in organising information campaigns for female community members, radio networks, encouraging community mental health practices for psychological rehabilitation practices for female soldiers, leadership training etc. There have been successful case studies from Liberia when women agencies were crucial stakeholders in the peace process (Tarnaala, 2016).

However, the IDDRS remained a mere policy-oriented document with scant analysis of these elements' origins and relative significance. When assessing the relevant factors affecting their participation at each level of the DDR process, it fails to go beyond listing mentality that covers

policy literature. It fails to rebuild the fundamental gender disparities and societal distrust to provide an appropriate solution. Instead of challenging established gender roles, it focused on the specific needs of women and girl soldiers.

Therefore, despite the many efforts on gender responsive DDR programs, the theory faced several criticisms including the under representation of women and girl soldiers, absence of women in peace talks, biased eligibility requirements (such as weapon tests to identify whether they are eligible for DDR process or not) etc. Let's discuss this further in the coming sections.

### UNDERREPRESENTATION OF GIRL SOLDIERS IN DDR PROCESSES

Violence, gendered inequalities, and stigmatisation remain major barriers in the reintegration of girl soldiers into civilian life. As noted by Denov and Maclure, the presence of girls as soldiers is less researched in both academic literature and in public awareness (Maclure, R., & Denov, M, 2009). The girl's transition to womanhood during armed conflict, the number of forced girl mothers and their children, self-demobilised girl combatants etc. are listed as some of the factors leading to their underrepresentation in DDR processes (Mæland, 2010). Vastapuu argues that the role of girl soldiers has been neglected by both the mainstream women's organisations and the state building traditionalists as the former regards more urgent issues must be prioritised above this "marginal" phenomenon. In practise, a girl soldier is 'neither civilian' for mainstream women's organisations 'nor soldier' for DDR practitioners and hence ignored in peace negotiation processes (Vastapuu, 2020).

Ortega (2015) and Vastapuu (2020) cite various reasons for the underrepresentation of female soldiers in DDR programs.

**(i) Inadequate knowledge and awareness:** Generally, it is the male commander who is asked to deliver the list of soldiers for DDR processes. The practical information on the program is also spread through them making it difficult for the participation of the latter. During peace negotiations "the kind of womanhood matters" (Vastapu, 2020) - she has to be the epitome of "peace loving mother and never rough in tongue and behaviour" to be given a seat at the negotiation table.

**(ii) Stigmatisation:** In a study conducted by "Save the Children" in 2004 at Sierra Leone, the children

viewed reintegration as being loved and cared for by families and communities, and meeting their basic needs such as food, shelter, and water (Save the children, 2004). However, the condition is different for girl soldiers who return to the patriarchal practices of taking care of domestic and child care responsibilities instead of using the skills from the training (Mazurana, 2004). Girl mothers are forced to take up jobs for economic self-sufficiency. A high number of girls take up prostitution to support themselves when left out by families and communities (Maeland, 2006).

Most often, female soldiers refuse to participate in DDR programs due to the fear of being excluded from their community once their identity has been revealed (Persson, 2008). According to the reports from Amnesty International (2006), a high number of females do not wish to be mixed with males during the reintegration process due to the years of trauma and mental impairment they had from being bush wives and combatants. Inter Personal Violence (IPV) is common among girl soldiers in Sub Saharan Africa due to years of being tortured as bush wives and sexual slaves (Bhardwaj et al. 2018). Coker (2002) identifies suicidality, substance abuse, PTSD etc., as a result of this long-time mental impairment. Most of the reintegration programs fail to provide financial aid to their children born from the warlords due to poor funding reintegration programmes. Hence, staying with her husband is the only way to sustain life. The limited job opportunities available for women in the society to support themselves and the new-born complicates the situation further. DDR vocational training programmes for female fighters is usually available only for traditional women's jobs such as sewing and cooking. This is humiliating for women and girls who are over-qualified for jobs provided by DDR training but is also increasingly likely to remobilise or engage in organised crime when frustrated with the absence of job choices. One of the reintegration offers given to female combatants by the Nepal government includes integration into the Nepal army as part of the peace accord signed between UN and the Maoist leaders. The prospects of this permanent job attracted many female ex combatants. However, the entry requires a great level of education and skills. Being abducted a very young age, most of the female ex combatants will be illiterate – forcing them to accept the cash compensation (Luna, 2019). Nirmala Gurung, an ex-combatant delineates her

experience where she was denied entry into Nepal Army being over aged (she was 30) and not fitting the NA criteria of education. Child care responsibilities also force them to not travel and attend the job interviews conducted in urban areas (Luna, 2019). In many communities, female returnees wouldn't be allowed to remarry and will be considered a “bad woman” as fighter partners will bring shame to the tribe (Braberg, 2016). According to Chris Coulter, fighting is construed to be included in the world of men in ways that it is not for women, and fighting women are commonly considered “less feminine”, “unnatural” or sometimes “incomprehensible” (Coulter, 2008). Hence after reintegration families, communities and relatives often regard them as “rebel women”.

**(iii) Inconsistencies in guidelines:** Since its official launch on 19th November 2019, the revised version of the UN Integrated Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) has not been available to the general public yet. One of the major inconsistencies with the IDDRS (2006), is the exclusion of non-active female soldiers (Shepherd 2010). Though the “one person one-gun policy” has been renewed, the DDR staff often fail to communicate the policy change to the combatants, forcing many female soldiers who are dependents and sexual slaves, out of the programme (Ruhl, 2019).

**(iv) Economic reasons:** The journey towards the disarmament site itself is costly and there is no guarantee of acceptance to the programme for female soldiers. DDR programmes typically provide financial support in the form of cash payments to former combatants because cash is fluid and provides more flexibility for use. Female soldiers are paid less than men as the payment corresponds to their ranks in armed groups and the former hold fewer higher positions. In addition, several former combatants said the male commanders or husbands robbed their money. Caritas Makeni, a local NGO in Sierra Leone reported that the cash benefits of girl soldiers will end up in the pockets of their commanders as it could give the perception that using them as combatants could end up as a ‘reward’ for the commanders (Bouta, 2005).

Not only does exclusion of female ex-combatants imply discrimination against female soldiers by the UN-led DDR itself, it also emphasises the gender inequalities in

accessing vital facilities such as education, skills training, and support to physical and mental health for female ex-combatants (Steenbergen, 2020). In order to promote empowerment and reintegration of ex-combatants to achieve inclusive, positive peace, the DDR needs to focus on challenging instead of reproducing Gender inequalities. For these reasons, UN-led DDR must work with female ex-combatants to reintegrate and challenge imprecise narratives in the documentation provided by UN-led DDR and between local and foreign DDR officials.

### **GENDER-RESPONSIVE DDR PROGRAMMING**

IDDRS (2006) observes that gender roles and relations are defined by cultural, regional, and communal contexts. The Security Council encouraged all those engaged in DDR programme to fulfil the various needs and the requirements of female and male ex-combatants as well as of their dependents" in the document. UN Women (2020) states that, for making a DDR programme gender sensitive, the programme cycle has to be planned, executed, monitored, and reviewed in a gender-sensitive manner. As a result, interventions should be carried out with sensitivity to and awareness of the unique environment in which a DDR programme is being carried out. Hence in all stages of its development, gender responsive DDRs employ gender sensitive approaches. It implies "identifying the distinct needs and realities of women, men, girls and boys based on the social construction of gender roles". By recognising this need and existing conceptions of male and female, gender-sensitive programmes address women, men, girls' and boys' varied vulnerabilities and build on their diverse capabilities to act as agents of change (United Nations Peace Keeping 2020).

A gender responsive DDR is based on three major elements:

- (i) Gender equality recognising different needs and priorities of women, men, girls and boys
- (ii) Non-discrimination and equitable treatment for all groups
- (iii) Culturally sensitive and people centred

These assumptions acknowledge that "people of different ages and physical capacities, as well as people of different sexes and genders, have different requirements." The biggest challenge faced by most of the DDR program implementation so far is the lack of an intersectional approach

forcing the combatants to be perceived homogenously or the 'one size fits for all' approach (Ramljak, 2020). The specific needs and demands of the female combatants are left unaddressed. They are discriminated against in different instances like aid distribution (De Watteville, 2002). Often the leader of a household, who is usually a male, receives more reintegration assistance than the female spouse. Even when they are heads of households, they hardly receive reintegration packages (ibid). Authorities and leaders of the community are fully informed and engaged in this process. They cannot have the same opportunity as their male counterparts to make decisions. It is usual for men to make choices for women and girls, mostly due to the former's lack of experience or the fear of speaking publicly (Ramljak, 2020). Moreover, many reviewed case studies from Liberia, Uganda, Nepal etc. emphasise that gender experts are often clueless about DDR programmes and lacks the necessary skill to effectively support the drafting of DDR provisions in peace agreements (Tarnaala, 2016). Furthermore, gender issues are frequently dismissed by DDR specialists with military or security backgrounds. As a result, there is a continuing need for engagement on gender-aware programming and sensitization.

Though gender responsive DDR programming has been in the limelight since 2006, very few studies focus on the gender-based analyses of the different experiences of women, girls, men and boys involved in armed conflict (Tarnaala, 2016). A gender disaggregated data shall reveal a clear picture of what the former combatants know and did during the conflict (Douglas, 2004). Operational guide to IDDRS by UN delineates in detail on the gender responsive DDR programming but the securitisation aspect has been given more significance than the former. As a result, male combatants who are regarded as more dangerous than female combatants get prioritised over the latter. Another major issue with the operational guide is lack of inclusion in gender aware interventions. Rather than giving a separate section on gender in the guide, it shall be worthy if gender perspective gets reflected throughout all the chapters (Branco, 2017). Most of the operational guide on the gender responsive DDR highlights the fact that "women build peace", portraying women as the instruments of peace and development. None of the guidelines underlines the right of women and

girl soldiers to lead a life of their choice or their right to participate in DDR programmes.

Therefore, the major reasons for the inadequacies in Gender-responsive DDR programme include the lack of commitment on the part of senior managers, insufficient resources, lack of expertise, marginalisation within the implementing institution and the inability to translate its content into action. Little or no attention given to the conditions of women increases the possibility of exclusion and insecurity of female ex-combatants in the DDR (Otto, 2009).

### DISINTEGRATION AND REINTEGRATION

Having seen the major deterrents on the Gender responsive DDR programmes, it is important to delve deeper into the concept of reintegration for girl soldiers. Reintegration is the most crucial process in the DDR programme of girl soldiers when compared to the Disarmament and Demobilisation phases. Once recruited into the armed group, the child soldiers undergo a disintegration from their families and communities and are forced to follow their new lifestyle. Baines (2014) in his study on the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda explains how families are created within armed groups by forcing the girls to marry the commanders. New recruits were asked to forget their old families and embrace the LRA family (Baines, 2009). Once the war ends or if the soldiers manage to self-demobilize from the armed groups, they have to disintegrate from this 'war family' and reintegrate back into the community. In the similar manner, most of the female soldiers abducted at a very young age might not have any memories about their past lives. Certain young combatants who have lost their families and relatives as a result of war face a similar situation, as it is not reintegration but the beginning of a new life. As a result, these processes intersect with a novel approach to social integration, or reintegration, returning into the (civilian) society.

The experts and international standards have emphasised that the transition from soldiers to civilians is significant. According to Torjesen (2013), social reintegration is a process in which soldiers undergo identity transformation from 'combatants' to 'civilians' and "alter their behaviour by ceasing to use violent tactics and increasing activities sanctioned positively by mainstream society." Similarly, in order to properly

reintegrate, the impacts of [military] socialisation must be reversed (Vermeij, 2011)

Social reintegration is defined as "the process where an ex-combatant and his family feels part of society (Kingma, 2001). As a result, it is largely about mutual readjustment on the side of both former child soldiers and their communities, the mending of broken relationships, and the re-establishment of community acceptance. As a result, former girl soldiers' relationships with members of their families and communities are crucial for effective reintegration. The causes of feeling part of society have not been explored, as well as the duration that the former combatant must indicate that they feel are part of the community.

One of the most challenging and gruelling obstacles in the successful reintegration of girl soldiers have been stigmatisation and social control, though hardly few studies have an in-depth focus on the same (Mazurana 2002: Tonheim 2012: Maeland 2010: Vastapu 2020). In Angola, most of the girl soldiers prefers to stay away from their communities due to stigmatization, economic reasons and forced marriage (Tonheim, 2012).

A pertinent question raised by many scholars and practitioners on the reintegration of girl soldiers has been, whether the culture and societal norms eases or makes it more difficult for the girl soldiers to return into their families and communities. Harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation conducted in Sierra Leone (Strang, 2006) for girls who were abducted at young age, burial rituals in Mozambique (Honwana, 1999), 'Swasthani' and other purity rituals in Nepal (Brandon, 2014) present challenges in the cultural approach to DDR program. However, these rituals and healing practices have been tested effective in contributing to the psycho social needs of the former combatants when governments and other international mechanisms fall short of funding or technical challenges. Safanatu (Stark, 2006), a former girl soldier from Sierra Leone recalls her experiences before and after cleansing ritual by the community. Though her parents welcomed her heartily, the rest of the family alienated her as the "rebel from bush." "I also wanted to be cleansed because of what happened with the rebels. Since the rebels 'used' me, I needed to be cleansed (Pre-cleansing)" "When we came into town, the community welcomed us. They were happy with me. They stopped teasing me and calling me names (Post-cleansing)"

Because of poor treatment from communities, girls who have been stigmatised, deemed "impure," and "devalued" agree to cleansing rituals. Communities' lack of complete acceptance provides a fertile ground for violence and psychological issues. In Sierra Leone, a survey of former adults and child soldiers found an association between higher rates of exposure to violence with lower levels of family and community acceptance. Mistreatment, stigma and marginalisation creates obstacles which delays further reintegration into the community, thereby forcing them to relocate to other areas. For such individuals, relocating to new areas meant facing the uphill challenge of reintegration by themselves, without the support of family and village. This hinders long term reintegration process and widens the gap between former girl soldiers and people in their immediate surroundings. Thus, healing rituals are essential in the reintegration of girl soldiers where they gain formal acceptance and are considered to be in a better social position once they undergo the process. In this way, society can also leave the troubled past behind. Certain rituals conducted among Sierra Leone's tribes burn the previous possessions of ex combatants (Honwana, 2011) and welcome them for a new life. Hence as Brett (2004) pointed out, the traditional practices offer two choices in front of girl soldiers: stay silent, undergo the community practices and lead a 'normal life' or speak out, risk stigmatisation and move away. Alipanga, a lecturer from Gulu University, Uganda (2010) notes from the reintegration of former girl mothers in Northern Uganda that traditional based therapy suits better for their psychosocial needs than Western based therapy. Michael Wessels, professor of psychology at Columbia University, commented on the lack of professional psychological counselling in war zone areas during the reintegration process (Vandenhoe, 2011). The absence of specialised support can be overpowered by non-specialized support, family support and community support, especially for girl soldiers which they are so in need of. Cultural sensitivity is a necessary factor here. Local practices and rituals to appease the spirits such as 'cen' in Angola, offer solutions and strengthen their resilience.

Traditional rituals for reintegration have great potential to help child soldiers and communities in a manner that culturally fits the resources and practitioners available locally (Kohrt, 2015). Mazurana (2004) notes that community-based

rituals conducted in Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Uganda help the women and girl soldiers to reintegrate into the communities. Restorative rituals help female combatants considered 'impure' or 'polluted' by the communities to remarry (Kohrt, 2015). However, in the case of girl soldiers, these rituals often come counterproductive in the long-term success. The rituals of cleansing and restoration disempower women and girl soldiers and make them socially acceptable individuals. In the case of former female combatants who marry male fighters generally end up in divorce as the latter prefer more 'modest' and 'civilian' women as their partner (Hale, 2001). Weber (2020), in her interview with former girl soldiers in Guatemala remarked that while boy soldiers return home to their mothers and are welcomed heartily, girl soldiers, many now single mothers, have to take care of child care, family responsibilities, and do household chores. With the training they received from reintegration camps, seldom are they given jobs by the communities. In many state institutions, even if they join with the help of NGOs and other agencies, they are either fired for being a 'guerrillera' or had to balance work and gender responsibilities. Thus, though the traditional rituals help in the psycho-social wellbeing of former girl soldiers, it may depict a lost opportunity for children, particularly girls' soldiers, to participate in social processes. As a result, prior to the propagation of these patriarchal and ethnically discriminatory practises, the necessity for critical analysis must be considered. Through careful consideration of the goals of rituals, beneficiaries, practitioners, and potential harm, researchers and NGO workers will be able to foster environments of well-being for girl soldiers and other populations affected by mass violence.

Thus, strengthening whole community structures is a step toward long-term social reintegration. Working with community structures to ensure they embrace it would help to erase stigma from the community. Women and girls have learned new insights about themselves and their communities, as well as new goals, responsibilities, and abilities during the course of their engagement with armed groups and conflict. These factors must be reflected in the ideas and actions of peace negotiators and DDR planners (Mazurana, 2013).

## ON TO A MORE GENDER-SENSITIVE DDR

After analysing the case studies on most of the reintegration programs for girl soldiers, it was clear that the discriminatory and gender-blind practices of most DDR programs available forces the female ex combatants to dropout or spontaneously reintegrate without the assistance offered by the program. The UNSCR 1325 used gender mainstreaming to peace building and conflict but even after a decade later, the condition of female ex combatants has been the same. Most gender mainstreaming programs are also found to be poorly operationalized and disparate leading to marginalisation (Basini, 2013). The adoption of 'one man one gun' criteria, lack of separate registers for female ex combatants from their partners to sign up for DDR program, male commanders hiding girls as the latter serves as wives, cooks etc. are some of the problems that have not been taken in gender sensitive DDR programs. Hence there is an urgent need to revise and reframe the current gender sensitive DDR program.

It is necessary to incorporate gender-sensitive DDR programmes throughout the peace process, from peace negotiations through peace-keeping and the ensuing measures to promote peace. This includes women identifying themselves and participating in DDR processes; understanding identity issues and barriers to female participation in post-conflict policies; focussing on women as a larger unit comprising their children and partners (and sometimes their parents) and not individuals; addressing female health and psychological needs, etc. The planning phase is crucial in order for institutional actors to create key guidelines and roadmaps to design the DDR process from a gender viewpoint. Disaggregation of data by sex and gender is an important pre - requisite for all assessments and can provide crucial information. Moreover, pre-program assessments by specialists in the DDR programme should include the socioeconomic profiling of programme participants and beneficiaries, an assessment of the specific exclusion risk and psychosocial needs of women and an evaluation of overall skills, knowledge and competencies of participants, and an understanding of the perceptions of host communities of returning former combatants.

## CONCLUSION

Women and girl soldiers' responsibilities have not been examined, and their needs and interests during reintegration are frequently overlooked. The situation of self-demobilized girl mothers and those returning to traditional gender roles without any skill training from DDR camps is never addressed by reintegration agencies. More female conscious DDR programmes must be included throughout the whole peace process, beginning with identifying female soldiers and establishing specific eligibility criteria for entering the DDR process. Gender specialists and DDR practitioners frequently disagree since there is no collaboration between the two during the drafting of DDR provisions. UN and other international Agencies should engage more women peacekeepers in the drafting and implementation process. Examples from Liberia illustrate the success of women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the reintegration process and community sensitization programmes, which enable former female combatants to live dignified lives in the community. In the middle of discussions about hard data such as 'arms trade' and 'gun wielders,' there is a repeated tale of neglecting the politics of 'Identity.' It is still impossible to see "wives" and "girls" as political actors in masculinized IR discourse, and women's needs as women are frequently ignored in international conflict. Case studies have demonstrated that it is easy for a boy to reintegrate into society after amputating a community member, but it is difficult for a girl to reintegrate into the community if she has been a victim of sexual assault (Sioberg, 2010). The reasons why females refuse to participate in the reintegration programme should be investigated further, and programmes tailored particularly to them should be devised. The humanitarian discourse frequently presents girls as passive victims and creates a universal framework to accommodate the needs of girl and women soldiers. This is often counterproductive. They need to find a method to assist female soldiers while also working on culturally appropriate solutions and a large-scale awareness campaign with the assistance of local agencies and civic groups.

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