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Challenges to policy and practice in the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation of youth combatants in Liberia

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Abstract

Following the end to Liberia's 14-year civil war in 2003, the current challenge is to successfully resettle and reintegrate its displaced population. Central to this, and essential in terms of long-term peace and sustainable development, will be the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) of young ex-combatants. If the DDRR programme is to be a success in Liberia, there must be a clear understanding as to why young people have chosen to join armed groups in the first place, and these issues must be addressed through the DDRR programme in order to prevent re-recruitment. Furthermore, although targeted opportunities may be appropriate in the short-term during disarmament and demobilisation; a non-targeted community based model of reintegration and rehabilitation, as advocated in the resettlement of IDPs and refugees, will have the most success with reference to the long-term reconciliation and security of Liberia's war-affected population.

Abbreviations

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AI	Amnesty International
DDRR	Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	Interim Care Centres
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPA	International Peace Academy
JIU	Joint Implementation Unit
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MINUCI	United Nations Mission in Côte D'Ivoire
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
QIP	Quick Impact Project
TSA	Transitional Safety Net Alloance
ULIMO	United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia

Introduction

Liberia has been in a nearly constant state of civil war for fourteen years. The violence and crippling destruction have created large numbers of displaced people. During the peak of the most recent crisis in 2003, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated there were approximately 500 thousand internally displaced people (IDPs) and another 320 thousand refugees (HRW, 2004b: 9). A further displaced group are the 103 thousand combatants who have recently reported for demobilisation having fought in the civil war (UN, 2005: 3). The challenge to Liberia now is to successfully resettle and reintegrate these groups.

The most immediate concern in consolidating a lasting peace and laying the foundations for sustainable development is the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) of Liberia's ex-combatants. It is a fundamental precondition for addressing the social and economic development concerns of all sectors of Liberian society and one of the principle pillars of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra, Ghana, in August 2003 (UNDP, 2004: 11). Significant numbers of IDPs and refugees will not be able to safely return to their homes until there is an overall perception of security, which will depend in part on a smooth and effective DDRR programme (UNDP-World Bank, 2004: 2).

Many of the ex-combatants are youth, including an estimated 21 thousand children (AI, 2004: 1), some as young as nine years old (HRW, 2004b: 26). The issue of 'child soldiers' involved in the armed conflict is emotive and highly charged. Graça Machel, author of 1996 UN report on the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, defines a 'child soldier' as:

> "any child – boy or girl – under the age of 18, who is compulsorily, forcibly, voluntarily recruited or used in hostilities by armed forces, paramilitaries, civil defence units or other armed groups."

> (Machel, 2001: 7).

Largely as a result of Machel's report, a number of international legal and policy frameworks have emerged to protect children from involvement in armed conflict. The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child denouncing the involvement of children in armed conflict came into force in 2002. It sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, for compulsory recruitment by governments and for all recruitment into armed groups. By August 2004, 77 states had ratified the Optional Protocol (Child Soldiers Global Report, 2004: 2).

Such age limits and definitions ignore the fact that in many societies the distinction between 'children', 'adolescents', 'youth' and 'adults' are not so clearly defined. In Liberia, children are defined as anyone 17 years or younger (Kelly, 1997: 74). However, many young people may feel they have made the transition to adulthood whilst in a fighting force (Baaré, 2005: 13). Having often migrated or been displaced away from their families and communities, they have learnt the adult tools of independence and survival.

Many under-18s will see their participation as equal to that of adults and want similar recognition in a demobilisation exercise. Conversely, many of those who may be a few years older than eighteen at the time of the peace accord or demobilisation exercise will have spent their developing adolescent years as a soldier. Like their young peers, they will have been deprived of the normal skill development and moral socialisation gained from families and communities (Verhey, 2001: 7). Thus, as Verhey (2001: 7) points out, whilst attention to the special needs of child soldiers in demobilisation programmes is important, questions of age underline the need to see reintegration holistically for a range of war-affected youth.

In this paper, the term 'youth combatant' will be used because, although the definition of 'youth' varies from culture to culture, it commonly describes a transitional stage from childhood dependencies and vulnerabilities to the rights and duties of an adult (ILO, 1997a: 1). Furthermore, it avoids emotional debates associated with the term 'child soldier'.

Approaches to the DDRR of youth combatants tend to be undermined by a polarisation between Western donors and NGOs, and populations in war-affected countries. Donors tend to be impressed by the victimhood of 'child soldiers' and agencies play upon this image by focussing on their vulnerability, passivity and need for protection, as is often the case with IDPs and refugees. However, many of those directly affected by war tend to see young elements of the social underclass as culpable agents of criminal violence, who deserve to be punished for having caused widespread suffering to society (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 16).

Peters and Richards (1998: 183) point out that many under-age combatants choose to fight with their eyes open, and defend their choice, sometimes proudly. However, they do so set

against a background of destroyed communities, failed education systems and displacement, in which militia activity offers young people a chance to make their way in the world (Peters and Richards, 1998: 183). Many agencies and academics, such as Wessells (2002), have argued that lack of opportunity and the circumstances under which young people join negate a real degree of agency in the choice to join an armed group. However, Brett (2003: 863) argues that if young people consider themselves to have volunteered, they are taking responsibility for their actions and it is not helpful to tell that person that he or she had no choice, or was not entitled to make those decisions because he or she was under age. Many adolescents feel themselves to be fully adult since, having moved away from their communities, they have been fending for themselves for a number of years (Peters and Richards, 1998).

Being realistic about the agency of young people involved in armed groups and having a clear understanding of *why* they leave their communities and choose to fight is essential in the design and implementation of any successful peace process and DDRR programme. Indeed, there is no logical reason to expect young people to stop fighting unless the reasons why they volunteered are identified and addressed (Brett, 2003: 858). Thus DDRR programmes must take into account socio-economic marginalisation as well as cultural and political obstacles to the personal development of youth. Providing young combatants with the opportunities to go back to school, acquire skills and find employment are all essential to the DDRR process (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 16), as well as to any hope of lasting peace and development.

For those affected by the war, this process may seem to be rewarding a youthful criminal underclass for their participation in war. Therefore, it is important wherever possible to offer non-targeted assistance in the reintegration and rehabilitation phase, through a community-based approach. It has long been recognised in the return and resettlement of IDPs and refugees that area-based initiatives at a community level can best address the reintegration needs of a war-affected population (UNDP, 2004: 10). This approach must therefore encompass the needs of returning youth combatants in order to aid long-term reconciliation and development.

This paper will give a brief historical background to the conflict in Liberia, which will offer a context in which to follow up with an examination of why young people in Liberia have become involved in armed groups and the implications this has for disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation. I will then reflect upon the current programme, and whether targeted or non-targeted assistance is appropriate at each stage of DDRR. I demonstrate that although targeted opportunities may be appropriate in the short-term during disarmament and demobilisation; a non-targeted community based model of reintegration and rehabilitation, as advocated in the resettlement of IDPs and refugees, will have the most success with reference to long-term reconciliation and security. Finally, with elections approaching in October 2005, the question is whether or not the scene is set for lasting peace and long-term sustainable development.

Historical background: war in Liberia

The conflict in Liberia began in late 1989 when rebel leader Charles Taylor launched an incursion from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. He set out to overthrow President Samuel Doe who had used his tenure of government to plunder the country's wealth, brutally suppressing a coup by his rival Thomas Quiwonkpa in 1985. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) was originally a collection of exiles that had little in common other than their hatred of Doe and his government (Ellis, 1998: 157-158).

Although the conflict was rooted in historical grievances, the brutal tactics displayed against the civilian population and the targeting of particular ethnic groups by the NPFL, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and later the United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) were previously unknown in Liberian history (HRW, 2004a: 7). Furthermore, the scale of rape and violence against women reached a scale almost unmatched anywhere. An NGO conducted a survey of internally displaced women and found that out of 1,502 women, 626 had been raped (O'Neill, 2004: 30).

Richards (1995: 137) believes that the NPFL transition from a small insurrection to local mass movement was greatly assisted by Doe's reaction to the first news of rebel activity in Nimba County. Doe assumed the NPFL incursion was a resumption of the attempted coup of 1985 by Nimba County elements in the AFL. Thus government troops directed violence against civilian communities in Nimba County without discrimination or restraint; entire villages were burnt, populations massacred and thousands of people were displaced. Youngsters who escaped quickly rallied to the NPFL, and thereafter, the NPFL represented itself as the champion of the Mano and Gio (Dan) peoples of Nimba County threatened by Doe's "ethnocidal brutality" (Richards, 1995: 138). Therefore, Richards (1995: 141) argues that ethnic tension was seen as an

opportunity for, rather than a *cause of*, rebellion in Liberia.

After fourteen failed peace agreements, a binding ceasefire was achieved in 1997 and Charles Taylor was elected as president of the country. However, the Taylor administration was marred by widespread corruption, as government officials regularly used state power for personal enrichment with little or no accountability to the Liberian citizenry. Widening divisions and deepening popular resentment caused by the civil war continued to mount and a series of violent outbreaks ensued (HRW, 2004b: 4).

In July 2000, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a Liberian armed opposition group launched an incursion from Guinea, backed by the Guinean government, into northern Lofa County. This incursion resulted in four more years of civil war in Liberia, in which many of the young people who had been demobilised in 1997, were re-recruited by government forces and non-state armed groups for this latest chapter in the war (HRW, 2004b).

In early 2003, a new faction, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), with support from the government of Côte d'Ivoire, broke off from LURD and began a simultaneous push toward Monrovia from eastern Liberia (HRW, 2004b: 5). The intensification of the conflict through the first few months of 2003 culminated in the siege of Monrovia in June and July 2003. LURD forces launched three attacks, locally dubbed World Wars I, II and III, and the eyes of the international community were finally drawn to the conflict (HRW, 2003: 3). Regional troops from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened in early August 2003 to enforce a ceasefire agreed upon in June of that year during ECOWAS sponsored talks in Ghana. On 1 October 2003, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) took over from ECOWAS (O'Neill, 2004: 30).

Charles Taylor stepped down as Liberia's president on 11th August 2003, going into exile in Nigeria, after intense pressure following his indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for his alleged role in crimes committed during the ten-year civil war in Sierra Leone. A week later, on 18th August 2003, all three warring parties signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, establishing a permanent ceasefire and providing for a two-year transitional government, disarmament and demobilisation of the fighting forces, and elections in 2005 (HRW, 2004b: 6).

Why young people fight, and its implications for DDRR

> "... the gun gave them a means by which to capture modernity and with it, a sense of value and vindication. With a gun, a young fighter [could] obtain food, clothing, sex, consumer durables and many other things, which were out of his reach in peacetime."

Jeremy Armon, 1996 (cited in Kelly, 1997: 14)

War is strongly influenced by, and may be largely a product of, the disaffection and social exclusion of youth. In demographic terms, Africa is the world's 'youngest' continent, as well as the poorest and least developed. 55.6 percent of Liberia's population are under the age of 20 (UN, 2004: 1). Therefore, as a majority group, young people, eager for employment and educational opportunities, are disadvantaged by political and economic issues affecting the country (McIntyre and Thusi, 2003: 3). Collier's (2000) global econometric study of post-1960 internal wars indicates that having a large number of poorly educated young men in the population, especially in countries with abundant mineral resources, is a better predictor of outbreaks of violent conflict than ethnic rivalries or autocratic rule (cited in Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 9).

Western understandings of childhood – which have become the dominant framework enshrined in human rights legislation – maintain that children are vulnerable, dependent and innocent human beings who need to be protected by adults. In universal definitions and international law, children often appear as pre-social and passive recipients of experience who need to be protected up to the age of 18 (Friends World Committee, cited in Save the Children, 2001: 232). Furthermore, the view that childhood is a fixed notion, determined by biological and psychological facts, rather than culture and society, is explicit in international children's rights legislation (Boyden, 1990: 197). Such definitions do not necessarily match understandings of the nature of childhood and the transition to adulthood in the local context. They often uphold an 'ideal' Western childhood versus African childhoods that are always found wanting (Shepler, 2004: 36). Thus it is important to understand each situation within its own social and cultural context, and avoid over-generalising or judging with respect to a Western model.

War Child, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Save the Children and other agencies that campaign on behalf of child soldiers, have exposed cases of abduction, traumatic initiations, forced drug use and fear. However, this is only part of the story.

Most young children in West Africa begin working life at a very young age. Thus, according to Shepler (2004: 12-14), the use of children as workers in the pursuit of war is not surprising. Indeed, children's roles during the war – fetching water, cooking, cleaning, shooting people – were done within a cultural context in which it made sense for children to be part of adult activity (Shepler, 2004: 13).

Rachel Brett's (2003) findings from 53 in-depth interviews with individuals from 9 different countries, who identified themselves as having volunteered to join armed forces before the age of 18, show that very few young people go looking for war: war comes to them. War exacerbates poverty; forces the closure of schools; causes the death or dispersal of family members; results in the loss of income and the lack of employment prospects. However, for many adolescents, war is also an opportunity. It is an opportunity for employment or self-sufficiency; an escape from an oppressive family situation or humiliation at school; an adventure in emulation of military role models; to serve a cause; and to dream of becoming a hero in battle (Brett, 2003: 859-860).

For others interviewed in Sierra Leone by Peters and Richards (1998), joining armed groups is due to a loss of educational opportunity; a rational survival strategy in the face of poverty; a chance to exact revenge for loved ones killed by opposition groups; and a substitute for lost family and friends. For those living 'on the street', joining a militia group is both a meal ticket and surrogate education. "The pay may be derisory... but weapon training pays quicker dividends than school ever did; soon the AK47 brings food, money, a warm bath and instant adult respect" (Peters and Richards, 1998: 187).

For many of those who have lost access to education, the army is simply seen as a new form of schooling. Richards (1996: 24) points out that young people in West Africa are always on the look out for new sources of patronage, and that "the arts of war are better than no arts at all". Indeed, Richards (1996: 29) cites young soldiers in Liberia who, having demobilised, spoke longingly of their guns not as weapons of destruction, but as being the first piece of modern equipment they have had access to.

Marginalised from political participation, excluded from education and economic development, youth are provided with a semblance of social integration and status when they join an armed group. Thus, militias are an opportunity to escape further alienation and become part of a process that rejects the current institutional order and

society (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 34-35).

Militias provide adolescents with a renewed identity. Initiation rituals transform them into respected guards of their community while at the same time clearly severing all their links with their former social environment (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 35). Moreover, initiation rituals in West Africa serve as a formal marker between childhood and adulthood: young people are taken away from the town (the site of social order) to go and live in the bush (the site of powerful forces, both destructive and regenerative) to be moulded into responsible adults (Shepler, 2004: 22). Fighting forces in Liberia co-opted traditional rituals and scarification for the express purpose of giving their fighters a sense of prestige as adults, and enhancing a sense of loyalty to their fighting groups instead of to their society and community (HRW, 2004a: 27).

Youth combatants interviewed by Human Rights Watch (HRW) after the Liberian conflict, report being given new names, such as 'Castrator', 'Ball Crusher' and 'Bush Lover' to indicate what they would do to captured civilians during battle. They were also given t-shirts emblazoned with slogans and the name of their armed group, and a hairstyle for militia identification. For example, in certain units of Jungle Lion militia, part of the government forces, recruits were not allowed to cut their hair and small braids were fashionable. In some squads of MODEL, hair was coloured orange, whilst those who served with LURD had their heads shaved as part of the initiation process (HRW, 2004a: 26-27).

Furthermore, Richards (1995) points to the exposure of youth to media violence as a drama in which they read significant messages about their underutilised and unrecognised powers of inventiveness and daring. Violent films, such as 'Rambo', are an inspiration for a youth political culture required to address the paradoxes of peripheral modernity, physical hardships and brutality. Rambo is a hero figure, socially excluded and ejected from town by the corrupt and comfortable forces of law and order, with only his wits for protection (Richards, 1996: 58).

According to Cosentino (1989), Rambo's exploits are not far removed from the violent, amoral, forest-going trickster of Mende tradition, Musa Wo (cited in Richards, 1995: 136). Local interpretations of media violence serve as a prop to dreams of youth empowerment. Therefore, it is reported that rebel strategists sought to play on this early on in the Liberian civil war, running video parlours that played films of violence 24 hours a day for young rebel recruits. Such dreams were transformed into reality when, supplied with

weapons and confidence-boosting drugs, rebels took part in massacres attired as if acting out scenes in a Rambo or Bruce Lee film (Richards, 1995: 136).

Children and teenagers who felt powerless and marginalised before the war, experience power as they become more and more involved in the fighting. Whilst some children interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2004a) spoke of fear of death, the killing of other children in fighting, and of those they killed themselves; others bragged about the killings, proud of their advancement to commander status for their ferocity (HRW, 2004: 19).

Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot (2003:31) have found that many youths in a post-conflict setting, although they may no longer have the direct power of the gun, indicate that they are not willing to go back to the pre-war situation "now that our eyes are open". According to Ellis (1999: 286), Liberian conceptions of 'power' do not necessarily relate to the conventional political model, but to the ability to prosper; and from this, all else will follow.

The personal accounts of youth combatants recorded in Sierra Leone by Peters and Richards (1998) repeatedly stress that it makes little sense to stand down voluntarily without any real promise of social reintegration, education, training, or civilian job prospects. Failure to address this complex of aspirations has caused and prolonged the conflict. Indeed, frustrated by the failure of demobilisation to offer a way out, several informants promptly re-enlisted as soon as they had the chance (Peters and Richards, 1998: 187).

Whilst exclusion from education and socio-economic, political and cultural marginalisation continue for youth in Liberia, the very tensions that create conflict remain unresolved. Unless youth can be convinced that they have some kind of future in the remaking of Liberia, and that they can have confidence in the structures of state and civil society, young people will continue to fight.

It is essential that youth combatants are taken seriously as active participants in war, occupying an important political and socio-economic space. As can be seen, there are many reasons why young people choose to fight, whether they be in the cultural context of working life; to provide alleviation from poverty through employment and self sufficiency; due to lack of educational opportunities; to identify with a group; in emulation of role models; or because they feel marginalised from socio-economic and political participation. If the DDRR process is to be a success and long-term peace sustained in the future, account must be taken of the views of youth combatants and the reasons they join armed groups must be addressed.

Demobilisation, disarmament, reintegration and rehabilitation of youth combatants

Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) of ex-combatants denotes the formal procedure that follows a peace agreement, and forms a continuum that is part of the entire peace process. Where disarmament ends, demobilisation must begin and eventually lead to reintegration and rehabilitation if sustainable peace and development are to be secured in countries emerging from conflict (UN, 2000: 1).

Past DDRR programmes for combatants in Liberia have had limited success, especially for children and youth. The formal DDRR programme established in 1997 served less than one third of the estimated 15 thousand children associated with the fighting forces during the civil war (Toweh, 1998: 13). According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2004), 89 percent of those children who awaited demobilisation disappeared before the process was completed, and only 78 girls participated despite much evidence that their presence in the armed forces was significantly larger (HRW, 2004a: 30). For many of the children and young people who disarmed during the 1997 DDRR programme, expectations were not met or they were unable to find viable employment opportunities after receiving vocational training (HRW, 2004a: 30).

The failure of the 1997 DDRR process was largely down to a lack of funding and support from donors. For example the annual budget of the peacekeeping forces in Liberia was equivalent to the cost of five days of UN peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia (Armon and Carl, 1996, cited in Kelly, 1997: 30). As a result the entire demobilisation process for combatants, children and adults alike, was not more than twelve hours (Kelly, 1997: 30).

According to the ILO (1998: 22) the planned retraining of 60 thousand ex-combatants as part of the 1997 reintegration programme was abandoned due to resource limitations and the inappropriateness of singling out of ex-combatants for special treatment in the eyes of the other war-affected Liberian people. Furthermore, the identification of beneficiaries was near impossible and thus an effective and transparent mechanism for targeting assistance could not be developed. The reintegration

programme was enlarged from ex-combatants to all conflict-affected groups in order to facilitate and stimulate the spontaneous resettlement of internally displaced persons, refugees and ex-combatants. Investments were then channelled to concentrations of war-affected populations, using decentralised community-based operations (ILO, 1998: 22).

However, such programmes were slow to start up and did not reach many communities. When fighting resumed in 2000-2003, many frustrated young people were re-recruited by armed forces, making the DDRR process a failure. Human Rights Watch (2004a: 31) interviewed one young man who said:

> "I went through the programme in 1997 and received some assistance but it soon ran out. For a while, I did some small jobs around Monrovia, but there was not much to do and I couldn't afford to go back to school. So two years ago, I decided to join the LURD. I figured it was better to fight and try to get something, than hang around town doing nothing."

> (HRW interview, Montserrado County, 31st October 2003)

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana, in August 2003, a DDRR process was reinstituted with the specific aim of facilitating the promotion of economic and social reintegration of former combatants into civilian society. The current DDRR programme is a joint initiative of national and international stakeholders including UNDP, UNMIL, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), NGOs as well as UN and other international humanitarian agencies. The Joint Implementation Unit (JIU), composed of UNMIL, UNDP and the National Commission for DDRR (NCDDRR), coordinates and oversees the process (UNDP, 2004: 11).

The ILO's report on *Enlargement* (1998: 10) highlights the fact that in times of peace, target groups are defined along 'peace-time diversities' such as: job-seekers, women, children, female-headed households, communities etc. In conflict-affected countries, 'war-time diversities' are used to identify target groups, such as refugees, internally-displaced, ex-combatants, child soldiers, disabled persons etc. During the disarmament and demobilisation phase of a peacekeeping operation it is essential to use war-time categories for political reasons, however to avoid long-term social disturbances and the potential of future conflict, it is highly favourable to return to peace-time categories as soon as possible (ILO, 1998: 10). Indeed, using war-time categories, contrary

to aiding reintegration, will increase people's expectations and enforce the idea that they are changed completely due to the war. Rather, people should be encouraged to pick up their normal role in society as soon as possible. Furthermore, such categories are unstable and not exclusive (ILO, 1998: 11), therefore targeted assistance can lead to lack of access for many groups.

I examine below the different stages of DDRR separately, as different stages require different strategies. I will examine the extent to which targeting categories are useful at the disarmament and demobilisation phase. Ex-combatants are offered targeted assistance as they leave their armed groups. However, distinctions have been made between what is offered to 'child soldiers', those under 18 years of age, and what is offered to 'adult combatants'. It is crucial to examine these categorisations and their usefulness in the various stages of disarmament and demobilisation.

Disarmament and demobilisation should be followed directly by the reintegration and rehabilitation phase in the DDRR process. The reintegration and rehabilitation of youth combatants should begin to address the reasons young people have participated in armed groups, namely due to poverty, unemployment, lack of education and training opportunities, little hope for prosperity in the future and in search of identity and empowerment.

If reintegration and rehabilitation programmes do not address these reasons, there is a strong possibility, evidenced by the failure of the 1997 DDRR programme and current reports of youth combatants crossing into Côte D'Ivoire, that young people will return to armed groups and fight.

Furthermore, I argue that it is of crucial importance that programming for youth combatants is harmonised with that for other people affected by armed conflict, such as IDPs and refugees, through a community-based approach. Thus 'war-time diversities' are transferred to 'peace-time diversities'. If the DDRR process is to be a success in the long-term, it is critical to ensure that the reintegration of ex-combatants is not given privilege over that of civilians and communities, particularly when the latter have to come to terms with economic stagnation and destruction caused by the conflict (Ginifer, 2003: 7). Furthermore, young combatants are often a difficult group to target. Frequently they return to society by informal routes, or end up in camps for the internally displaced (ILO, 1998: 25). Or due to the extreme character of the violence and cruelties committed

by soldiers they do not want to admit having been involved (ILO, 1998: 23). Moreover, youth combatants often share the essential characteristics of other war-affected groups, such as IDPs and refugees, in terms of capacities, needs and preferences (ILO, 1998: 12).

Targeted assistance in disarmament and demobilisation

Disarmament is the collection, control and disposal of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone. It frequently entails the assembly and cantonment of combatants, and includes the development of arms management programmes. Demobilisation refers to the process by which parties in conflict begin to disband their military structures, and combatants begin transition into civilian life. It generally entails the registration of former combatants; some kind of assistance to enable them to meet their immediate basic needs; discharge, and transportation back to their home communities (UN, 2000: 15).

During the demobilisation phase, ex-combatants should be targeted for pre-discharge and reorientation programmes with briefings, counselling and training to prepare them for the transition to civilian life. Activities should include registration and profile assessment; medical examination, assistance and detoxification for those in need; trauma healing and psychosocial counselling; and life skills training for re-entry into civil society (ILO, 1998: 6). They should also be given information on accommodation, education, training, economic activities, medical and health issues, and legal and civic matters (UN, 2000: 9).

Family reunification is seen as a principle factor in effective resettlement and social reintegration of young ex-combatants, particularly children, and this should be supported during demobilisation by specific tracing procedures and community and family sensitisation programmes to ease their reintroduction into civil society (UN, 2000: 11).

In September 2003, the United Nations Security Council authorised a 15 thousand member peace keeping force in Liberia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), most of whom had been deployed by the end of March 2004 (HRW, 2004b: 7). The disarmament plan was for UNMIL to register fighters who turned in their weapons and pay each individual a Transitional Safety Net Allowance (TSA) of US$300 in several instalments as they progressed through demobilisation and reintegration. The first US$150 was to be paid to each ex-combatant after a 3-week stay in the cantonment site.

On the first day of the programme in December 2003, over 2 thousand ex-combatants arrived at the barracks outside Monrovia to turn in their weapons, a much larger number than was anticipated. The situation quickly deteriorated when fighters learned that they would not immediately receive the first half of the $300 allotted to each fighter. A new plan was devised to pay each former combatant US$75 in exchange for a weapon to quicken the pace of the process. Despite a previous agreement not to pay child combatants, it proved difficult not to pay children when they showed up at the site with weapons and ammunition and the plan was revised to include children in the repayment activities (HRW, 2004b: 31). This controversial decision is discussed further below.

After ten days, UNMIL were overwhelmed by the number of former combatants eager to participate and were forced to suspend the programme. Two days of looting and violence commenced in which twelve people were killed, and a curfew was imposed on Monrovia (HRW, 2003: 19). UNHCR were forced to temporarily suspend relocation of IDPs because of the insecurity (O'Neill, 2004: 33).

Several observers have blamed UNMIL for insufficient preparation and little dissemination of information to fighters about the precise sequence and content of the DDRR process. Special Interim Care Centres for children and women had not been prepared, and cantonment sites had not been adequately staffed or provisioned. However, Human Rights Watch (2003: 19) point out that UNMIL were under considerable pressure to begin the programme due to the significant number of fighters, including children, who had begun 'spontaneously demobilising': leaving their units (although not necessarily their command structure); retaining their weapons; and integrating into displaced or home communities in the months running up to the official DDRR start date.

After a four month delay, the DDRR process again got underway in April 2004. Under the new programme, no upfront cash payments were to be made to ex-combatants. The first US$150 would be made after a minimum seven day stay in the cantonment site, at which point ex-combatants would be discharged and provided with transport to facilitate their return to the community of their choice. A final instalment of US$150 would be made after three months, assuming that ex-combatants would be participating in specific reintegration projects (HRW, 2004b: 31).

Since then cantonment sites have been set up in eight counties: Bong, Grand Bassa, Bomi, Montserrado, Grand Geddeh, Nimba, Lofa and

Maryland. Approximately 103,000 combatants, including over 11,000 young people under the age of 18 have been disarmed and demobilised (HRW, 2005: 1), and UNMIL have collected 27,000 weapons, 6.2 million rounds of small arms ammunition and approximately 30,000 heavier ordnance in the disarmament process (IRIN news, 20 December 2004).

Child ex-combatants have been receiving priority attention, including special procedures indicating that they should be immediately separated from adult ex-combatants and not spend more than 72 hours in a cantonment site (HRW, 2004b: 31). Many are placed in Interim Care Centres (ICC), whilst their family is traced. Daily activities are designed to give structure to the children's lives, including the maintenance and repair of their centres. The aim of these activities is to help them acquire useful skills such as carpentry, roofing and farming to give them a sense of achievement and pride in their efforts, instill responsibility for their environment, and to encourage them to work together and help each other to achieve a common goal (Save the Children, 2001: 29). Verhey (2001: 11) points out that it is important that Interim Care Centres only provide the basic necessities in line with the means of the surrounding community in order to avoid resentment of any special treatment given to these young ex-combatants.

Further to this, Verhey (2003: 23) states the importance of establishing community relations and cites the example of opening a new transit care centre in the Democratic Republic of Congo during demobilisation, where neighbours threw stones at a group of staff and children relaxing at the entrance. In the follow-up investigation, neighbours and community members expressed a variety of concerns: some thought the transit centre was a re-education camp for combatants; some were upset that the building was not used as a school to benefit the community; and others wondered if children at the centre benefited from better treatment than their own children. Thus to remedy the situation, a meeting was organised with community representatives to ensure the demobilisation programme was fully explained, and joint recreational activities were organised for children in the transit centre and community. Thus the transit centre became the starting point for community and family reintegration (Verhey, 2003: 23).

Many contentious issues have surrounded the way in which assistance is targeted during the disarmament and demobilisation phase in Liberia, none more so than the question of cash payments in exchange for weapons to child ex-combatants. UNICEF and NGO implementing partners have protested at the decision to include child ex-combatants in the US$300 cash allowance scheme. They have raised an array of concerns about the potentially damaging impact of cash payments. For example, many believe that payments create financial incentives for the recruitment and re-recruitment of child soldiers; that they make children susceptible to violence as targets for theft; and that they cause community tension as children and others who have not participated in armed conflict may perceive such payments as discriminatory (HRW, 2004b: 32).

Refugees International (21 April 2004) claim that cash allowances are unlikely to be used by children for productive investments in education or economic opportunity as many are still in the thrall of the commanders who abducted them or hooked them on drugs. Furthermore, as there is no way to prevent cash from being turned back over to commanders, this in effect encourages them to recruit more children. According to a recent Refugees International article (26 January 2005), services designed to help children overcome the trauma experienced with war and to better integrate them into society have been suspended or have become useless due to the children's focus on receiving cash. One social worker has stated that:

> "for most of these child combatants, the Interim Care Centre became a housing facility where they could wait for their money. The payments definitely discouraged them from engaging more fully in the activities we were trying to involve them in"

(Refugees International, 26 January 2005).

However other NGOs, such as Save the Children (2001: 91), argue that any benefits package should be equitable for both children and adults. In Sierra Leone, a cash benefit was provided on demobilisation to adults only. Children who had fought alongside their fellow adult combatants resented the fact that they were excluded. Furthermore, children who have been absent from home and involved in the conflict did not want to return home empty handed, especially where family and community economic circumstances are difficult (Save the Children, 2001: 104). Therefore, many tried to register as adults to get the money they felt they deserved.

Arguments against cash payments to child combatants which make a distinction between under-18s and over-18s ignore the agency and competence of many young people who have served and often made a transition to a socio-cultural adulthood whilst with an armed group. Such arguments also ignore some of the reasons why young people may have joined armed groups

in the first place, or may rejoin in the future, namely due to poverty and lack of access to education, employment and hopes of prosperity.

Finally, with the distribution of cash payments to ex-combatants, account must be taken of intrastate conflicts and their regional dimensions, as arms buyback or exchange programmes stimulate illicit regional arms trade and weapons proliferation. Whilst the surrender of weapons is worth US$300 in Liberia, the reward in Côte d'Ivoire is US$900. This has led to fears and suggestions that armed elements in Liberia are crossing over to Côte d'Ivoire to triple the financial value of their weapons (Isima, 2004: 3).

Nevertheless, according to Isima (2004: 5), cash payments have been proven to be the most effective and efficient option as they: reduce transaction costs; offer flexibility to beneficiaries; permit more transparent accounting; can adapt more closely to the specific needs of the beneficiaries; are easy to distribute; are used for social and productive investment after consumption needs have been met, thus stimulating the local economy; and have a positive psychological effect of empowering ex-combatants to take charge of their lives (Isima, 2004: 5).

However, this raises the question as to why cash payments are made to ex-combatants, but not to civilian refugees or IDPs. Baaré (2005: 19) suggests a broader programme of transitional payments to not only ex-combatants, but also refugees and IDPs, providing flexible security and empowerment. Indeed, targeting of cash payments to ex-combatants can be difficult since cash is of inherent value to all in a post-conflict society (Isima, 2004: 5). It is suspected that three times the number of people have registered in Liberia for disarmament and demobilisation than initially predicted in order to gain financially from the programme, many of whom may not be ex-combatants as only one in four have actually handed in a weapon (IRIN news, 20 December 2004).

A spokesman for the NCDDRR, told IRIN in December 2004 that, as result of the large number registering for disarmament and demobilisation, the programme had run out of funds to provide education and training for the 103 thousand who had come forward as ex-combatants (IRIN news, 20 December 2004). The UNDP has appealed for a further US$58 million to train demobilised combatants over the next three years, warning that any disruption to the process will have serious consequences for the overall peace process in Liberia (IRIN news, 20 December 2004).

It is important to note in this context that cash payments create only a very short-term breathing space in placating dissatisfied combatants. Assistance must be followed closely by effective transitional economic reintegration measures. The most effective inducement and persuasion for combatants to disarm is a credible DDRR programme that offers opportunities for new, non-violent livelihoods (Knight and Özerdem, 2004: 505). When "combatants are asked to give up their arms, they face a 'point of no return': they and their leaders must have faith in the future where the advantages of peace outweigh those of war" (ECHA, 2000 cited in Knight and Özerdem, 2004: 506). In effect they are surrendering the security and economic surety that their weapons provide, in exchange for opportunities and assistance in finding new peaceful livelihoods. Thus issues arising from *why* youth combatants join armed groups must be robustly addressed through the reintegration and rehabilitation process.

Non-targeted assistance in reintegration and rehabilitation

Reintegration and rehabilitation programmes are assistance measures provided to former combatants that should increase the potential for their economic and social reintegration into civil society. Generally reintegration programmes include cash assistance, vocational training and income-generating activities (UN, 2000: 15). Reintegration should lead to rehabilitation and long-term development initiatives that enable lasting peace and prosperity. Participants at a seminar on the challenges of reintegration of ex-combatants in DDRR programmes in West Africa emphasised that the 'R' in DDRR is multifarious: not only reintegration and rehabilitation, but also, resettlement, repatriation, reconciliation, recovery and so on (UN, 2005: 2).

Unlike disarmament and demobilisation, which can be described as time-bound, reintegration and rehabilitation are a process involving many variables including the willingness of ex-combatants to reintegrate and of communities to accept them (IPA, 2002: 2). Reintegration and rehabilitation present more complex challenges that encompass the stimulation of viable economic growth and development, the establishment of income-generating projects, the provision of education and training programmes, the preparation of host communities and families for the return of ex-combatants, and the response to the psychosocial impacts of war (IPA, 2002: 2).

The issue of reintegrating and rehabilitating youth combatants in post-conflict situations often poses distinct challenges. In the case of Sierra Leone,

the urgent need to rehabilitate infrastructure was more appealing to donors, and given priority by government at the expense of a focus on youth rehabilitation (McIntyre and Thusi, 2003: 3). McIntyre and Thusi (2003: 3) point out that the concept of 'youth rehabilitation' as a category may not be appealing to donors but failure to deal with the healing of youth and reorient them as responsible citizens will have serious consequences for the future of the country. Indeed, what is the point of rebuilding schools, clinics and infrastructure if the youth have no sense of ownership or responsibility towards them and destroy them again?

Furthermore, the focus of much reintegration and rehabilitation programming is prioritised for 'child soldiers', including family tracing and reunification, and psychosocial support. Although children are certainly a priority, programmes often overlook the fact that most of those who get demobilised as youth or adults were recruited as children. Young adults are simply provided with vocational training without any direct form of further support, such as psychological consultation. McIntyre and Thusi (2003: 8) point out that, in the case of Sierra Leone, depression and feelings of neglect are increasing amongst youth as they find themselves shunned by society and not provided with the opportunities to earn a living by the government. This situation is a serious potential threat to peace and sustainability in a post-conflict society.

In the design of major reintegration support for demobilised ex-combatants, different approaches are often adopted: (i) one approach is to establish a pre-determined menu of options and then shape the expectation of the target group around these options; (ii) second is to use the expectations of the target group to design a programme of intervention measures; (iii) third is to focus intervention measures on the communities in the anticipation that ex-combatants would reintegrate in the context of community-based initiatives. It is the second of these approaches that has been adopted in the reintegration and rehabilitation phase off the DDRR programme in Liberia (UNDP, 2005: 1).

During Liberia's recent demobilisation process, sets of questionnaires were distributed to ex-combatants whereby they were expected to state their preferred area of resettlement and their desired rehabilitation support preference. 50 percent chose vocational training, apprenticeship and job placement, and a further 42 percent chose formal education (UNDP, 2004: 12).

Involving ex-combatants in the design of reintegration programmes can strengthen their sense of ownership of the process and enhance the probability of its success. Their involvement can also help to ensure the formulation of feasible and appropriate programmes (IPA, 2002: 4). However, such an initiative can also create problems with the management of expectations. Youth combatants often have highly inflated expectations and unrealistic assumptions about civilian life, exaggerated pride in their military identity, and have learned to rely on aggression to meet needs and solve problems. They are deprived of the normal cultural, moral and values socialisation usually gained from family and community (World Bank, 2002: 3).

I examine below the areas that must be included in any reintegration and rehabilitation package; and their effectiveness in the context of Liberia in addressing the needs of youth combatants and the communities into which they resettle.

Psychosocial support and the transition to civilian life

During the war in Liberia, civilians, including children and youth, have often been witness to horrifying atrocities. As fighters, they have often been the perpetrators of such atrocities. It is frequently argued that youth combatants need special trauma programmes before making the transition to family and community life (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 22). Boyden (1994) has challenged this theory, calling it the "apocalypse model" of conflict, which "pathologises children's experience of conflict" and treats "children as passive victims rather than active survivors" (cited in Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 22).

Many practitioners argue that a family and community environment and skill-building activities are most important in psychosocial support. In a follow-up survey of former youth combatants in El Salvador, 84 percent reported that their family played the most important role in their transition to civil life (Verhey, 2001: 15). Family tracing methodologies are now being applied to cross-border situations through close inter-agency collaboration with UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as part of the refugee repatriation process.

Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot (2003: 22) emphasise that Western psychiatric and psychosocial approaches and therapies should not be copied in non-Western settings without careful and sensitive adaptation to local cultural understandings of post-conflict mental health disorders. Verhey (2001: 17) argues that community solidarity provides adequate recognition, acceptance and historical place for individual experiences of grief and trauma. Often traditional healing rituals and religious and

cultural ceremonies assuage the ill spirits associated with the young person's actions during conflict and reconcile them with ancestral spirits and hence the community as a whole (Verhey, 2001: 18). Furthermore, the value of jobs and education, keeping youth busy, and giving them future prospects can not be underestimated in preventing the development of trauma (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 22).

Education

Education is generally seen as critical for restoring a sense of normality to the lives of young people. In addition it provides a 'cooling off' period, helping to make a break with their military past, enhancing confidence and self-esteem, establishing a new identity, and reorienting them to civilian life. Education can also include vital training in life skills, including nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS awareness, and managing finances.

One child rights specialist reported that in a conversation with a military commander about child soldiers in Liberia, the officer declared that children with education, those that can read and write, are more difficult to recruit and generally more questioning of authority. Therefore, it is believed that the key to fully reintegrating youth combatants and breaking the cycle of re-recruitment in Liberia lies in education (HRW, 2004a: 41).

ICG (2004: 24) believe extensive revision of curricula will be required to promote civil awareness and tolerance. There has been a tremendous "beating down of Liberian values, and the mentalities of many have been corrupted", making education, especially civic education, a necessary part of the reconstruction agenda (ICG, 2004: 24).

The transitional government of Liberia, working with UNICEF, has committed itself to providing universal primary education with school fees waived for the poorest children (HRW, 2004a: 41). However, education support for ex-combatants has been initiated against a backdrop of a collapsed education system, characterised by poor or irregular remuneration of teaching staff, lack of teaching materials, books and deteriorated support infrastructures (UNDP, 2005: 2). By the end of 2004, contracts had been drawn up with 103 educational institutions, including grade schools, universities and computer schools, accommodating approximately 7202 students. However, 95 percent of these schools are located in Monrovia and Montserrado County alone (UNDP, 2004: 12), representing 25% of the ex-combatants who opted for formal education (UNDP, 2005: 5). Many of those youth

combatants who are unable to access educational facilities have expressed their frustration and anger (IRIN news, 20 December 2004). A 14 year old boy interviewed by Human Rights Watch in March 2005 states:

> "My mum died years ago and my father lives far away in a village. My commander is the one taking care of me. After I disarmed, I really wanted to go back to school. They said we should try to get our heads together, they say education is the key to life, but we've seen nothing. No schools have opened here and the UN people haven't told us if and when they will open. We're just sitting around – no school, no food – what else are we to do. I just came from Côte d'Ivoire and I'm soon going back like all my friends. I know at least 20 kids like me who are there. If they're going to put me in school, then they should tell me. If not, then tell me that too so I can just go back to my rebel life without thinking about school again.

(HRW, March 2005: 3)

Vocational training and employment

Although education can certainly keep young people occupied for a short period, the question is whether or not it will lead to viable employment options following graduation from educational institutions. Frustration and disappointment may follow if young people are unable to sustain a livelihood, ultimately affecting reconstruction and peace.

Vocational training is generally viewed as a means of increasing an individual's employment prospects, helping them to become financially independent and facilitating social acceptance in the communities into which they reintegrate. Therefore, it has become a key focus in DDRR programme planning. However, the experience of Mozambique has shown that most ex-combatants failed to find employment in the area in which they were trained (IPA, 2002: 6). This was down to a failure to link training with jobs or to promote appropriate employment opportunities. One NGO in Mozambique commented that they felt the aim of the training packages was to "keep the demobilised quiet"; and therefore job creation was very much a secondary aim. Indeed it is generally thought that formalised training in Mozambique had been more of a burden than a benefit to the society as thousands of ex-combatants had been thrown into a labour market where there were no vacancies (ILO, 1997b: 12).

This illustrates the need for training programmes that are responsive to the needs of the community and to job opportunities that actually

exist or can be generated. Often NGOs have programmed training in courses such as car mechanics, and then found that ex-combatants have returned to villages where there might be only one or two cars (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 26).

The ILO (1998: 7) argue that the reintegration programme should be 'demand based' as the majority of demobilised combatants who have spent many years in conflict, often since a young age, do not have a realistic view of employment opportunities in the resettlement communities. Therefore, their initial expectations and preferences should not be the main starting point for programme planning and implementation, as is the case in the current DDRR programme in Liberia. Instead, support services should be based on identified demand in the labour market and on opportunities for viable micro-enterprise. Rapid assessment methodologies should be used to produce lists of trades for which there is an existing or emerging market demand and of opportunities for micro-business (ILO, 1998: 7).

In a post-war context in which the labour force must absorb a large number of uneducated youths, self-employment in a trade or craft, or employment in the agricultural sector are the most realistic options. However, ex-combatants need not only technical skills, but also training in how to run a micro-business, and the availability of toolkits and micro-credit to generate income. The ILO (1998: 7) recommends training in the production of basic food crops and subsistence agriculture, including market-oriented economic activities in horticulture, food processing and animal husbandry.

Labour-intensive public works have also proved to be extremely appropriate in a post-conflict context. The practical impact of rebuilding destroyed roads, health centres, schools, water wells and so on is evident. However, the social and cultural benefits are also high. The project creates considerable short-term employment opportunities, and people work together to rebuild their country (ILO, 1998: 8).

Some agencies are now beginning to experiment with forming rural reconstruction teams, training young ex-combatants to make spot improvements to rural roads, to build minor bridges and so on. This has also proved a useful basis upon which to form small, cooperatively managed business. Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot (2003: 27) cite the example of an agricultural cooperative set up in 2000 by local youths in the Small-Bo chiefdom of Sierra Leone called the Small-Bo Youth Community Development Organisation (SYCODO). The organisation started with 10 members, but within a year had 220 members between the ages

of 13 and 35, working on farms and providing volunteer labour for several community projects, including the repair of schools, roads and showers for the market women. The organisation also works to sensitise young people to women and children's rights, and more generally to raise awareness among youth. One young member highlights the importance of such a project by saying:

> "Young people have realised that we are both the perpetrators and the victims in this war. If we could involve ourselves in rehabilitating the place, it would not make sense to go back to the bush or destroy the place."

> (Cited in Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 27)

Hence, vocational training and viable employment opportunities are essential in addressing the needs of youth combatants as they seek to reintegrate and work towards a sustainable peace.

Youth empowerment

Often children and young people, who felt powerless and marginalised before the war, experience power as they become involved with an armed group. Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot's (2003: 31) study of youth during and after wars, indicates that many young men and women are not willing to return to a pre-war situation which was often characterised by patrimonial rule by elders.

Crucial questions arise over whether or not pre-war authority figures, such as elders, chiefs, secret societies, patrons and so on, have re-emerged and re-established old modes of governance and social control.

In Sierra Leone, traditional reconciliation techniques, such as cleansing rituals, as well as radio programmes about crime, guilt, justice, tolerance, forgiveness and peace, have made a considerable impact in terms of community relations (Ginifer, 2003: 7-8). Furthermore, the Ministry of Youth and Sport have identified the establishment of a 'Youth Radio' as a platform where youth will be involved in the development of programmes and articulate their needs and hopes for the future without interference (McIntyre and Thusi, 2003: 7).

In response to notions of youth empowerment in Liberia's post-conflict situation, UNDP have been involved in setting up a national youth project attempting to integrate Liberia's youth into national recovery and reconstruction efforts, linking closely with UNDP and UNESCO's 'Foundation for Africa's Future Leadership' joint

initiative. A National Youth Conference is planned for this year to lay the foundation for the development of a long-term post-war, integrated and cross sector youth policy that will mainstream youth concerns on issues such as education, employment, health, HIV/AIDs and juvenile delinquency, amongst others (UNDP, 2004: 27).

A community-based approach

It is thought that 90 percent of Liberians are war affected, with most villages looted, destroyed or burned down (ILO, 1998: 19), and over one quarter of the population displaced by the conflict (UNDP-World Bank, 2004: 2). The struggle will be to retain the peace during the return of thousands of refugees, IDPs and ex-combatants to unstable conditions and physical and economic devastation. There is on-going debate as to whether ex-combatants should be prioritised over IDPs, refugees and communities affected by war. In the past, most assistance has targeted ex-combatants. However, there is increasing agreement that programmes to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life in post-conflict environments are most appropriately linked with economic revitalisation activities at the community level that include IDPs, refugees and civilians affected by the war (Ball, 1997: 90).

IPA (2002: 4) argue there is a risk that if ex-combatants are treated as a distinct group, they will continue to identify themselves as such, demanding special benefits and targeted economic opportunities over the long-term. Furthermore, there is often resentment amongst the civilian population over what is often seen as 'special treatment' for those who have committed atrocities against them (IPA, 2002: 4).

This latent hostility to ex-combatants among civilians affected by the war is one of the major problems faced in the DDRR programme. Tensions have grown over lack of available land as returning IDPs and refugees try to claim land that was once theirs from combatants who have demobilised and are looking to resettle (UNDP, 2000: 20). One ex-fighter quoted by IRIN news (20 December 2004) felt the slow and steady return of Liberian refugees was complicating life for the former rebels:

> "Some of us now have nowhere even to sleep. Some of our friends have been kicked out of houses where we were residing because the original owners are returning then and claiming them."

> (IRIN news, 2004)

In Sierra Leone, too, reconciliation has been a grudging process. Ginifer (2003: 6) highlights comments heard from communities, such as: "we

are forgiving the ex-combatants for the sake of God", or "we are forgiving them because the government says so". There is resentment in communities where it is felt that ex-combatants have received 'special' treatment, and it is common to hear "those who have ruined us are being given the chance to become better persons financially, academically and skills-wise" (Ginifer, 2003: 6). One observer in the 1997 DDRR programme in Liberia stated:

> "You take a group of kids who have fought and killed and committed a lot of atrocities and put them in an institution with 24-hour electricity, the best of clothing and three meals a day, when children in the surrounding community can't even get one good meal or one good wear of clothing and you are going to create the impression that "well, we should have joined after all."

> (cited in Kelly, 1997: 43).

Nevertheless, there have also been some misgivings about integrating and mixing young people who have different backgrounds and needs in the post-conflict situation. Indeed, during the 1997 demobilisation in Liberia, parents were often reluctant to put their children in on to programmes known in the communities as the place where the 'rebels' go (Kelly, 1997: 70). Nevertheless, Verhey's study (2003) in the Democratic Republic of Congo has shown that mixing different categories of youth, ex-combatants, IDPs, refugees and the war affected, is actually beneficial to their social reintegration, and that young people express profound appreciation for learning about the true situation of other children (Verhey, 2003: 41).

Working with all children and youth affected by war helps to diminish the perception that those who fought with armed groups are being privileged or rewarded for their behaviour. Offering reintegration benefits directly to communities in which ex-combatants, as well as other displaced populations, are to be reintegrated has the potential to ameliorate this resentment (IPA, 2002: 4). Furthermore, community based approaches have been found to lessen distrust and increase tolerance between the different war-affected groups and thus support the reconciliation process (ILO, 1998: 12).

Nevertheless, Baaré (2005: 14) argues that from lessons learned during the 1997 demobilisation in Liberia, the development discourse on community driven reconstruction is part of a fallacy that 'communities' actually exist, and that they are able to absorb former combatants. Over 800 thousand people have been displaced by the war

in Liberia, many of whom are yet to return. Furthermore, where traditional and communal landownership is still common, 'community-based' approaches reinforce male dominated traditions that are biased against women (Baaré, 2005: 17).

However, one could counter argue that foundations must be laid at community level precisely in order to increase the social capacity and cohesion of local populations and aid the resettlement of all displaced groups in a post-conflict situation. "One can no longer speak of *reintegration* of any specific target group but rather of the *integration* of all war-affected persons, a target group that covers most of the Liberian population" (ILO, 1998: 25).

Furthermore, community-based capacity building will help to reach those excluded, most often girls and the disabled, from formal demobilisation (World Bank, 2002: 3). Many young people interviewed by Save the Children (2004) in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone had been associated with armed groups during the war but had missed out on the official DDRR programme. They were extremely bitter and resentful about being denied the benefits that other young combatants had received (Save the Children, 2004: 14). In addition, those who had not been associated with the fighting felt a deep sense of injustice at being denied help with school fees or skills training, despite having suffered equally during the war as those who had obtained DDRR benefits (Save the Children, 2004: 20). One 13 year old female ex-combatant explained:

> "We are not respected because they [peers] are always calling us rebels. Even when we are given school supplies by [an NGO supplying DDR benefits], our friends tell us that the supplies are blood supplies."

> (Save the Children, 2004: 21)

Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have become very popular in post-conflict countries and are a good example of programmes that can be adapted to encourage reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants, IDPs and refugees, as they focus on rebuilding damaged schools, clinics, bridges, roads and other public facilities. The projects provide income and food-for-work and an opportunity for young people to learn construction skills. In Angola, QIP-supported micro-enterprises were more effective than vocational training schemes because they provided a quicker way of acquiring skills and income (Verhey, 2001: 20). Furthermore, they foster a sense of shared responsibility for and contribution to community reconstruction (Save the Children, 2001: 39). However, UNHCR have acknowledged that the speed of QIP implementation often leads to lack

of socio-economic and environmental sustainability due to lack of planning and preparation (UNDP, 2000: 37). It is important, therefore, that the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants, IDPs and refugees is seen as part of a long-term development strategy.

UNDP have instituted the Community-Based Recovery (CBR) scheme in Liberia providing a bridge between emergency relief and long-term development in order to enhance the ability of communities to absorb returning IDPs, refugees and ex-combatants. The aim of the CBR programme is to rehabilitate infrastructure, rebuild the local socio-economic fabric, create employment opportunities and foster the reconciliation process (UNDP, 2004: 14).

Summary

Reintegration and rehabilitation of youth combatants is a long-term process. If it is to be a success, fighters must be given a sense that they have better prospects for the future. Programmes must be seen as an investment in the productive potential employment and education of former youth combatants rather than as a bribe to keep them 'busy' and 'out of trouble' (Knight and Özerdem, 2004: 513). Knight and Özerdem (2004: 513) underline the need to consider the DDRR process as a new social contract between former combatants and their post-conflict environment. Therefore, DDRR programmes must address the reasons young people choose to fight, namely lack of access to education, training and employment opportunities, and marginalisation from political and socio-economic participation. A DDRR programme that includes psychosocial support, education, vocational training, income-generating activities and youth participation and empowerment will reduce the likelihood that youth will be re-recruited into armed groups in the future.

Furthermore, such investment must include the needs of the wider community in to which youth combatants, as well as other populations returning after the conflict, integrate, in order to avoid the possibility of future conflicts between groups. Indeed, mobilising community-based capacity is the essential foundation to sustainable support for war-affected youth (Ball, 1997: 99).

Recent developments: implications for youth combatants and the future of peace in Liberia

Liberia faces a massive displacement of people, the destruction of productive capacity and basic infrastructure, and a significant militarization of the population (ILO, 1998: 19). Currently 85

percent of the population is unemployed and 80 percent live below the poverty line (ICG, 2004: 23). Reintegration of IDPs, returning refugees and ex-combatants will be a principle area of focus as Liberia moves towards peace, reconciliation and socio-economic recovery.

As the transitional government shepherds the country towards the elections on 11 October 2005, there is frustration amongst the donor community as some in authority have actively blocked outside audits and investigations of alleged corruption. Furthermore, there are fresh reports that Charles Taylor is violating the conditions of his exile by keeping in touch with former business, military and political associates in Liberia and funnelling money to several presidential candidates to try to ensure a friendly elected government (Reuters, 14 June 2005).

ICG (2004) reports that there are also growing divisions within LURD and MODEL, as leaders have prioritised gaining secure positions in government for themselves, leaving the future of their fighters in doubt. Bitterness has grown as fighters have seen their leaders driving fancy cars in the city while they remain in the bush with uncertain prospects (ICG, 2004: 8-9).

The success of the peace process depends on the full reintegration and rehabilitation of demobilised combatants. It will also depend on the capacity of the new government to meet the expectations of thousands of these former fighters who will find peace-time existence potentially less lucrative than war-time looting (ILO, 1998: 19). Unfulfilled promises to ex-combatants will promote social discontent.

By December 2004, it had become apparent that the Liberian authorities had run out of money to provide education and training for the 103 thousand people who had registered as former combatants. Thus far, the funding has only reached 7,202 of the ex-combatants, and the UNDP Country Director, Mr Ursino, has confirmed that there is a budget shortfall of US$58 million to carry out the rest of the DDRR programme. Nearly 4 thousand ex-combatants now risk being expelled from schools and universities unless donors contribute to the funding shortfall to keep them enrolled (UNDP press release, 2 February 2005).

Following official estimates of 38 thousand fighters due to demobilise in 2003, critics of the DDRR programme suspect that thousands of civilians, including returning IDPs and refugees, squeezed their way into the disarmament programme in order to claim the US$300 resettlement grant resulting in the funding shortfall (IRIN news, 2 December 2004). It is perhaps with hindsight, that one would advise that assistance to combatants during disarmament and demobilisation may have been best tackled through a non-targeted community-based approach, as part of an overall initiative to resettle all of Liberia's displaced population.

Recent reports (IRIN news, 20 December 2004) have described groups of ex-combatants loitering and begging on the streets of remote towns such as Voinjama. IRIN quotes one rebel fighter, who says:

> "This is not what we wanted, just remaining here doing nothing... We were promised by both our senior commanders and the NCDDRR that those good programmes would help us become productive in society." (IRIN news, 20 December 2004)

There is widespread grumbling amongst former combatants that they have been short changed by the country's August 2003 peace agreement. Such frustration is comparable to the earlier 1997 DDRR scheme that went badly wrong, sparking off disappointment, anger and ultimately a full-scale resumption of civil war (IRIN news, 20 December 2004). Indeed, the continued delay in programmes heightens the risk that some young people will be recruited to fight in neighbouring countries.

Liberia's neighbours, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire are both unstable, and whilst Guinea has not itself exploded, it is still a player in the region's instability. The cross border mobility of forces and the flow of illicit arms and mercenaries throughout the region have contributed to this (Boya, 2004: 9). UNMIL's limited troop strength have restricted its ability to monitor borders. Similarly, the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) has limited range in monitoring the borders with Liberia (ICG, 2004: 3).

Consequently, Liberian youth and commanders interviewed on 21 March 2005 by Human Rights Watch (2005: 2-4) indicated that many young people, disappointed by the DDRR process and promise of education and employment, are being re-recruited to fight in Côte d'Ivoire. A 30 year old commander stated:

> "I have been in Côte d'Ivoire since October of last year. I am now working for the Ivorian government... I have just returned to Liberia a few days ago. I am here on a small recruitment operation. That was the order my commander gave me. He said he wants some children because they are good – they follow orders and don't ask questions like the rest of us. The operation is on; just this morning a pick-up left with 18 people on board. I think 6 of them were boy soldiers. But they aren't

children anymore – they have been fighting for years and after all they've done and gone through – they are big men now. Besides, none of us are doing anything else – the UN people promised us education and jobs, but we've seen nothing and heard nothing since we handed in our guns last year. They were all lies. They should learn that just as you would never make a fool out of a drug dealer, so you should never make a fool out of a rebel."

(HRW, March 2005: 2-3)

A 28 year old commander stated:

"I went to Côte d'Ivoire with five boys – from fifteen to seventeen. I'm a commander and they were all my boys during the Liberian... I don't know where their people are. So I take care of them. I got paid for all of them... I've seen the Ivorian military bring arms and uniforms and food and everything we need to our bases... This wasn't my natural plan but during the Liberian war I lost everything – my house, my dad – I have nothing to sustain my life and my family. It's the poverty that makes us chase the gun game."

(HRW, March 2005: 3)

Another 28 year old commander stated:

"I disarmed in July 2004 and waited until October 2004 to start school. But nothing happened... When I was with MODEL I had 12 kids under me... The youngest is 12. I take good care of them. When I went over to Côte d'Ivoire in November, I took 6 of them with me. The others sent word that they wanted to join us... I'll wait for a few weeks to see if the DDRR programme starts up and if it doesn't, I'll head back across the border."
(HRW, March 2005: 4)

As can be seen from such testimonies, whenever enlistment is the result of a conscious choice, there is a danger that re-enlistment will occur the minute that difficult circumstances return (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 19). For many youths, marginalisation lay behind their joining armed groups, and thus if marginalisation continues, so does the risk that these youths will be re-recruited into the armed groups to which they once belonged (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 28).

Conclusion

The conflict has affected a generation of youth, mostly uneducated with little prospect of legitimate employment. As a consequence, Liberia has been thrown off a fragile, and arguably dysfunctional, path of development into a cycle of violence and failed peace initiatives (Scott, 1998: 99). The conflict has been perpetuated by the poverty, high unemployment and lack of opportunity for Liberian youth throughout the country. Due to lack of employment and education prospects, many young people from the first Liberian civil war in the 1990s quickly remobilised when the conflict reignited. If having a large proportion of ill-educated, unemployed young men in the population is a factor conducive to civil war in Africa, as Collier (2000) concludes, then addressing the circumstances through which a forced division of labour is maintained may be a key to longer-term peace (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003: 11).

Thus, as part of the peace process, DDRR raises serious concerns and challenges. DDRR must be seen in the context of both promoting sustainable development and peace, but also in preventing a relapse into war and recruitment of youth. A failed programme will have grave implications for the region.

Managing the expectations of ex-combatants is critical. If ex-combatants have unrealistic expectations about what they will get out of the programme they are liable to become disillusioned and return to modes of behaviour developed during war-time (IPA, 2002: 6). The antidote to such violence is to involve young people in the reconstruction of society, and therefore any education and vocational training must provide a context in which young people are able to anticipate new, secure and viable social worlds (HRW, 2003: 12). Furthermore, young people should be acknowledged not as victims, but as survivors, with insights and ideas, who can play a role in implementing solutions and rebuilding society.

Youth often form part of a grey definitional and legal area that results in them not being adequately prioritised or included during the implementation of DDRR. Recognising youth, as opposed to just children, in societies emerging from conflict has serious consequences for policy formulation and programme design. The neglect of youth, demobilised as adults, and frustrated by delays in reintegration programmes promising education and employment opportunities, can easily lead to the group becoming marginalised and potentially resorting to violent forms of political and socio-economic articulation. Therefore, youth combatants need to be quickly targeted during the disarmament and demobilisation phase, and smoothly integrated with other war-affected groups during the reintegration and rehabilitation stages.

Prevention of re-recruitment must reflect the multitude of ways in which youth become involved in hostilities. It must recognise the cultural and individual needs of the youth involved, and will require greater investment in practical measures, such as education and non-formal youth activities, community level advocacy, and income generating activities as part of the reintegration and rehabilitation stage of DDRR (Verhey, 2001: 23).

The capacity of the community into which youth combatants return will be crucial to the entire DDRR process. Therefore, this thesis concludes that youth combatants should not be treated as a distinct or separate group, but should be part of a community-based approach to reintegration and rehabilitation of the whole displaced and war-affected population. Thereby, the community as a whole can work towards rebuilding and reintegrating both civilians and ex-combatants through the reconstruction of community facilities, education and training institutions, and income-generating activities. However, it is also important to ensure that former youth combatants are well represented in all projects, as their reintegration into civilian life is essential to lasting peace (ILO, 1998: 36).

Reintegration and rehabilitation are a continuous process that should end in a situation where short-term war-related approaches are replaced by long-term development objectives (ILO, 1998: 15). Therefore, DDRR programmes should be part of an overall integrated recovery strategy that encompasses economic development, security sector reform, the integration of refugees and IDPs, justice and reconciliation (IPA, 2002, 1), and long-term development. This represents a challenge of monumental proportions and requires a long-term commitment from the international community.

Donor funding is absolutely essential to the ongoing success of the DDRR programme in Liberia. Indeed the 1997 DDRR programme clearly illustrates that the best laid plans by the most well-informed experts will falter if resources are withheld, undermining the preparation and implementation of DDRR.

The UN Special Representative for Liberia, Jacques Klein, has predicted that recovery for Liberia will take at least four to five years. Donors have pledged more than US$520 million for long term reconstruction. However, by the end of 2004, only US$31 million had been received (UNDP, 2004: 10). Furthermore, due to more than double the number of ex-combatants presenting themselves to the DDRR as initially predicted, an appeal has been made to the donor community for an additional US$39.5 million (UNDP, 2004: 10).

Liberia's reconstruction requires serious long-term commitments and a focus on hard issues. It will require the rebuilding of a devastated social and economic infrastructure to provide opportunities for the successful return to a productive society of ex-combatants, refugees and IDPs. Furthermore, if Liberia is to achieve peace, reconstruction must be felt throughout the country. Donors tend to concentrate on the capital and central government, aiding unbalanced development. Planners should gear projects towards building local structures and encouraging the return to villages of those who have been economically, politically and socially marginalised (ICG, 2004: 21).

Finally, it is crucial for DDRR programmes to recognise the regional dimensions of the conflict. War has a tendency to 'spill in' and 'spill out' of neighbouring states, and combatants often migrate with the fighting from country to country, contributing to levels of insecurity (IPA, 2002: 6). As demonstrated, the war in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire is now becoming a magnet for fighters from Liberia with no other prospects but to rejoin armed groups.

Although IPA (2002: 6) point out that it is unrealistic to involve neighbouring countries in the design and implementation of DDRR programmes, it is important to consider the impact of regional conflict in a country such as Liberia; and question the impact that the cessation of violence and the development of DDRR programmes might have on other countries in the sub-region (IPA, 2002: 6). Coordination with neighbouring peacekeeping forces in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire will be needed to ensure that guns and youth combatants do not spill across borders and undermine the fragile stability of Liberia's neighbours (HRW, 2003: 20).

In conclusion, the success of the DDRR process, followed by long-term peace and prosperity in Liberia will be down to a thorough understanding of the political, socio-economic and cultural context in which war has flourished in the past. This thesis demonstrates that the reasons why young people have become involved in armed groups must be recognised and adequately addressed through the DDRR programme in order to prevent their re-recruitment. Issues of poverty alleviation, the provision of educational and vocational opportunities, psychosocial support and youth empowerment must be tackled. Furthermore, interventions will need to be community-based, ensuring that the needs of all young people, whether ex-combatants, IDPs,

refugees or as part of the community as a whole, are valued and supported in the future.

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Appendix