Chapter XXII

The Emperors Clothes -
Critical Reflection on the
Disarmament, Demobilization
and Reintegration

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Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes are frequently introduced by multilateral and bilateral aid agencies in the context of so-called peace support operations (PSO) and post-conflict recovery/reconstruction activities. Despite their growing appeal among United Nations (UN), World Bank and western donors however, there is comparatively little consensus on what DDR is expected to achieve. Paradoxically, even where there are shared objectives and benchmarks of success, there is rarely sufficient concrete evidence to show whether DDR achieves its stated objectives. This article considers a range of contexts in which DDR is implemented and the assumptions that underpin the process. Drawing on recent empirical data, it issues a number of lessons emerging from the field.

The article observes a veritable explosion of DDR interventions since the

early 1990s - peaking at the turn of the twentieth century. These operations take place in a range of contexts and circumstances and vary in form and content. By far the majority of these are concentrated in Africa, followed by Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Balkans and the Pacific. The scale (and budgets) of DDR is varied across countries: from fewer than 1,000 demobilised police and militia in the Solomon Islands to more than 350,000 veterans demobilized and reintegrated in the case of Ethiopia. Related, the average cost of DDR per beneficiary also varies considerably - from less than USD400 to over USD11,000 - often orders of magnitude above the affected country’s poverty line. These discrepancies reflect as much the variable costs of bureaucratic machinery as local purchasing power.

1 A Short History of DDR

Though a regular feature of contemporary PSOs and post-conflict recovery packages, DDR is a relatively novel concept. Prior to the 1980s, DDR was conceived and executed exclusively by and for military entities and shaped as much by a desire for peace-building as the imperatives of Cold War co-operation. Focused on veterans and in rare cases rebel groups, the process was ordinarily designed to right-size armed forces and, more unusually, as a stop-gap stabilization measure.1 Early experimentation with DDR - such as interventions supported by the UK in Zimbabwe in 1979 and 1980 - were narrowly conceived as military reform packages. They were confined to bilateral cooperation and the decommissioning and reforming of formal military structures.

By the late-1980s, the UN and its associated agencies became increasingly involved in supporting DDR. Their engagement was frequently solicited in the context of peace-keeping operations and a growing interest in promoting democratic oversight over military institutions. The first UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctioned DDR operation was launched in Namibia (1989-1990) with support from the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG). As such, it was intended to canton and dismantle South African and South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) forces and as well as various ethnic and paramilitary units. Similar initiatives followed in southern Africa and Central America soon after.