



Crafting a Viable DDR Strategy for Congo

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Implementing a viable and effective national strategy on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, or DDR, of ex-combatants of armed groups in eastern Congo is an urgent issue in the regional peace process for the Democratic Republic of Congo. The government of Congo has finalized its national DDR plan, and the United Nations and U.S. Special Envoys to the Great Lakes, Mary Robinson and Russ Feingold, prioritize DDR as a focus of the peace agenda. However, Congo and international partners have not yet agreed on how to implement and fund the DDR plan. Without an effective program, demobilizing combatants in eastern Congo may not see the benefits of defecting and may choose to remain armed. The March 5-6 meeting in the Netherlands of the International Contact Group on Congo provides an excellent opportunity to address this urgent issue. Robinson, Feingold, and other leaders and donors should prioritize efforts to resolve outstanding differences with Congo on DDR and move forward.

New opportunities to advance peace in eastern Congo emerged following the signing of the Nairobi Declarations in December 2013, which established political agreements among Congo, the M23 rebel group, the Southern African Development Community, or SADC, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, or ICGLR. Greater numbers of combatants from the spectrum of armed groups in eastern Congo are willing to disarm and engage in demobilization programs following the military defeat of M23. The speed and efficacy with which the government of Congo and its international partners implement a viable national DDR strategy and reintegrate former combatants will to a great extent determine the future of peace and stability in the region. The process and sequencing within the U.N. Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for Congo and the Region, or PSC Framework, will determine the success of DDR efforts by Congo and its regional and international interlocutors.

The regional security landscape has recently changed in dramatic ways that have created new opportunities for the Congolese government and U.N. forces to establish peace and stability in eastern Congo. The U.N. Intervention Brigade, a 3,069-troop brigade composed of forces from South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi, assisted the Congolese national army, or FARDC, in efforts to militarily defeat M23. The brigade has a mandate to take offensive military action against the threat of armed groups in eastern Congo. The deployment of new unmanned aerial vehicles,

or UAVs, now also provides surveillance and reconnaissance for the intervention brigade to take military action against armed rebel groups.¹

The addition of more robust forces, mandates, and technology has altered the strengths and incentives of rebel groups. A swift effort by the joint FARDC/Intervention Brigade force resulted in the military defeat of M23 forces in North Kivu province late last year, and other armed groups took note. Defections have soared, with approximately 8,000 total combatants surrendering since the official defeat of M23.² At the transit camp of Bweremana, in Masisi, North Kivu province, 2,674 combatants—accompanied by 3,084 dependents—from a range of armed groups have voluntarily surrendered in that time frame.³ However, the ex-combatants currently at the camp do not yet receive clear communication about DDR plans and live in poor sanitary conditions that could affect their incentives to remain.⁴

As defections from rebel groups grow, so too does the need for an effective DDR program. The number of combatants in eastern Congo is difficult to determine, and the capacity of the government and U.N. to assist those who wish to disarm is currently in question. National DDR programs in the past have failed due to the lack of resources and political will, duration of program implementation time, failure to effectively sensitize armed groups and communities, and failures to properly reintegrate ex-combatants into the military or provide alternative livelihoods. Renewed efforts on DDR must apply lessons learned from past experiences—both failures and successes. (See Annex 1)

DDR III

The Congolese government has now developed a national DDR strategy known as DDR III,⁵ after two previous attempts at national DDR strategies in previous national conflicts.⁶ The DDR III strategy consists of four steps:

1. Sensitization of armed groups and affected communities.
2. Disarmament of groups and moving ex-combatants to existing transit camps such as Bweremana, a camp located 54 kilometers west of Goma.
3. Demobilization of groups, starting with the relocation of all combatants to one of three DDR facilities in Kamina, Katanga province; Kitona, Bas-Congo province; or Kotakoli, Equator province. These facilities are already military training camps where biometric identification, medical screening, and vetting take place.
4. A choice between military or civilian reintegration options. Ex-combatants who choose the military option will be vetted for human rights abuses and moved into training programs. Those ex-combatants who choose the civilian reintegration option receive assistance through Reintegration Preparatory Centers, or CPRs. CPRs are designed to provide ex-combatants with five years of support, starting with psychological support, skills training, and civic education.

The DDR III plan is designed to provide for 11,785 ex-combatants⁷ from over 50 armed groups, including 1,800 M23 ex-fighters. DDR III costs nearly 100 million USD, and funds are to be provided by multilateral and bilateral donors, MOSNUSCO, and the Congolese government.⁸

While DDR III implementation falls under the Executive Unit of the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Program, or UEPN-DDR, Congo's president, prime minister, and ministers of defense, interior, justice, and information all supervise. Direction by multiple leaders reflects the power balances within the current Congolese political landscape. Administrative bureaucracies and multiple interlocutors with partners and donors, however, raise the risk of impeding swift implementation of DDR III.⁹

The UEPN-DDR, which replaced the National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration, or CONADER, due to allegations of rampant corruption, is composed of many stakeholders. UEPN-DDR participants include Congolese government agencies, MONUSCO U.N. peacekeeping mission, U.N. aid agencies, donors, local and international nongovernmental organizations, civil society groups, and representatives from the public and private sector. The broad range of actors can provide a window for an independent oversight of UEPN-DDR, but such a role has not yet been stipulated formally.¹⁰

Challenges

Congolese and international leaders must address several critical challenges as the national strategy process moves forward. Stakeholders do not yet agree on the priorities and challenges that they will address. The security environment in which DDR is conducted, the fate of M23, and questions of where and how to resettle ex-combatants are among the most pressing questions. Issues of how to pursue DDR in a way that balances justice and accountability measures with incentives to encourage defection pose another set of key challenges and questions.

Security

Eastern Congo's prevailing insecurity complicates implementation of DDR but also presents those entities implementing DDR with opportunities to strengthen relations with local communities. As the Congolese army and U.N. Intervention Brigade conduct joint operations against armed groups, the capacity of Congolese state security services to provide security for those who have disarmed or would like to disarm remains unclear.

The Congolese government and its international partners must work to build trust and overcome problematic relationships with many communities where armed groups exist, because combatants will only lay down arms if their security is assured. Those leading DDR efforts must also provide for vulnerable dependents of former combatants, particularly women and children. Building trust with local communities as part of a DDR strategy will garner the political and social buy-in of communities reintegrating former combatants. Increased trust with local

communities will also help advance security sector reform and economic development in conflict-affected areas.

Undecided fate of M23

As those who implement DDR confront broad security issues in eastern Congo, the fate of the M23 rebel group poses a particular challenge. Recent reports, including those of the U.N. Group of Experts, suggest that M23 rebels continue to recruit and train new personnel.¹¹ The fates of top leadership and rank-and-file fighters in Rwanda and Uganda are still unknown, although extradition of these individuals for either trial or reintegration seems unlikely at the moment.

The credibility and interests of M23, the Rwandan government, and the Ugandan government remain unclear with regard to Congo's DDR efforts and the regional peace process as a whole. Congo's military victory over M23 reduces the likelihood that Kinshasa would be willing to make concessions to M23 in pursuing DDR. Congolese leaders have little incentive to reintegrate M23 combatants into the Congolese military with their M23 ranks or allow combatants to remain in or return to territory they formerly held. A unilateral approach to reintegrating M23 combatants into society could, however, renew regional hostilities.

Relocation and Repatriation

The issue of relocation and repatriation of ex-combatants has created divisions between Congo and the international community and impeded efforts to implement a DDR program. Some argue that ex-combatants should be relocated from their home regions to other areas of Congo; others believe they should be relocated to their community of origin. There are merits to both perspectives, and compromise is possible. Ex-combatants who choose a civilian reintegration option over the military option should to the greatest extent possible be reintegrated into their communities of origin and not to western Congo, as this would provide disincentives for future defections. Ex-combatants who choose a military reintegration option could be deployed to other parts of Congo for service to help instill a national rather than a regional ethos in the army. Past difficulties with combatant relocation exposes the challenges a DDR program faces in this area. The reintegration and redeployment of National Congress for the Defense of the People, or CNDP, rebels (the precursor group to M23) to areas they had previously controlled resulted in human rights abuses and illegal mining practices.

Providing for repatriation of non-Congolese ex-combatants and populations of vulnerable women and children who are associated with these ex-combatants presents a critical challenge. Regional governments must facilitate the voluntary, transparent, and timely repatriation of non-Congolese ex-combatants and dependents back to their country of origin. Both international and regional partners of the Great Lakes states must press regional governments to reach and implement such agreements.

Providing fully for the needs of ex-combatants who currently reside in transit camps presents yet another urgent challenge for implementing a DDR program. Ex-combatants at transit camps like Bweremana, Walikale town, Beni FARDC camp, Lubutu, Punia, and Kasese in Maniema province, and Nyamunyuyu near Bukavu in South Kivu province lack adequate food, water, shelter, and basic services. These poor conditions could lead the ex-combatants to return to armed groups or discourage those they know on the outside from disarming.

Justice

Those working to implement a viable DDR program must balance incentives for combatants to disarm with accountability measures for those accused of carrying out war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other human rights violations. Balancing punitive measures for the worst offenders with efforts to build acceptance among combatants and conflict-affected communities poses a central challenge for many stakeholders in a DDR process.

The Congolese government and its international partners must continue working to establish specialized mixed chambers to address grave human rights violations in eastern Congo. Political will and questions about temporal jurisdiction for a mixed chambers structure remain key obstacles. The establishment of a mixed chambers institution would provide a powerful mechanism to counter an environment of impunity for grave crimes.

Recommendations

A series of complex, interlocking challenges require new efforts to strengthen the credibility and viability of Congo's national DDR strategy as one element, but not the sole component of the peace process. An effective national DDR strategy must complement and be coordinated with related regional peace and security agreements, including the U.N. PSC Framework and the international reconstruction strategy known as the International Security Stabilization and Support Strategy, or I4S. Congolese and regional authorities, with the support of the international community, should harmonize goals across multiple agreements to ensure consistency in the vision and approach for land rights, local governance, economic opportunity, and security in eastern Congo.

We recommend the following measures for the government of Congo and international partners:

- **Finalize the DDR plan and ensure it meets key operational and accountability standards before the International Contact Group meeting on March 5-6.** International leaders and diplomats must realistically account for the Congolese government's capacity to implement reforms. A combination of pressure and guidance can help Kinshasa implement the strategy. Kobler, Robinson, and Feingold should press for an independent financial oversight board for the DDR plan to prevent misappropriation of funds.

- **Effectively neutralize the M23 rebel group as part of a regional process.** If M23 reemerges as a security threat, the peace process will lose momentum and hard-won progress. Special Envoys from the U.N., U.S., E.U, and A.U. should pressure Rwanda and Uganda to halt support for M23 and extradite ex-combatants to Congo.
- **Include host communities in reintegration efforts.** Joint reintegration projects with local communities can enhance reintegration and build economic and social interdependence to reduce hostile attitudes.
- **Expand community-level sensitization campaigns tailored to local populations.** Partnering with churches and other local stakeholders to educate communities on DDR programs and provide opportunities for both ex-combatants and host communities can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of DDR measures. Communicating about the reintegration efforts, available options and processes, how long certain procedures will take, and what security mechanisms are available is a critical component of this effort. Providing reconciliation measures and psycho-social support for victims and perpetrators of abuses can help conflict-affected communities begin to heal.
- **Provide for women, children, and disabled ex-combatants.** The World Bank should promote projects that address the needs of these groups.
- **Ensure that the DDR strategy includes economic opportunities tied to the public works projects of the I4S strategy and regional economic integration projects of the PSC Framework process.** Economic opportunity can dissuade ex-combatants from remobilizing. These larger regional and international processes provide both a ready framework and resources to ensure new economic opportunities exist for ex-combatants and affected communities.
- **Establish a qualified and credible third party monitoring and evaluation mechanism to oversee implementation of the DDR strategy, which could take place within the I4S program.** Those responsible for oversight must be recruited on the basis of merit as opposed to political affiliation or connection. International partners should continuously monitor the process and create strategies and mechanisms to ensure that malfeasance, corruption, and lack of capacity do not undermine the success of the project. Gradually releasing funds based on progress, including milestones established with the Congolese government, could provide one strategy.

Considerations for socio-economic and military reintegration:

Socio-economic reintegration

Lessons learned from previous DDR campaigns

- Do not provide lump sums of cash. Integrate ex-combatants into economic activities that offer reliable and regular payment, for instance through labor-intensive public works projects.
- Balance support for host communities with assistance for ex-combatants who are reintegrating to prevent resentment.
- Account for the psychological needs of ex-combatants.
- Provide sustainable livelihood programs as well as necessary and economically viable skill sets for ex-combatants who need structured activities upon disarmament, particularly in the short term. Livelihoods like infrastructure construction (roads, schools, and hospitals), community farming, and mechanical engineering can provide constructive vocations for ex-combatants.
- Ensure that medium- to long-term reinsertion programming for ex-combatants who choose civilian reintegration is conducted in ex-combatants' home communities as opposed to relocation elsewhere in the country.

Military reintegration

Lessons learned from previous reintegration campaigns

- As a long-term strategy, military reintegration has often produced new violence. Reintegration cannot be dismissed altogether but must be slowly phased out while other economic alternatives are created.
- Manage the expectations of armed groups and ex-combatants, and convey through DDR sensitization programs that many ex-combatants may not be able to enter the army.
- Balance between pressuring and negotiating with armed groups to support DDR programs.
 - Work closely with the U.N. Joint Mission Analysis Centre and other intelligence/research services to understand their strengths and capabilities.
 - Create a sense of ownership in the process for ex-combatants, and use the military victory over M23 as a bargaining chip to encourage combatants to participate in the DDR process.
 - Ensure that defectors understand their choices when they cannot return or face punishment upon their return. The costs for integrating must neither be too low nor too high.
- Ensure that vetting and training are a pre-requisite to DDR programming.
- Consult affected communities to identify perpetrators of gross human rights violations and make known from the outset that they will face judicial consequences and not be reinserted into communities with impunity.

- Ensure that ranks are given on the basis of merit and not with regard to political considerations. Account for perceptions of (ethnic) favoritism and discrimination among ex-combatants. To prevent future conflict, ensure that non-eligible combatants understand that they have been rejected based on lack of qualifications rather than political concerns.
- When reintegrating ex-combatants:
 - Be aware of the ethnic composition of the unit (e.g. perception of Rwandaphone favoritism in 2009).
 - Sever the ties between ex-combatants and their former patrons.
 - Prevent parallel command structures.
 - Prevent favoritism in the treatment of armed groups.
 - Set clear deadlines for the integration of armed groups.
 - Ensure adequate living conditions so that ex-combatants are not dramatically worse off and find reasons to defect.
 - Do not reintegrate at the expense of the performance of the army.
 - Implement a reward scheme to increase motivation.
 - When deployed, monitor the availability of lucrative opportunities such as mining that might disrupt DDR processes.
 - Build cohesion to strengthen bonds among newly created units. Increased loyalty to the unit reduces the likelihood of defection from the army. Continuous training promotes cohesion.

Endnotes

¹ Gberie, Lansana, “Intervention Brigade: End Game in the Congo?” *African Renewal*, August 2013, available at <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2013/intervention-brigade-end-game-congo>.

² See remarks by Martin Kobler, U.N. Security Council, “The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” Meeting record S/PV.7094, January 13, 2014, p. 4, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.7094.

³ Based on field research from Enough field staff in Goma, North Kivu province, December 2013.

⁴ Based on interviews with U.N. field staff, North Kivu province, December 2013.

⁵ Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ministry of National Defense and Former Combatants, “Plan Globale de Désarmement, Démobilisation, et Réintégration (DDR III): Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation, et Réinsertion (PNDDR),” available at <http://desc-wondo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Plan-Global-de-DDR-III.pdf> (last accessed February 2014). See also DRC, Ministry of National Defense and Former Combatants, “Unité d’exécution du programme nationale de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion (UEPN-DDR): Plan Des Operations Conjointes de désarmement, et de démobilisation pour le DDR III,” [Joint Operations Plan], December 2013, available at <http://desc-wondo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Plan-des-Operations-conjointes-de-DDR.pdf> (last accessed February 2014).

⁶ For a look at the outcomes of Congo’s Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project, see The World Bank Group Integrity Vice Presidency, “Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project: Democratic Republic of Congo,” redacted report available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDOII/Resources/INT_redactedreport_Congo2.pdf. For a short overview of World Bank-managed activities in support of Congo’s Stabilization and Reconstruction-DDR project see World Bank, “DDR in the Democratic Republic of Congo Program Update,” September 2009, available at http://www.mdrp.org/PDFs/DRC_Program_Update.pdf.

⁷ DRC, Ministry of National Defense and Former Combatants, “Annexe 1: Cartographie illustrée des groupes armés,” [Illustrated map of armed groups], pp. 31-32, available at <http://desc-wondo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Plan-Global-de-DDR-III.pdf> (last accessed February 2014).

⁸ DRC, Ministry of National Defense and Former Combatants, “Financement et Budget du Plan Global du DDR III,” [Financial and budget strategy for DDR III], p. 30, available at <http://desc-wondo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Plan-Global-de-DDR-III.pdf> (last accessed February 2014).

⁹ Accounts, notes of International Partners’ meeting of January 28, 2014 privately shared with Enough Project.

¹⁰ DRC, Ministry of National Defense and Former Combatants, “Organisation institutionnelle du DDR III,” [DDR III Institutional Organization], p. 9, available at <http://desc-wondo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Plan-Global-de-DDR-III.pdf> (last accessed February 2014).

¹¹ U.N. Security Council, “Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” S/2014/42, paras. 4, 5, 17, 18; Annex 15, January 23, 2014, available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/42&referer=/english/&Lang=E.