The Struggle after Combat

The Role of NGOs in DDR Processes: Sierra Leone Case Study

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Cordaid

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This study was commissioned by Cordaid and executed by five researchers. The views and analysis put forward in this report are entirely those of the authors in their private or professional capacity and should not be attributed to Cordaid, the involved research institutions or any agencies or persons interviewed during this study.

Table of contents

The struggle after combat 2
Table of contents 3
Acknowledgements 4
1 **Introduction** 5
2 **The causes and dynamics of armed violence in Sierra Leone** 7
State and shadow state 7
Youth and rebellion 8
Shifting alliances and the war economy 9
Attempts at resolution 9
Implications for DDR 10
3 **Overview of the DDR process** 12
Design of the process 13
Institutional setup 15
4 **NGO involvement in DDR** 17
NGO involvement in Disarmament and Demobilisation 18
NGO involvement in Reintegration 18
NGO involvement in DDR for ex-CAAFG 19
NGO contributions to DDR outside the formal programme 20
Non-involvement with DDR and underlying concerns 21
5 **Voices from below: examples of strategy and perspective of ex-combatants** 23
Margaret's story 23
The Okada business 24
David's story 25
6 **Strengths and weaknesses of DDR** 27
Stability and security 27
No transformation 27
Exclusion from the programme 28
Economic reintegration 29
Social reintegration 32
Strengths and weaknesses and the role of NGOs 33
7 **Conclusions** 35
Bibliography 37
List of interviews 40
Abbreviations 45

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1 Introduction

The past twenty years have witnessed a dramatic rise in the number of comprehensive programmes aimed at the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants (DDR) in countries recovering from war. It has come to be well recognised that effective DDR is crucial for building lasting peace and preventing a relapse into conflict. It has also become clear that DDR is difficult and that it is intertwined with other immediate post-war processes, such as establishing security and legitimate governance, rehabilitation, the return of refugees, reconciliation, transitional justice, and economic recovery. Academic and policy-oriented analysis of DDR has also developed in recent years. Many experiences, outcomes, shortcomings and lessons learned with regard to DDR have been documented, and responsive policy guidelines – such as the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS, United Nations 2006) – have been formulated.

The bulk of these efforts have focussed on the required context and the desired design of DDR as well as on specific issues and target groups. There is some literature on the institutional dynamics around the agencies implementing DDR, the United Nations (UN) in particular. Much less has been written specifically about the functioning of NGOs in DDR processes, while they often implement a major part of the programme. The wider literature on developmental and humanitarian practice demonstrates that it is inappropriate to view NGOs as mere executers of donor-funded projects. Particularly in countries emerging from war, 'development politics' tend to be complicated. The lack of strong local agencies and the massive influx of foreign NGOs and other actors often compound an already complex transition. The NGO arena thus becomes inter-woven with pre-existing processes and problems, while introducing its own dynamics and dilemmas.

This document is part of a broader study that focuses on that area of relative analytical neglect: the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in DDR processes. The study consists of three case studies – Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone – and a synthesis report. This report covers Sierra Leone's experience with DDR.

The study was commissioned by Cordaid, a Dutch multi-mandate NGO. It aims to assist the organisation with developing its views and policy in relation to DDR by bringing into focus the theoretical underpinnings of DDR and the role of NGOs in DDR processes in the field. More broadly, the study aims to inform a wider audience of academics, military, policymakers and aid practitioners about the activities, strengths and weaknesses of NGOs in DDR processes. Accordingly, it aims to examine how NGOs can improve their practice and how they can best complement parties that normally play a leading role in DDR processes, such as the military and UN agencies.

The main research question of this study is thus: what is the role of NGOs – and Cordaid's partners in particular – in DDR processes in relation to military and other actors involved with such processes?

The case of Sierra Leone was selected for three reasons. Firstly, with the formal DDR process lasting from 1998 to 2004, there is sufficient scope for analysing longer-term processes and revisiting ex-combatants and their communities a few years after the formal completion of DDR. Secondly, despite various weaknesses and problems, the Sierra Leonean war-to-peace transition in general and the DDR process in particular have been presented as relative successes. This enables us to look at the potential contributions of NGOs to positive change and might result in useful lessons learned. Thirdly, we deliberately selected a West African case, in view of the considerable proliferation of violent conflict and the various attempts at transition (including DDR) in the region.

Like the DRC, Sierra Leone is a case with large-scale UN involvement. Clearly, this distinguishes the subject of this study from DDR processes with minor foreign involvement, such as in neighbouring Mali. It draws particular attention to the UN approach to DDR and the nexus between peacekeeping and DDR.

Not all parts of Cordaid's present programme have strong ties to DDR. For that reason, this case study focuses on the wider NGO involvement with DDR, rather than on Cordaid and its Sierra Leonean partners. However, some relevant partners have been interviewed and their views and experiences are part of the overall analysis.

This report is based on a literature review and empirical fieldwork in Sierra Leone. The latter was carried out by three researchers over an accumulative period of eight weeks in the country. In total, seventy-one individual interviews and group discussions were held in and around Bo, Freetown, Kenema, Kono, and Makeni, and over the phone from the Netherlands. These interviews were held with a wide variety of respondents, representing different population groups, ex-combatants and -commanders as well as other community members, representatives of the state, academics, multi-lateral organisations and different kinds of NGOs. In total, we interviewed forty-two ex-combatants, thirty-three NGOs (of which five were Cordaid's partners), twenty-two women who used to be 'bush wives' or prostitutes, six representatives of the government and the army, six representatives of UN or bilateral donor agencies, five academics, four artisans, twenty-two individuals with ties to three 'Okada' associations and four other informants. A list of interviewees is included in Annex 1.

The main methodological constraint of this case study concerns the fact that the DDR process was completed in 2004. Institutional structures, reports, key informants and databases had disappeared and the informants interviewed had to rely on their memory to answer some questions. We tried to minimise this problem by crosschecking data with other studies carried out in an earlier period and by focusing the bulk of our analysis on the present circumstances.

2 The causes and dynamics of armed violence in Sierra Leone

To comprehend a DDR process, one needs to understand why people became part of an armed faction and in what context they did so. The history and nature of conflict in Sierra Leone are well publicised. We discuss the main underlying factors of the Sierra Leonean war in some detail, because there are relevant continuities and linkages to the post-war recovery process, including DDR.

State and shadow state

The roots of organised armed violence in Sierra Leone are commonly traced to the workings of the political economy and the nature of the state. Alongside the formal state architecture – first created in 1896 as a British protectorate, transformed into an independent state in 1961 – Sierra Leone has long known a 'shadow state.' Rather than working through formal governance structures, rulers draw "authority from their abilities to control markets and their material rewards." (Reno 1995: 3) The key to this patrimonial system is the redistribution of national resources "as marks of *personal* favour to followers who respond with loyalty to the leader, rather than to the institution the leader represents" (Richards 1995: 34). Resources and political control are thus organised along the lines of competing, personalised networks, which often have a particular affiliation, ethnic or otherwise. Though sometimes portrayed as primitive, pre-modern or problematic, patrimonialism is actually "quite compatible with various institutions in modern state and society", as Richards points out, and in many ways the formal system depends on it to function (Reno 1995).

State and shadow state assumed a highly centralised character over the course of Siaka Stevens' presidency, which was preceded by two unsuccessful military coups (1967 and 1971). His All-People's Congress (APC) sidelined its predecessor, the Mende-dominated Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), crushed political opposition, neglected rural parts of the country and marginalised large parts of the population. The one-party state of the APC resorted to systematic violence to safeguard its position (Bangura 1997), while relying heavily on the diamond sector for its resources. Stevens' handpicked successor, General Momoh, faced increasingly fierce opposition in the years after his inauguration in 1985. Richards (1995) and others argue Momoh's patrimonial network collapsed under decreasing prices at the world market for Sierra Leone's natural resource exports as well as crumbling international assistance when the country lost its geo-political relevance with the end of the Cold War. Others question to what extent Momoh actually succumbed to a lack of foreign funding (Bangura 1997: 132).[1] However, it is uncontested that his rule invoked the popular resentment, rebellion and mutiny that eventually uprooted his regime.

Meanwhile, Liberian warlord Charles Taylor grew agitated with the involvement of the Sierra Leonean army in the ECOWAS[2] Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) regional peacekeeping mission in Liberia. He responded by assisting the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in taking control over Sierra Leone's diamond fields, thus unleashing what was to become a gruesome war. Momoh expanded the armed forces but lacked the means to sustain them. Ill equipped, they suffered major losses to the guerrillas. The army's weaknesses did not interfere with its access to the spoils of war; they became a powerful player in the political economy.

1 *Bangura argues against the academic tendency to use patrimonialism as the magic term that explains all African political dynamics. Judging from international aid flows to Sierra Leone, there was no such thing as the collapse of patrimonialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s.*

2 *ECOWAS stands for Economic Community of West African States. ECOMOG was created as a regional peacekeeping force to intervene in Liberia in 1990. In 1997, ECOMOG intervened in Sierra Leone as well.*

The ailing Sierra Leonean state largely collapsed under the decade of war initiated by the RUF, but the rebels never truly captured Freetown to reinstall a new regime. Instead, the regime fell prey to a succession of coups and power transitions in the capital. Momoh was ousted in 1992 by Captain Valentine E.M. Strasser's National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), which was in turn overthrown by a military uprising led by Brigadier Julius Maada Bio in 1996. Following a brief interlude of ceasefire and elections, war resumed and the government suffered another coup in 1997, this time at the hands of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Throughout the 1990s, the shadow state with its coercive tactics and privatised control over resources and territory rendered much of the formal state irrelevant, and Sierra Leone descended into a traumatic era of violence and humanitarian crisis.

Youth and rebellion

A second key strand of analysis focuses on the behaviour of youth and their position in Sierra Leonean society. The RUF made world headlines with drugged youngsters maiming, raping and killing community members. Popular analysts like Robert Kaplan (1994) resorted to terms like 'mindless violence' and 'new barbarism' to account for it. Others have argued, however, it would be a mistake to 'foreground' war as 'a thing in itself,' without appreciating its societal roots and the various continuities between war and peace: that is, war makes 'sociological sense' (Richards 1995 and 2005).

Richards (1995) and other scholars refer to the history of slavery – its present incarnations within the patrimonial system and the resulting resentments amongst the 'Lumpenproletariat.' The RUF rebellion was induced by the failure of state and shadow state to deliver to unemployed and marginalised youth. Fighters cited the unjust rule of local chiefs, exploitative labour and inability to access land as reasons to resist the established societal order (Peters and Richards 1998; Douma 2007). Student uprisings and Gaddafi-inspired Green Book activism are drawn into the equation as well, though the RUF's ideological underpinnings and revolutionary agenda have always remained fairly thin (Abdullah and Muana 1998). The vast majority of the rebels claim they were not driven by revolutionary sentiments, but rather were forcibly conscripted (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 25). The RUF leadership used them to 'constitute a viable fighting force and *suggest* a credible "popular uprising" against the APC' (Richards 1995: 5, italics added).

Youth violence did not come to Sierra Leone as a revolutionary reaction to the establishment – it had long been part of the system (Kandeh 1999). Underclass youth ('Rarray Boys'), particularly those living in parts of the urban slums and those working in the diamond pits ('San-san boys') have always been an instrument of the 'political patrons and criminal bosses' for petty crime, political thuggery and staged demonstrations (Musah 1999: 82; Abdullah 1997). These youth were mercenaries and rebels avant la lettre and would prove to be a fertile recruitment pool for the main players in the Sierra Leonean conflict: the army, the RUF and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). There are thus many continuities between early youth clientelism and the subsequent proliferation of child soldiers (Murphy 2003). Some analysts reduce the RUF to an inherently violent (Bangura 1997), 'bandit organisation' (Abdullah and Muana 1998:191), while others continue to underline the importance of economic and political grievances of youth, particularly in the rural areas (Richards 1995; 2005). Finally, a salient role in the conflict has been attributed to youth culture, anti-systemic discourses – such as those inspired by Rambo movies (Richards 1995) – and the *rites de passage* and sense of belonging created by (armed) youth groups.

Shifting alliances and the war economy

The war itself lasted from 1991 to 2001 and mainly involved five groups of armed actors: the Liberian-backed RUF, various incarnations of the Sierra Leonean armed forces, the CDF, foreign mercenaries hired by the government, and international forces (ECOMOG, Nigerian, UN, United Kingdom [UK]). Comprised of multiple subgroups, each of these factions suffered from diverging interests or outright fissures.

The CDF find their roots in the traditions of the various ethnic groups. Among the Mende, the traditional concept of Kamajor ('secret societies' of hunters and protectors), was reinvigorated in the early 1990s as a self-defence mechanism against the threat of the RUF (Fanthorpe 2001). Similar systems among other ethnic groups were known, such as Tamaboro, Gbetti and Kapra. These groups were much more effective than the army in resisting the RUF with their knowledge of the local terrain, their ability to engage in guerrilla tactics, and the mythical power attributed to them by local medicine men through herbal solutions and ceremonial acts, which instilled great fear among the rebels (Muana 1997). The army gratefully used these armed villagers as 'vigilantes' to expand its control. These diverse and localised groups were united under the banner of CDF and subsequently strengthened and reinforced by the Nigerian-led ECOMOG. Though the CDF never became a fully coherent group, they were largely united under the leadership of chief Sam Hinga Norman.

The SLPP-led government increasingly relied on the CDF to rebuke the RUF threat (Zack-Williams 1997), and in 1997 the army rebelled once more and formed the AFRC. With both the CDF and the SLPP government dominated by Mendes, and the army disproportionately Temne (as intended by the APC), this coup appears to have had an ethnic dimension. Paradoxically, the AFRC forces then joined sides with the RUF. Subsequently, ECOMOG became directly involved in the conflict and drove the AFRC out of Freetown and into the bush. It was there that the earlier tendency of army troops to adopt RUF tactics and cruelties – earning them the label of 'sobels': soldier by day, rebel by night – was thus formalised into a military alliance.

Though 'normal' politics were on hold, the political economy thrived. From the start, the war was a scramble for the country's wealth of natural resources – diamonds in particular. Though the rank and file had little access to this wealth (Douma 2007: 125), commanders of the various groupings capitalised on the prevailing disorder and utilized coercive means to capture and trade commodities. Looting and exploitation became an end, rather than just the means to the struggle among RUF commanders, the army, and mercenaries whom the government had hired (but was unable to pay).

The war between the different factions took a heavy toll. A humanitarian tragedy unfolded with massive displacement of the civilian population. Armed groups engaged in killing, intimidation, amputations, extortion, conscription and sexual abuse of civilians. Large numbers of girls and women were abducted by the RUF as 'bush wives' and subjected to systematic rape and abuse.

Attempts at resolution

Several attempts to end the war in Sierra Leone preceded the eventual peace agreement in 2001. The war can be roughly divided into two phases. The first phase ended in 1996 with the Bio Coup and subsequent ECOWAS-facilitated peace agreement in Abidjan between the RUF and the new army leadership. Despite RUF warnings that peaceful conditions must prevail first, elections were held and the first government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (SLPP) came to power. Hopes for peace proved short-lived, when the RUF took to arms and Johnny Paul Koroma's AFRC pushed Kabbah into exile and joined forces with the RUF insurgency.

The second phase encompassed a series of offensives and lulls during which the CDF, the Nigerian-led ECOMOG, UN peacekeepers, and the UK armed forces eventually brought the rebels (RUF) and the junta (AFRC) to their knees. ECOMOG seized control over Freetown in 1998 while the CDF advanced from various rural areas, mainly in the South and East. ECOMOG was soon replaced by the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL, July 1998 – Oct 1999), which was in turn to make way for its larger successor, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). In the wake of the international offensives, the newly returned government set up the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) in 1998, and in 1999 reached a new peace agreement with the rebels in Lomé. This arranged for a ceasefire, the disbandment of the army and the creation of a new one, and the transformation of the RUF into a democratic political party. UNAMSIL was to monitor the situation – the DDR process in particular.

UNAMSIL's peacekeeping role soon became peace enforcement, as the rebels and junta breached the agreement and took to arms again. They took hostages on several occasions, most notably 500 UN peacekeepers in Makeni in May 2000, which they later set free. The situation was further complicated when the West Side Boys – a new splinter group from the RUF/AFRC front – took more hostages. Along with UNAMSIL and the CDF, the British military launched an impressive offensive, crushing the renegade faction and crippling the rebellion. A new, final agreement was reached in 2001 after a series of negotiations in Abuja. This cleared the road for a range of peace-consolidating efforts: new elections (which reinstalled Kabbah, sidelined the CDF and decimated the RUF), a range of reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, the founding of the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the recreation of Sierra Leone's armed forces and the resumption of the DDR process.

Both the RUF leader Foday Sankoh and the CDF chief Sam Hinga Norman were offered lucrative posts in the government but were subsequently accused of war crimes and charged by the Special Court. Sankoh and Norman both died before a ruling could be made. By January 2002, the RUF, the CDF and the AFRC had formally been disarmed and demobilised. President Kabbah declared the war over, though the reintegration programme was to last another two years.

Implications for DDR

The preceding analytical summary of the war yields four important implications for DDR. Firstly, armed violence in Sierra Leone stems from a complex set of political, social, economic and military causes. Some of these – the failure of the state and shadow state and the marginalisation of youth – are structural; other causes are dynamic, such as the war economy and the domestic (CDF) or foreign (ECOMOG) military response to the initial war between the army and the RUF. A successful consolidation of peace would have to address both factors. Merely eradicating or disbanding armed groups would amount to a short-sighted treatment of symptoms.

Secondly, there are continuities between war and peace, particularly when it comes to the workings of the political economy. Sierra Leone has witnessed resilient processes of patrimonialism under the guise of a phantom state with *de facto* privatisation of resources, territorial control and coercive means. In many ways the sequence of war and peace efforts has not changed the way the system works, though there were dramatic changes in the actors involved.

Thirdly, there are crucial differences between the armed factions, most prominently the RUF, CDF and various incarnations of the army. Their origins, constituencies and organisations are radically divergent. The rank and file of the RUF largely consisted of youth conscripted by the guerrillas. Many of them were women abducted for sexual use by their superiors in addition to roles in combat, intelligence, cooking and other tasks. The CDF originated as an upgraded cluster of traditional self-defence movements with

strong links to their local constituencies. Its members were almost exclusively male, often more senior and respected, and many maintained a 'normal' life in their communities while engaged in military efforts. The government forces were traditionally urban oriented and slightly better educated, but transformed from a conventional army into a 'sobel' movement and, following the 1997 coup, into a fragmented junta allied with the rebels.

Similarities among the factions include problems with control and command, engagement in atrocities, and the presence of different ethnic groups. There are distinct differences with regard to their fates during the endgame of the war. The CDF eventually emerged victorious and had relatively high levels of local and international legitimacy, even heroism, attributed to the movement. In parts of the country, they filled the vacuum of absent government structures in the immediate post-war period by serving as a paramilitary law and order force. Ultimately, however, they were prevented from taking a strong political posture. In contrast, the end of the war left the RUF militarily crippled, politically irrelevant, and socially stigmatised. The same was true for the junta, but unlike the RUF, the armed forces were reinvented as a legitimate guardian of the democratic government. Some former rebels and CDF were also integrated into the new army. As a result of these differences, the needs, wants and threats of the three groups in relation to DDR were also quite different.

A fourth point concerns the transnational nature of security dynamics. Both the causes and consequences of armed violence in Sierra Leone have international dimensions. The neighbouring countries Liberia and Guinea are of particular importance to DDR, because armed factions – as well as their funds and arms – easily passed across national borders. Unfortunately, this study did not include fieldwork in these countries. While acknowledging that the regional element is important, this report focuses on Sierra Leone's domestic situation.

3 Overview of the DDR process

Minor *ad hoc* DDR efforts were initiated at various moments in the 1990s, but they disintegrated when hostilities flared up again.3 The last programme started in 1998 and was suspended twice due to resumed fighting, which yielded insecurity and rearmament (Interview 34).4 The first phase was mainly concerned with discharging AFRC soldiers, who surrendered to ECOMOG, but it was terminated by the joint junta-rebel attack on the capital in early 1999. The second phase lasted from October 1999 to April 2000 and disarmed significant numbers of RUF (4150) and CDF (8800) as well as remaining junta and former government forces (4495). This phase ended as violence resumed and RUF forces took UN peacekeepers hostage. Only 2600 were disarmed in the subsequent year of violent turbulence. The bulk of RUF (19,267) and CDF (28,051) combatants were disarmed in the third attempt at DDR, which started in May 2001. The total DDR process was completed in February 2004 and received a largely positive evaluation (Tesfamichael et al. 2004). Initially, DDR aimed to demobilise some 33,000 ex-combatants (Peters 2006: 118). Later this goal was raised to 45,000, of which 12 percent were expected to be women (Thusi and Meek 2003: 25). In the end, the process disarmed 72,000 ex-combatants, demobilised some 71,000, and enrolled 56,000 in reintegration activities. Over 42,000 weapons and 1.2 million rounds of ammunition were collected. Tables 1 and 2, below, provide an overview.

Table 1: Estimated and actual disarmament figures (UNDDR 2007)

Armed faction	Original estimate	Actually disarmed	Percentage of original estimate	Percentage of total ex-combatants
RUF	15,000	24,352	162%	33.6%
CDF	15,000	37,377	249%	51.6%
AFRC/Ex-SLA	13,000	8,527	66%	11.6%
Other paramilitary groups	2,000	2,234	112%	3.1%
TOTAL	**45,000**	**72,490**	**161%**	**100%**

3 *These include token efforts of the NPRC in 1993 and the limited DDR resulting from the Abidjan Peace accord in 1996 (Peters 2006: 117).*

4 *The reference numbers of the interviews have been randomized to protect our sources against any negative consequences of discussing sensitive and controversial issues with us. In subsequent references, the abbreviation 'Int' is used for interview.*

Table 2: Disarmament and demobilisation figures for gender and adulthood (UNDDR 2007)

Category	Number disarmed	Percentage	Number demobilised	Percentage
Adult men	60,894	84,0%	59,447	83.7%
Adult women	4,751	6,6%	4,751	6.7%
Children	6,845	9,4%	6,45	9.6%
Total	**72,490**	**100%**	**71,043**	**100%**

Design of the process

The stated aim of the DDR programme was “to assist the government in stabilising the region and ensuring peace within the nation” and “to disarm combatants and reintegrate them back into society to ensure peace and development of the nation” (UNDDR 2007). The underlying political priorities driving the process were narrower than these comprehensive and ambitious phrases would suggest (Tesfamicheal et al. 2004; various interviews). The *de facto* aim was “to buy time for the government to get back on its feet,” explained one informant who was closely involved with the process (Int 55). The emphasis thus lay with the more immediate objectives of disarmament and demobilisation.

DDR took place in the gradually expanding area controlled by the peacekeeping force; only in the third phase did it spread across all twelve districts of the country. The first and biggest DDR camp was located in Lungi, near the international airport and the capital. Additional camps were set up as close to RUF territories as possible, such as the camp in Port Loko – to service RUF-controlled Makeni (Peters 2006: 118) – and the RUF-surrounded enclave in Daru, close to the Liberian border (Int 21). Though UNAMSIL was mandated to enforce the peace agreement, the DDR process itself was not coercive. Efforts to persuade ex-combatants to join the process included direct dialogue, publications, and radio broadcasts, and enrolment was met with concrete benefits, such as money, food, shelter and training opportunities. No force was used to broker registration and ex-combatants were free to leave the process. (Int 21)

All combatants of the RUF, paramilitary groups, the armed forces of Sierra Leone and the CDF were entitled to DDR benefits. As a proof of participation, they were to present ammunition or a serviceable, modern weapon – no single or double-barrelled guns or locally-made hunting rifles (Thusi and Meek 2003: 27). Disarmament often occurred collectively, which enabled combatants to enrol on a given troop/arms ratio, depending on the type of weapon – three people registered with two guns, for example. In the early stages of DDR, this was only allowed with team-managed weapons, such as rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine guns, and not with a regular gun. Combatants below eighteen were offered a different DDR package and were not required to present a weapon to be eligible. (UNDDR 2007)

Adults received an identity card upon disarmament for tracking eligibility and receipt of benefits. The card displayed four letters which would be punched when the main benefits were delivered: an ‘A’ (disarmament fee equivalent to US$100), a ‘B’ (another US$100 as a transitional, safety net allowance upon discharge from the DDR camp), a ‘C’ (the provision of assistance in seeking employment, e.g. vocational training) and a ‘D’ (the provision of the required tools upon completing the training). (Peters 2006: 120; various interviews)

Disarmament occurred at 'reception' centres – a sports field or other public place designated for this activity – and consisted of assembly, interviews, weapons collection, eligibility certification, transportation to demobilisation centres and the provision of civilian clothing (Thusi and Meek 2003; Int 21). The demobilisation phase usually included of a number of activities inside the DDR camp – an explanation of the DDR programme, medical checkups, quick orientation programmes for job hunting, awareness-raising on reconciliation and homecoming, education on sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial counseling, civic education and recreational activities. Many ex-combatants – particularly CDF who had remained with their families – never entered a camp. They collected their benefits – if provided – and returned home.

Ex-combatants residing in the camp were provided with cooked food, shelter and sanitary facilities. The 'followers' accompanying an ex-combatant (often his 'bush wife' and children) were not eligible to access these facilities. Partly as a result of rumours and high expectations, DDR camps tended to be volatile and prone to demonstrations. Only in sporadic cases, however, did UNAMSIL intervene to curb severe unrest (Thusi and Meek 2003). In the later years of DDR, as donors decided to fast-track DDR, the camps were abolished and ex-combatants were sent straight into society (Int 21; Peters 2006: 118).

The reintegration programme administered by NCDDR primarily focused at the economic dimension. Ex-combatants were free to choose from four options: 1) the receipt of tools and seeds for agricultural work, 2) manual labour in return for salary and/or food, 3) enrolment in formal education, or 4) vocational training in carpentry, tailoring, garage mechanics, driving, cloth dying, hairdressing and other artisan work (UNDDR 2007). Because this last option would often require ex-combatants to travel and stay outside of their home place, they were offered a stipend. This added further benefit to the option that was already considered most lucrative.

A fifth occupational option was only available during the first period of DDR: joining Sierra Leone's newly created army. Only a few thousand ex-combatants, some of whom were ex-RUF and ex-CDF, did this. The Military Reintegration Programme (MRP) was designed for a maximum of 3000 ex-combatants, while the army strength at the time was some 12,000 (Malan, Rakate and McIntyre 2002: ch. 8). Table 3 provides a limited overview.

Table 3: Ex-combatant choices for economic reintegration (Peters 2006: 120)

	Agriculture	Food for work	Back to school	Vocational training	Into the army
Percentage of ex-combatants choosing:	15%	no data available	20%	51%	no data available

The DDR programme for ex-combatants below eighteen was entirely different. Children formerly associated with the fighting forces (ex-CAAFG) were hosted in Interim Care Centres (ICCs). These were camps or some kind of pre-existing accommodation and also hosted other 'unaccompanied children.' The ICCs provided food, shelter, sensitisation programmes and some form of schooling while efforts were made to trace and reunite families. In parallel, there were activities to sensitise communities to the return of child soldiers. In line with the Cape Town Principles, the formal policy was that ex-CAAFG did not need to hand in a weapon or prove their ability to assemble and handle a gun in order to enrol for DDR benefits. In some cases, they would be interviewed to verify their testimonies (Int 20). However, in practice – especially in the later stages of DDR – the ability to handle a gun was often used as an eligibility criterion. Many youth

were thus left out, because they served as spies, cooks, porters or sex slaves rather than as fighters. Some youth who initially entered the regular DDR process were subsequently transferred to an ICC. Other children went to an ICC directly. Children of ex-combatants were not sent to ICCs but instead remained with their parents through the regular DDR process.

Institutional setup

The execution of the DDR process involved a large number of agencies. Each of these had its own background, mandate, and particular role in the implementation of the DDR programme.

The NCDDR was set up to administer the DDR process. President Kabbah chaired the commission while daily management responsibilities lay with the Executive Secretary, Francis Kai-Kai. For discussion on key political and security issues relating to DDR, there was an additional committee with representatives from the government, the RUF, the CDF, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) and UNAMSIL. NCDDR had a central administration and multiple demobilisation centres as well as regional and district reintegration offices in the four regions of the country. Though the DDR programme was officially a nationally-owned endeavour administered by NCDDR, in practice the UN and donors had strong influence.

Disarmament was carried out by UNAMSIL. The military observers of the peacekeeping mission had the lead in screening the ex-combatants and collecting their weapons. Destruction of weapons was also handled by UNAMSIL, though part of the work was subcontracted to the German government agency Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

The NCDDR administered demobilisation, but the UN, NGOs, and various donor agencies were present in the camps to construct and/or maintain infrastructure, provide food and other items, and to hold discussions and sessions aimed at sensitising the ex-combatants.

The NCDDR also maintained a database of the locations of ex-combatants, both during and after their stays in the DDR camps. Financial allocations for reintegration were based on these geographic breakdowns. Implementing agencies – mostly NGOs – were requested to submit project proposals aimed at the (economic) reintegration of ex-combatants. On average some US$1000 per combatant was available for these projects (Int 55). The donors funding this part of the programme were closely involved in the decision-making process. They participated in the Project Approval Committee (PAC), which reviewed all proposals. Initially there was a lack of proposals, creating a gap between demobilisation and reintegration packages, and resulting in frustration and unrest among ex-combatants (Int 21). The PAC soon found itself facing a surplus of proposals. According to an observer of PAC meetings, the committee's criteria were tough and the members were often divided in their views (Int 55).

The DDR process for ex-CAAFG was implemented by a different set of organisations. Though NCDDR played an administrative role, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its implementing NGO partners – which were labelled Child Protection Agencies – had the operational lead. For family tracing, the Ministry of Social Welfare collaborated with UNICEF and its NGO partners.

The DDR programme was financed through parallel funding flows including those of the Sierra Leone government, the World Bank-administered Multi-Donor Trust Fund, and direct funding from the World Bank and bilateral donors. UNAMSIL's DDR-related activities and UNICEF's efforts for ex-CAAFG had their own financial modalities. Total costs of the DDR programme are estimated to have been US$100 million. (Tesfamicheal et al. 2004)

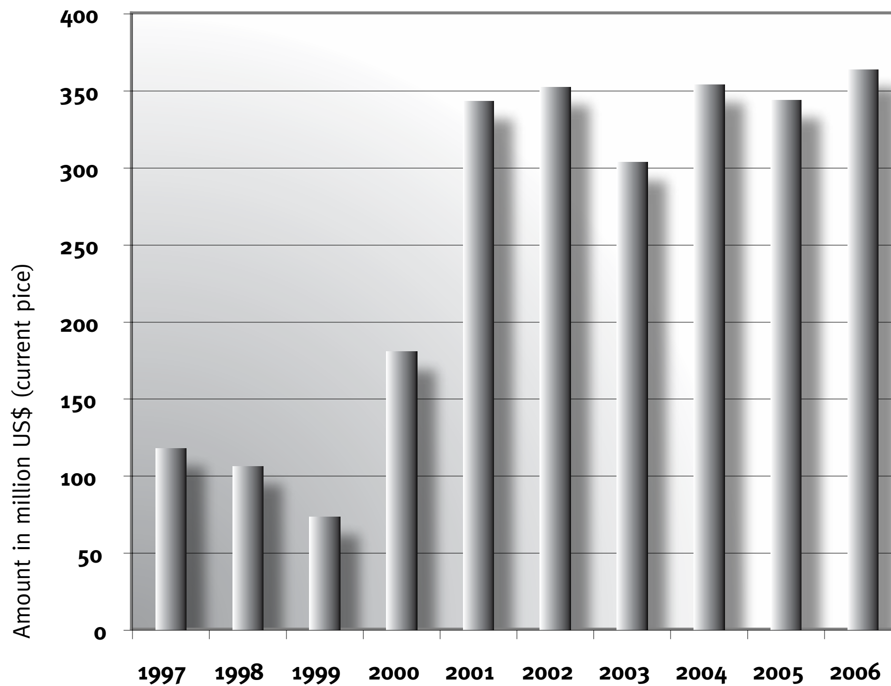
4 NGO involvement in DDR

State and civil society are interlaced throughout the countries of sub-Sahara Africa and elsewhere in the world (e.g. Chabal and Daloz 1999: 17-30). Similarly, civil society in Sierra Leone has been linked to the neo-patrimonial system and the youth crisis, both of which were key causal factors behind the war. Under Stevens' rule, civil society was deliberately weakened and corruption became an essential survival strategy for the sector at large. Civil society became involved with the elite capture of power and resources, and thus part of the system against which the RUF rebelled (Bøås 2002). Factions of the old elite re-emerged from the war and were closely involved with the scramble for benefits associated with the reconstruction of governance structures after the peace agreement. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the civil society spectrum, armed underclass movements – RUF and CDF – were under heavy pressure (particularly through DDR programmes) to dissolve. Moving beyond the establishment and the armed counter-establishment, there were also civil society organisations which tried to take a more constructive and transformative approach (Douma 2004). This brings us to the sector of community-based organisations (CBOs), and national and international NGOs.

The implementation of the DDR programme is primarily concerned with these organisations. As is common around the world in the immediate aftermath of an armed conflict, this sector expanded rapidly in response to the tremendous needs of the country, heightened international interest, and the funding that followed. Due to the timing of this study, we have not studied these immediate post-war dynamics closely, but present circumstances in the country as well as individuals' recollections provide some indication of the problems that occurred: timing and budget pressures, limited institutional memories and capabilities, competition between agencies and coordination mechanisms, rapid staff turnover, insufficient local knowledge and consultation, unfulfilled promises, and disruptive side effects of aid. These dynamics are relatively common and to some extent inevitable in high-profile post-war reconstruction processes. They should not be taken as proof that little has been accomplished. Other analyses have reported positive NGO contributions as well (e.g. Douma 2004). They do however underline the need to further dissect the civil society concept and take a critical, nuanced perspective on NGO activities.

Graph 1, below, shows the sharp rise of aid disbursements after the war. Between 2001 and 2006, disbursements remained largely steady. These figures conceal the recent departure of the relief industry and the thinning out of the NGOs: relief-oriented agencies and approaches have taken a back seat to 'development,' many intermediary NGOs and contractors departed to neighbouring Liberia as available funds declined, and local development organisations assumed greater responsibilities while simultaneously struggling to prevent their projects from being cut off (Int 20, 25 and 50).

Graph 1: Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursements to Sierra Leone, 1997-2006 (OECD/DAC 2008)



As described above, the state (NCDDR), the UN (UNAMSIL and UN agencies) and bilateral donor agencies played a leading role in designing, administrating and (to a lesser extent) executing the DDR programme. The bulk of implementation – particularly with regard to reintegration – was done by NGOs. The DDR programme correlated with the rise of NGO activity and a large number of organisations tapped into the DDR framework and its funding.

NGO involvement in Disarmament and Demobilisation

The institutional and logistical structures for disarmament and demobilisation were largely run by UNAMSIL, NCDDR, and bilateral donor agencies. NGOs had no major involvement in the disarmament process – the demobilisation component marked the real beginning of NGO activity. Inside the camps, they provided food, mosquito nets and other items, and constructed toilets. Along with such material aid, NGOs provided orientation to the DDR programme, handled medical checkups, and offered programmes for recreation, sensitisation, and trainings on issues ranging from water and sanitation to gender-based violence and other social and psychological subjects.

NGO involvement in Reintegration

The reintegration process was implemented almost exclusively by NGOs. GTZ, which in some ways resembles an NGO, also implemented a large number of reintegration activities.[5] As described above,

5 *Though it is part of the German government, GTZ project implementation – its sources of funding, the type of activities undertaken – are similar to those of international NGOs and therefore many people perceive GTZ as an NGO. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) along with its contractors is also reported to have engaged in direct project implementation at field level. Unlike GTZ, this is approach is atypical for DFID.*

NCDDR designed and administered the programme in collaboration with the main donors; NGOs were requested to apply for funding within the DDR framework. This resulted in a wide array of vocational trainings (driving, cooking, carpentry, car mechanics, petty trade, tailoring, weaving and so on) as well as projects aimed at agriculture, formal education and food-for-work. Ideally – practice was often different – ex-combatants were free to choose their preference from these options. Vocational training was usually, not always, sub-contracted to local artisans who were paid to take on ex-combatants as apprentices. After the training – normally about six months – the trainees were provided with start-up kits (such as a sewing machine for an apprentice tailor) to help them initiate income generation.

Many of the agencies implementing these projects were sub-contractors, rather than 'regular' NGOs. That is, they were created in response to the funding opportunities and had no established constituency, broader mission, or history, and very limited institutional structures. In some of the districts, the vast majority of the local agencies implementing reintegration projects were these 'portfolio NGOs'. They ceased to exist when their projects ended (Int 68). Some of these entrepreneurs are criticised as corrupt and driven by overhead profits or other kickbacks, while failing to deliver proper results.

Some of the more institutionalised NGOs immersed their trainings into broader projects. Community mobilisation, micro-credit projects, sensitisation campaigns, health programmes and other activities were thus combined with economic reintegration activities. Counselling activities, peace education, local conflict mediation and traditional cleansing of social outcasts – such as 'bush wives' – were incorporated as well (Int 8, 15, 31, and 41). The work of the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) is an example. This NGO worked with communities to set up traditional cleansing ceremonies involving both perpetrators and victims. CVT provided the chicken, cola nuts, gold, rice, gin or other goods used for traditional ceremonies. Gathered on banana leaves, communities talked and danced for hours, sharing their feelings and in some cases voicing their forgiveness in face-to-face dialogue (Int 41).

Some NGOs combined DDR funding with other sources to execute projects serving both ex-combatants and members of the broader community. Ex-combatants were thus absorbed into wider vocational training activities and other development programmes. In some cases, 'regular' rehabilitation projects were put to dual-use by recruiting ex-combatants in the labour force. For example, Action Aid employed significant numbers of ex-combatants to construct houses.

This study produced no evidence that NGOs were involved with the reintegration of ex-combatants into the military. In a later stage there were some examples of NGO training or advocacy aimed toward improving the quality of the armed forces of Sierra Leone, but this has largely remained the field of governmental actors such as the British government-led International Military Advisory Training Team (IMATT), which is the key foreign actor with regard to Security System Reform (SSR). (Int 15, 32 and 67)

NGO involvement in DDR for ex-CAAFG

This part of the DDR programme was largely coordinated by UNICEF and implemented by its NGO partners. Involvement of these Child Protection Agencies started at the very beginning: they joined UNAMSIL's military observers at the disarmament sites to monitor and advise on the screening of underage ex-combatants. Some of these organisations engage the UN and other actors in training and advocacy activities that transcend the Sierra Leone case: the core of their plea is to make DDR more sensitive to the nature and needs of ex-combatants under eighteen (Peters 2006; Save the Children 2004).

The ICCs accommodated children who were registered as ex-combatants as well as other unaccompanied children. These were created across the country as the DDR process spread to more and more districts. All twelve of these ICCs were run by NGOs (some of which were Cordaid partners): Save the Children

(UK), Caritas Makeni, Caritas Kenema, the Family Homes Movement, the International Rescue Committee, Christian Brothers, World Vision and Cooperatione Internazionale (Landry 2005: 32). The ICCs provided inhabitants with accommodation, food and some essential non-food items. Various training and sensitisation programmes were also offered.

Once an underage ex-combatant was accommodated in an ICC, tracing his or her family was the key priority. UNICEF and the Sierra Leone government maintained the database, while the NGOs on the ground provided information and liaised with the child and/or family. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) complemented these efforts with their own regional database (Ibid.: 37). Once a match had been made, NGOs entered into dialogue with both the family and the child in an effort to address fears, sensitivities and other problems. UNICEF reports nearly all children were united with at least one family member (qtd. in Ibid.: 37); the remainder were connected to a foster family and/or given vocational training to sustain themselves.

NGO contributions to DDR outside the formal programme

There is a host of NGO activity that contributes to the reintegration of ex-combatants even though it is not officially part of the DDR process as defined by NCDDR. It would be a mistake to ignore these activities, as they may be at least as valuable as the activities formally labelled as 'DDR.' It is in this way that NGOs truly complement the DDR process and redress some of its flaws and yet it is difficult to clearly demarcate these activities. Almost any NGO activity can be linked to DDR in one way or the other. For our purposes, we address some of the most salient: activities that deliberately benefited ex-combatants and activities that were consciously designed as follow-up projects to DDR.

A number of these activities occurred in parallel to the formal DDR process. For example, the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) executed a mass immunisation campaign alongside UNAMSIL's disarmament efforts. Apart from the straightforward health objectives, this was intended to attract people to the areas where disarmament took place and bolster confidence among the communities. A similar 'peace dividend' logic lay behind CCF's provision of seeds to farmers and health training to communities as the DDR process took off. (Int 31)

As mentioned above, many NGOs combined DDR activities with their other projects. Many livelihood and income generation projects serviced a large number of ex-combatants that had either missed out on DDR benefits or needed ongoing support after completing the programme. The Salone Micro Finance Trust in Makeni, for example, runs a micro-credit programme with saving groups and revolving loans. The borrowers are relatively poor, but typically have enough capital to initiate a business and repay the loans. Many of them are ex-combatants, but because they are not registered as such, these numbers are unknown. (Int 42)

World Vision implemented a major training programme for youth[6] on health, human rights, governance and environmental issues. Many of the participants were ex-combatants. The organisation subsequently initiated a Skills Training and Employment Promotion (STEP) programme, which encompassed micro-credits, public works and vocational training (Int 49). Similarly, UNICEF and its partners implemented the Complementary Rapid Education Programme (CREP), which enabled youth who had missed out on schooling during the war to catch up with the regular system; girls and young women were specifically targeted (Int 31 and 61).

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6 *Some clarification on the term 'youth:' In the Sierra Leonean conception this category tends to encompass all those not considered to be senior. For example, a forty-year old man who is married and has two children may still be considered youth.*

For underage ex-combatants, the formal DDR process ended with departure from the ICC and family reunification. The assistance provided by UNICEF and its Child Protection Agencies continued however, through the community-based reintegration programme. This encompassed the creation of Children's Welfare Committees (CWCs) at the village level. These CWCs consisted of village representatives and were used to facilitate social reintegration and raise awareness on child protection issues. Both within and outside of this programme, NGOs were engaged in traditional cleansing ceremonies, trauma healing, psychosocial projects, sport events and other community activities aimed at reconciliation (Int 36, 31 and 58; Williamson 2006).

Some NGO activities were deliberately aimed at people who were left out of the regular DDR programme. As discussed below, many women who were captured by the RUF as 'bush wives' were barred from taking part in the DDR process. Caritas Makeni is one of the organisations that created designated projects for the 'girls left behind,' offering them training in catering, weaving, cloth dying, hairdressing and tailoring (Int 20 and 39). Other organisations have also engaged in micro-credit or income-generating projects for these women (Int 16 and 36) or offered tailor-made activities for single mothers (Int 31).

Another aspect of the DDR programme discussed below concerns the fact one of the most successful income-generating strategies of ex-combatants lay outside the elaborate framework of trainings and toolkits. As discussed below, many former fighters became Okadas – that is, they ride motorcycles and offer taxi services. Though Okadas make better business than many other ex-combatants, there are many problems associated with it, including lack of legal registration, breaking traffic rules, driving without a licence and police corruption. Access to Justice is one of the NGOs that have delved into these problems. They facilitate the self-organisation of the bike riders, assist them in setting rules and getting proper registration, and also provide training to the police. (Int 11 and 71).

Non-involvement with DDR and underlying concerns

As demonstrated in the preceding section, NGO involvement in the execution of the DDR programme was widespread, particularly in the reintegration component. Nevertheless, there were a number of organisations that did not get involved. Particularly in the initial period when violence prevailed and the possible relapse into war was a real concern, there were agencies that shied away from the DDR camps. None of the NGO staff interviewed for this study were able to explain that position thoroughly. Expectably, these NGOs or the decision-makers of the day left the country some years ago.

Three individuals who were closely involved with running the DDR programme at the time had vivid memories of NGO opposition, though. "Particularly the international NGOs were sceptical," one said (Int 34); they avoided ex-combatants altogether and feared for the safety of their staff (Int 55). "NGOs prefer victims," another informant recalls. He was a camp manager at the time, facing the problem that the food rations were sufficient only for the ex-combatants and not for the family members that they brought along. His efforts to persuade NGOs to fill that gap were futile (Int 21). NGOs did not like the prospect of feeding the perpetrators of violence. Moreover, they felt that conditions in the DDR camp were generally better than in the numerous camps of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Their priority thus lay with the latter (Int 21 and 50).

This position – not explicitly shying away from DDR, merely focusing on other, 'greater' needs – was taken by a number of NGOs. One agency was busy with its projects for amputees and war victims; they felt activities in the field of DDR were beyond their expertise (Int 51). Most agencies were focusing on the resettlement of IDPs and refugees, itself a massive operation at the time, and for some this was a reason to avoid DDR (Int 13, 16, 47, and 50).

From the evidence gathered in this study, there exists little proof of NGO opposition to DDR or principled objection to involvement with it. Many NGOs participated in DDR, and those who did not were mostly driven by practical concerns. This applies to Cordaid's partners as well: two were heavily involved in DDR, particularly the ICCs (Caritas Kenema and Caritas Makeni), one was involved in some vocational training and micro-credit for ex-combatants (Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement), one had no experience with it because they had other concerns (Cause Sierra Leone) and one had been created after the DDR process (Cotton Tree Foundation). None of them saw NGO involvement with DDR as a problem.

5 Voices from below: examples of strategy and perspective of ex-combatants

People are not like chess pieces that adhere to the rules and assumptions of an aid programme. They use, trade or ignore gifts; they bend rules, bribe officers and manipulate options. The DDR programme is one among many factors in the life of an ex-combatant. The actual process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration is often incongruent with the design of the DDR programme. The following three examples illustrate the reality outside of the programmatic drawing board.

Margaret's story[7]

Margaret is a rather big, strong-looking lady of thirty years old. She was born in a village close to Makeni, but grew up in Freetown, the daughter of a police officer. When she was fifteen, she married and returned to Makeni. She gave birth to a son, but her happiness was short-lived. Her husband mistreated and beat her. She left him and moved to Kono where she married another man.

When the war came, Margaret, her husband, and his family fled to the bush, but the RUF found them. The rebels killed her seven-year old son and her husband's sisters and brother. Margaret and her husband escaped and struggled to survive in the jungle. The RUF came again and the two were captured. The rebels killed her husband and took Margaret as a sex slave: "They used me how they wanted. They were beating me and did anything they liked."

The RUF kept her for over a year. Then the war came to an end and the rebels were told to disarm. Margaret managed to register for DDR but the rebels demanded her disarmament fee. When she refused they hurt her leg with a machete. She was rescued by an officer who told them to let her go, but still today lengthy scars bear testimony of what happened. She thought herself free – DDR was being completed – but some of these rebels were still around and they captured her again. They told her she was a traitor, a collaborator. They took her, "just to punish my life," Margaret says. Again they 'used' her and beat her – "any man could use me." Finally, they left her.

She went to Makeni and life was hard. She had no means to earn a living and there was no family to fall back upon. Her father was killed in the war; her mother and sister survived. They accepted Margaret, but could barely support themselves. "I went to the streets to earn a living."

Men had sex with her and pay some 1.000 Leones (25 eurocents). Sometimes they refused to pay. People discriminated against former rebel girls, Margaret says; they feel they can use them. Six years down the road, the stigma is lessening, but some people call them the same names. They know these women were forced into those circumstances, but still they look down upon them. Many former 'bush wives' in Makeni have resorted to 'nightwork.' Margaret started to collaborate with three others – to feel safer and to help each other out on bad nights.

Eventually, Margaret learned about the 'girls left behind' project of Caritas Makeni. She was accepted and chose catering because she had some education as a child. Those who can't read menus and expiry dates had to go for weaving, tailoring or something else. Everyday, she goes to the office to follow the training. Still, it is hard to survive, because she gets no stipend and Caritas forbids her to resume 'nightwork.' Her second son needs food and school fees. Together with her three friends, she rents an empty room from a family in town. In the weekend, she goes to the mountain to collect wood and fruit, which she sells on the market.

7 *For privacy reasons, a fictitious name is used.*

Meanwhile, Caritas Makeni is struggling to keep up the programme. Donors are withdrawing from Sierra Leone. Staff salaries have not been paid and there are no funds to provide toolkits to participants at the end of the six-month training. Still, staff and participants keep coming, because all their eggs are in this basket. Margaret is desperate to finish her training: “I can sell food anywhere,” she says. “As long as I can avoid nightworking.” (Int 2)

The Okada business

Any significant town in Sierra Leone has a major population of motorcycles. Many of them take passengers on the back. These ‘taxis’ form the backbone of public transport in and around these cities. Though completely integrated in the local economy, these ‘Okadas’ are in fact a novelty of post-war Sierra Leone. There used to be car taxis, but these were slower on busy or bumpy roads, more expensive and unable to pass through narrow lanes, paddy fields or bush paths. With the exception of Freetown, car taxis have disappeared from the scene.

The Okada concept was imported from Nigeria by the ECOMOG troops. The majority of Okada riders are ex-combatants. Many of them were treated as social outcasts and had trouble earning an income in the traditional sectors of the economy. They either missed out on DDR benefits or found out that the reintegration package was insufficient to get a job. They have successfully worked their way around the system, however: the Okada business is among the most profitable in provincial towns like Kenama, Kono and Makeni. Many schoolboys aspire to become Okadas as soon as they can.

Life on the motorcycle is far from problem-free. Only a handful of riders own their bikes, with the vast majority renting from a bossman at some 20.000 Leones (5.50 euro) per day. With a charge of 1000 Leones per ride and fierce competition, it is not easy to pay the rent and save enough for a living. Okadas tend to work long days – sometimes 18 hours – and they subcontract their bikes to relatives or friends in the remaining hours to make ends meet.

Adding to these woes, many bike riders are unlicensed and proper insurance and bike registration are hard to come by, a challenge aggravated by police corruption and exorbitant fines. Unsurprisingly, traffic accidents with Okadas are common. Especially in the early days, the community complained that drug abuse by the riders further hampered Okada driving skills. The guerrilla concept of ‘hit and run’ has taken on a new meaning, some people jokingly say (Int 47). The communities complain about grouchy manners and occasional aggression by Okadas and they have not forgotten about their background. It is well known that many of them once carried guns, and they are subject to taunting. “People provoke us,” a rider in Makeni explains. Still today, a minor disagreement about the price of a ride can escalate into community unrest, as Okadas will come to each other’s aid. A group of angry ex-combatants can be quite intimidating.

There is a double standard involved here. Respected members of the business community earn part of their income by lending a bike to Okadas and anyone with some money to spend habitually takes a ride. Yet, Okadas often continue to be treated as outcasts. Adding to their alienation, bike riders are also suspected of having a hand in the local prostitution. They feel looked down upon and the police see them as a primary threat in society.

In response to these challenges, the bike riders have organised themselves. Most major towns have an Okada association. They have a significant number of members – the association in Kenema, for example, has 3000 – and they are well organised. Firstly, the associations unite the Okadas, ex-combatants and other riders, and facilitate solidarity in getting medical care or preventing robbery of their members. Secondly, they broker agreements among their members about prices, registration, licence and insurance and arrangements

with the bossmen, and they enforce discipline on these issues. Finally, they represent the Okadas in dealings with the police and other authorities, thus advocating for accessibility of driving licenses, fair fines and court proceedings, and an end to bribes. They also visit schools to encourage students to finish their education before becoming Okadas. (Int 18, 27, 43, 62, and 71)

David's story[8]

David's village lies on the side of the dirt road. There are four or five lanes with mud or brick houses and about a thousand inhabitants. Most of them make a living with slash-and-burn cultivation on the jungle-grown hills around the village. David is in his forties. His children go to school. They don't aspire to a farming future, but David is attached to his village and his work.

The village suffered from the war between the rebels and the army. People were killed and there was no food. Kamajors from elsewhere came to the village and told the men to organise themselves. David had no hunting or combat experience and he was afraid to join, but his uncle pressured him and he gave in. He underwent the ritual initiation, "so that the gun can't hit you." He carried a pistol and combined his village life with the battlefield. The men walked to places they were told to go, fought for three or four days and returned to the village. On the way, they were given food.

It was necessary, but David never liked being a Kamajor. "Fighting made this country backward," he feels. He was happy to hand in his pistol when the war was over and the Kamajors were told to disarm. He registered and received the instalment of US$100, a DDR identity card, a bucket and a blanket, and returned home. Later, he went to town again to receive his second instalment. He was one of the few. Out of some hundred Kamajors in his village, only six had modern weapons and were able to register. He shared his US$200 with some of them. David learned about the vocational trainings and wanted to enrol for masonry to rebuild his house, but when he went to the NCDDR office to inquire, he was told there were no opportunities. He tried again, but to no avail. "I did not know how the process worked," he said, so he went back to the village and continued to work the land.

Salim, a former Kamajor, from the village a few miles down the road was more persistent. When a hundred people registered for training at the NCDDR office, the applications were sent to Freetown. Eventually only about fifty were announced on the radio; Salim's name was not mentioned after his first attempt. He took a large chicken and some plantains and gave them to a high-ranking DDR officer in town. The following day his name was announced on the radio. For reintegration you had to bribe in some way or other, he explains. This was public knowledge. (Int 30)

David's house, meanwhile, is still in shambles, but he lives with his aging parents. An NGO came to the village to set up a youth project with training, labour sharing and the construction of a shed to store the harvest. He was elected chairman of the youth organisation. His wife participated in the training as well and tries to set up some petty trade at the town market. The organisation has since stopped its activities. There is no more funding and a new village chief has been elected who now oversees the labour sharing.

David is grateful for the training and assistance, but he does not understand how NGOs work. He sees them come and go on the road, and believes some of them cannot be trusted. "They are told to give a man a bag of rice, but they give him just a cup," he says. They are still better then the government, though. At least NGOs come and see the situation and they listen: "If you go to a government office, they look at you and tell you to come tomorrow." (Int 66)

8 *For privacy reasons, fictitious names are used.*

These three stories provide an insight into the life of some of the ex-combatants six years after the war and three years after the closure of the DDR programme. More positive examples can also be found, but these narratives were selected because they generate important questions. They raise concern with regard to the exclusion of females from DDR and the continued marginalisation of ex-'bush wives,' more general access to DDR benefits, and the corruption around DDR. The stories highlight ex-combatant strategies outside of the official framework and the marginal role of the DDR programme for some people in their return to normal life. Across the board, there are issues of economic hardship and social stigma. Finally, the narratives reveal NGO responses around the DDR process in response to remaining needs or overt omissions in the DDR programme.

These stories are merely examples, but they represent some of the broader trends and problems, as is evidenced by the rest of our data as well as other surveys and studies. The following section reviews the DDR programme and NGO contributions in a more systematic way.

6 Strengths and weaknesses of DDR

The 'final' evaluation of the DDR programme (Tesfamicheal et al. 2004) was very positive. It concludes that the AFRC, CDF and RUF "were successfully disarmed, demobilised, and reintegrated into society". Moreover, DDR reached a "high degree of success as a peace-building and conflict mitigation mechanism," the evaluators observed. "Despite a difficult working environment, the NCDDR managed to disarm, demobilise, and reintegrate ex-combatants to the extent that a foundation was built for a durable peace process" (Ibid. 2004: 6).

Our own data – as illustrated by the stories above – and other analyses suggest this picture is overly positive. The success of DDR is more nuanced, with different levels of achievement for different aspects of the process.

Stability and security

The relative stability and security that prevail in Sierra Leone are the clearest hallmark of success. Despite the hiccups and regressions between 1998 and 2001, the country has undergone a remarkable transition following the Abuja agreement. Only a few years ago, Sierra Leone was a war-ridden country with a collapsed state, powerful, armed factions, rampant violence and cruelties, and massive civilian displacement. Today, the RUF, the AFRC and the CDF have been disbanded, organised armed violence is rare, and elections and political transitions are carried out without major skirmishes.

Part of this success must be attributed to the implementation of disarmament and demobilisation. Both the literature (e.g. Richards et al. n.d.: 25) and most informants underwrite the conclusion that DD was largely successful. This is explained at least in part by the military calculus of RUF, AFRC and CDF commanders, the fact that UNAMSIL and NCDDR "got the prices right" (Ibid), and the alleged absence of a traditional 'gun culture' in Sierra Leone (Int 35).

Despite this praise, it has become clear that guns have by no means disappeared from Sierra Leone. Many were not handed in and many of those that were collected were of poor quality (Berman 2000). Through the complementary Community Arms Collection and Destruction (CACD) programme, its successor 'Arms for Development,' and other channels, significant arms caches including some more powerful weapons (e.g. surface to air missiles) have been found. Though this highlights the need for continued attention to the (regional) presence and trade of arms (Weiss 2005), it requires emphasis that DDR is not designed to take all weapons away. The programme has successfully neutralised the armed threat of the RUF, AFRC, CDF and other factions by taking part of their weapons and by demobilising their cadres and disbanding their organisational structure. Some former commanders still maintain ties with their former troops through ex-combatant associations (Int 71), or on an individual basis for mutual support or finding jobs (Int 64). Likewise, some of the women have remained with their 'bush husbands.' Though commanders complained no special DDR benefits were offered to them (Int 14), there is little evidence that military command structures remain untouched.

No transformation

Effective disarmament and demobilisation is crucial, but not sufficient for the overall success of DDR. It is a widely held view that DDR was much less successful in grappling with some of the more complicated and longer-term issues. Many, including NGO staff, complain that time frames were too short and that requirements, deadlines and opportunities were donor-driven (Int 12, 16, 31, and 55). Adequate assessments, consultation and flexibility to emerging needs were thus sacrificed. Child Protection Agencies working in the ICCs, for example, state that UNICEF was primarily interested in statistics, rather than the

underlying processes: how many ex-CAAFG were screened, how many were trained, what percentage were reunited with their families? There was much less interest in the quality of the training, the problems and prospects with family reunification, and the actual sustainability of the results (Int 36). A large part of DDR amounted to providing immediate relief, which is what many ex-combatants wanted (Int 44), but cash and goods were quickly consumed (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 32).

This brings us back to the objective of DDR discussed above. Though the formal aims were more ambitious and comprehensive, the primary concerns were disarmament and demobilisation, and thus winning time for the government to get organised. The DDR evaluation by Tesfamichael et al. acknowledges that the "reintegration component was intentionally short-term and designed to meet political and security objectives first and foremost" (2004: 67). From this perspective, DDR was mostly a stopgap measure.

But, as one individual closely associated with NCDDR rhetorically asked, "a stopgap for what? … There was no follow-up!" (Int 55). NCDDR was hurriedly dismantled in 2004 and the programme fell apart instantly, though reintegration evidently requires a long-term perspective. Opportunities for building on the first accomplishments or embedding them in broader development efforts were lost. Officially, NCDDR's work was meant to merge with the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), but due to institutional and personal rivalry between the two men leading these agencies, this did not materialise and the phasing out of DDR was 'chaotic' (Ibid.).

DDR in Sierra Leone thus made remarkable progress in addressing the pressing problems posed by armed factions, but its contribution to a more fundamental transformation was limited, at best. The immediate threat of war has gone with the demise of the armed factions, but the underlying causes of the war remain intact. This underlines our earlier point about the continuity between war and peace. The narratives of the previous section paint ironic pictures of this continuity. Margaret lived as a beaten-up wife before the war, a raped bush-wife during the war and as a prostitute after the war. David was a poor farmer with little trust in the government before the war. He helped defend his people when the army sided with the rebels; following the war he is once more a poor farmer with little faith in the government.

Failure to address these root causes has again left Sierra Leone with a pool of poor, marginalised youth, prone to rebellion and vulnerable to incorporation into militias once more (Peters 2006; Richards et al. n.d.: 27). In fact, one informant argued, the only reason these people have not been driven to war once more is the bitter experiences they have had with violent conflict (Int 48). Clearly, this is a critique on overall developments and interventions in Sierra Leone, not just on DDR. But the DDR programme also contributed to patterns of exclusion, patrimonialism and marginalisation. The following sections discuss some of the most salient programmatic problems.

Exclusion from the programme

The ability of adults to hand over a weapon or ammunition or of children to dismantle a gun (during the later phase of DDR) was the key eligibility criterion for the DDR programme. This might have made some sense from a military perspective – pacify the people that constitute the greatest threat to security – but it certainly did not do justice to all people affiliated with the armed factions. It discriminated against cadres with non-combat positions and it created opportunities for commanders to redistribute weapons and thus exclude people, "indulge in favouritism, and to include bogus combatants" (Tesfamicheal et al. 2004: 54). This was painful to witness, ex-combatants explained. After all they had gone through, those who had really fought and suffered were sidelined by blatant favouritism. In some cases, ex-combatants ended up protesting in front of the NCDDR office or even taking people hostage (Int 56). Accurate data are absent, but Richards et al. (n.d.: 25) suggest that as much as 50 to 60 percent of the ex-combatants missed out on DDR benefits. Exclusion was not a random phenomenon; there was logic to the patterns of exclusion.

Firstly, the CDF were disadvantaged by the gun criterion, because many of them fought with traditional weapons: locally made single or double barrel guns, knifes, slingshots and so on. The same study estimates even 80 percent of them were excluded (Ibid; Int 8). Ex-CDF consider this particularly aggrieving given that it was the CDF that turned back the rebel offensives when the government failed. They consider themselves the victors who paved the way for the reinstallation of the government. Rather than receiving adequate rewards, their rank and file was marginalised, the movement as a whole was sidelined, Sam Hinga Norman was put on trial and died, and other CDF leaders were pushed into political irrelevance. Many find the government an unreliable and corrupt lot. "They betrayed our effort. They failed to protect us and if trouble comes once more, they will let us down again" (Int 57).

Secondly, the DDR process effectively discriminated against women associated with the factions, particularly the RUF (Mazurana and Carlson 2004). Many of them did not carry a weapon as they were abducted for sexual reasons or they worked as cooks, porters, spies and so on. Others were combatants, but their commanders confiscated their guns (prior to DDR registration) or benefits (after registration). Large numbers were deprived the opportunity to start a new life (Ibid: 25) and it is very common for former RUF women to have resorted to prostitution to survive (Int 2, 8, 10, 39, 47, 52, and 59). Women that did take part in the DDR process encountered a 'one size fits all' approach. No adaptations were made and the programme was often 'blind' to their experiences of rape and the babies they were carrying with them (Int 68). "An unemployed man takes to arms, an unemployed woman turns sick and dies," said a senior aid worker, summarising the ironic underlying rationale (Int 33). In a later stage, NCDDR claims to have initiated a special micro-credit project for women, but this became a 'flat failure' (Int 34). These trends mirror the wider problem of gender inequality and (sexual) violence against women in Sierra Leone. Many women are economically marginalised and illiterate (Int 33). 'Transactional sex' is ubiquitous, and forced marriage, rape, abuse and female genital mutilation are the rule rather than the exception (Int 33 and 50). There is little public impetus to address the situation. As one interviewee paraphrased a senior member of government, "Raped girls between twelve and eighteen must have invited it and below that age, only God can help them" (Int 33).

Thirdly, there is evidence that large numbers of children associated with various factions were excluded. According to UNICEF, preliminary estimates suggested there were 10,000 to 30,000 people below eighteen among the armed factions. Only 6845 were demobilised and of that number only 8 percent were female (Landry 2005: 32-34). Landry concludes that "demobilisation was not child-friendly [...]. Children were thus regarded as second-class combatants who were not targeted with the same level of efforts and services" (Ibid.: 33). Youngsters were refused because they could not handle a gun, because they were not living in rebel-controlled area, or because they were identified as porter, cook or 'bush wife.' Some combatants were forced to hand their weapons to their commanders. Others were unable to reach the ICC, either because they were too far away or because they were misinformed about the eligibility criteria. Finally, some of the youngsters feared the societal stigma of ex-combatants and decided not to enroll. (Ibid 2005: 34; Save the Children 2004: 14; Int 54 and 71)

Economic reintegration

Ex-combatants who received reintegration assistance were mostly positive about it (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 35). Nonetheless, many of them are among the poorest of society, facing major economic hardship and at least half of them are unemployed (Ibid: 36; Stavrou et al. 2002: 55-56). As is the case with other families, many of them are struggling to get enough food and pay for their homes and children's school fees. The difficult context – economic conditions have been problematic for the country at large – is clearly a dominant factor here, but there are programmatic aspects to it as well.

One of the problems concerns the type of training ex-combatants took. As a matter of principle, NCDDR wanted ex-combatants to have a free choice (Int 55). These preferences often did not correlate with economic opportunities – at the extreme end, this resulted in illiterates opting for computer training. More generally, over half of the ex-combatants chose vocational training, while the labour market was clearly unable to absorb people with such professions in large numbers (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 32; Peters 2006: 120). How many tailors, hairdressers and car mechanics does a small, impoverished African village need? Neither NCDDR (at a national level), nor NGOs (at the level of implementation) conducted any labour market assessments to identify more fruitful forms of future employment for ex-combatants (Int 8, 20 and 33).

Sierra Leone has traditionally had a largely agricultural economy. The bulk of the CDF and a large portion of the RUF were farmers prior to the war. Most others were students (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 20). Analysts argue that the key flaw in the DDR programme was its failure to recognise 'the rural crisis' – rural marginalisation, vulnerability, economic inequality, and domestic slavery – as a pivotal cause of the war (Peters 2006). In fact, the urban, vocation-oriented approach of DDR reinforced these problems. Many ex-combatants were already reluctant to return to the village and work in the mud, but this was aggravated by the incentives provided in DDR. Officially, agriculture was an option for reintegration but it came with little more than some tools, seeds and meagre support, while the vocational option came with stipends, six months of training, a toolkit and job placement opportunities. Some ex-combatants claimed they were denied the agricultural option even though it was their first preference (Stavrou et al. 2002: 54).

The quality and duration of reintegration packages was a second problem. Six months is a short period to become a welder or a carpenter, particularly when the participants have little or no educational background and face significant market competition. In addition, there have been complaints about the quality and timeliness of the materials provided and teachers providing the training (Int 8, 21, 48, and 71). 'DDR drivers' has become a well-known term in Sierra Leone, used upon sighting an accident or irresponsible driver (Int 16 and 20). Many of the ex-combatants that succeeded in taking on artisan work were those who had had similar employment in the past – the training package helped them resume business. Those who were new to the work had a much harder time. This problem was not confined to vocational training. The food-for-work initiatives faced similar difficulties. One NGO, for example, recruited ex-combatants to construct a large number of houses for returning IDPs and people whose homes were ruined. The workers received minimal preparation and on-the-job training. Ultimately, their skills were insufficient to build quality housing. This resulted in community irritation and wasted resources, and reflected badly on the ex-combatants (Int 68).

Non-delivery of toolkits and certificates was a third source of frustration (Int 8 and 39). Both are seen as crucial for the leap from trainee to an established apprentice or craftsperson. Studies suggest over half of the trainees were deprived of these assets (Stavrou et al. 2002: 19, 22). The non-delivery of monthly allowances during the training generated frustration as well (Peters 2006: 122).

Fourthly, there is a lot to be said about the apprentice system. The Sierra Leonean economy – as elsewhere in the region – has long been organised around bossman-apprentice relationships. The former possesses the skills, equipment and client network required for the business, while the latter works under supervision to learn the job skills. He (or she) does not normally get a salary, but is provided with basic food and accommodation and gets a token cut of the profit from a nice sale. This informal pattern of loyalty, protection and support can last for many years. The apprentice remains dependent until he either starts his own business or succeeds the bossman. In some ways, the apprenticeship programme is a micro variant of the broader, hierarchical neo-patrimonial system. In some sectors, the rules of the game are more exploitative. Notably, in the diamond pits, people work for starvation wages despite

the value of the stones captured. This point illustrates the preceding analysis of youth marginalisation, dependency and exploitation, contemporary incarnations of slavery, and its linkages to the causes of the war (Richards 1995).

Given the skills and capacities of artisans, it is logical that many NGOs implementing the reintegration programme subcontracted local carpenters, garage owners, tailors and other skilled professionals to take apprentices. After all, they are best suited to teach the job and create job opportunities. NGOs offered funding and other perks to these artisans to adopt ex-combatants, which sidelined some of the other local candidates for these apprenticeships (Int 65), and in some cases led to rather large numbers of apprentices per bossman. A garage owner in Makeni accommodated twenty-three apprentices in a period of a few months. The workload was hardly sufficient to provide activity and income for all of them and once the NGO subsidies were cut off, he was unable to feed them all (Int 9).

Fifthly, the emphasis of the programme was on processing ex-combatants rather than creating new forms of productive employment. The prevalence of small boutiques is a case in point. Petty trade is very popular, but essentially comes down to selling the same goods over and over again for an increasingly minimal margin. It adds little or no productive value. There are positive examples as well. One of Cordaid's partner organisations has a combined programme of micro-credit, improving agricultural production (ginger) and improving access to foreign markets. Linking such innovative programmes to ex-combatants could be a way forward. The other obvious innovative example is the Okada business. Strikingly, this was an initiative that emerged without support from NCDDR or NGOs. Many of the ex-combatants that failed to get other benefits ended up riding motorbikes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they have organised themselves in fairly strong and sizable associations (Int 18, 27, 43, 62, and 64).

On a more fundamental note, one may argue that the Sierra Leonean economy – artisan apprentices, Okadas, the boys in the diamond pits – has recreated traditional dependency structures. This has strengthened the economically powerful, while young ex-combatants have barely been empowered. A more transformative DDR programme would be more cognisant of these economic inequalities. Some NGOs have gone into these neglected sectors, such as the above-mentioned work of Access to Justice in support of the bike riders (Int 11).

That brings us to the sixth point: the incorporation of DDR into longer-term development programmes. Reintegration by definition implies that ex-combatants are not eternally singled out as a special group. Rather, their social and economic plight are ideally taken into consideration by efforts to address issues of poverty, exclusion, inequality, lack of empowerment, etc. in society at large. NGOs have largely stopped singling out ex-combatants, in part due to criticism that these efforts rewarded the perpetrators, rather than the victims of violence. Instead, their projects target youth and vulnerable or excluded people in general although many of the beneficiaries are formerly associated with armed groups (Int 13, 31, 25, 42, and 50). Sierra Leone has made the transition from relief, DDR and rehabilitation to 'regular' development programmes, thus moving away from the delivery of goods and services to an approach that more strongly emphasises participation, sustainability and ownership. Donors decrease their budgets for such NGO programming and rather than implementing projects, many international NGOs focus on advocacy and building the capacities of local agencies (Int 50 and 68). The Sierra Leonean government, through NaCSA, has tuned in with this approach. Though there are many virtues to the underlying rationale, this transition also has adverse effects on valuable projects. As discussed above, Sierra Leone did not undergo a transformation that dealt with the root causes of the war. Rural neglect, youth marginalisation and the neo-patrimonial (post)war economy continue to pose a threat and in our analysis it seems premature to redirect funds and human resources from NGO programming into 'self-development' programmes. Also, there are signs of disconnects between DDR and broader development programmes, such as the poorly executed handover from NCDDR to NaCSA.

Social reintegration

As mentioned earlier, there has been a host of NGO activity aimed at facilitating the social aspects of reintegration. Many of these activities took place outside the formal DDR framework or timeline. The participants of these projects evaluated them positively, interviews showed. Some were sceptical about projects that did not involve any material benefit for the poverty-ridden beneficiaries. After all, “an empty bag can not stand” (Int 15 and 20). Others, however, indicate that traditional cleansing ceremonies and trainings on conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence were valuable and had great practical application (Int 8 and 54). Even the activities with an economic focus such as vocational training have a social impact, beneficiaries explain. The skills gained boosted their self-esteem; for example, the women who used to do ‘night work’ are proud to be making clothes or food now (Int 2, 10, and 39). A study by Betancourt, Pochan and Soudière (n.d.) indicated that NGO activity in villages correlated with lower scores for depression, post-traumatic stress, hostility and distress.

The actual level of social reintegration is difficult to conceptualise, let alone assess. A DDR tracer study in 2003 surveyed 250 ex-combatants and observed that over half of the ex-combatants had returned to live with their families. The rest had either remained elsewhere for ‘regular’ reasons – work or school – or for reasons related to their combatant history: fear for revenge, shame of returning with empty hands, dislike of rural life, or fear for having people depend on them (Stavrou et al. 2002: 17). Our fieldwork revealed similar concerns (Int 54, 34 and 74). The tracer study also concluded that “ex-combatants are members of social groups” which “tend to reflect a diversity of people [...] suggesting that they are reintegrated into their community or village. The study found that there is no suggestion that ex-combatants hang out together as units following their demobilisation” (Stavrou et al. 2002: 54). Nevertheless, the majority of ex-combatants agree somewhat (18.0 percent) or strongly (44.6 percent) that people in the neighbourhood generally do not trust ex-combatants (Ibid: 33).

Interviews held for this study confirm that mixed picture. The ex-combatants interviewed feel that social stigmas have lessened. Finger pointing and scolding are no longer as common as they once were, but still occur (Int 52 and 64). One of the bike riders said, “some people tell us we used to be rebels and now we come for money. They scold us. But we know they are just jealous” (Int 62). As was mentioned above, small disagreements with Okadas have sparked off larger and violent clashes in communities (Int 15). Some informants argued that the Sierra Leonean culture is geared toward forgiveness and looking forward: for this reason the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was seen to generate enmity and unrest, rather than console trauma and hostility (Int 15 and 16).

There are big differences between the CDF on one hand and the RUF and AFRC on the other. Most CDF fighters were recruited by a relative, a community member, a friend, or by themselves (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 24). They usually retained connections with their community and they often enjoy a high level of respect and appreciation from the community. Unsurprisingly, “CDF fighters are more readily accepted than RUF fighters” (Richards et al. n.d.: 26). In some cases the CDF itself organised football matches and other activities to raise funding from the community to support their former cadres, an ex-CDF member said (Int 57).

The vast majority of RUF cadres was recruited – or abducted – by strangers (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 24). They left their communities or committed atrocities in their native areas and the general rebel track record of killings, extortion and rape has not been forgotten. One of the ex-RUF combatants interviewed did not dare go back to his village. He was abducted at the age of fourteen and forced to commit atrocities. His unit completely destroyed his own village and the community saw him among them. “They talk about forgiveness, but the resentment remains,” he says (Int 54). Some of their victims suffer from shame as well and many former RUF ‘bush wives’ have difficulty finding a place in society for themselves and their children. In some cases they feel responsible for the death of family members who died while trying to save them (Int 52).

The statistics on the reintegration of underage ex-combatants are impressive. UNICEF data suggest that 98 percent of the registered children were reunited with their families (Landry 2005: 37). Implementing agencies report that the vast majority has been well-integrated – that is, they are reunited with family or a guardian for at least one year, they are not abused or prone to child protection issues, they attend a regular school, vocational training course or have a job, and they are not transferred to another area without notification to the implementing agency (Ibid.: 48). These conclusions seem to be overly optimistic, however. Anecdotal evidence suggests former child soldiers face significant problems. The preceding success rates are hard to reconcile with the numbers of ex-child soldiers working in the diamonds pits or in prostitution and with youth marginalisation in general. Evidence of social rifts and scars is equally striking. One reason may be that ex-combatants who turn eighteen are automatically considered reintegrated and disappear from UNICEF's programmatic radar. Six years after the Abuja peace agreement, the bulk of underage-combatants have passed that threshold, but that does not mean their problems are gone.

Strengths and weaknesses and the role of NGOs

In sum, the DDR process has resulted in remarkable achievements, particularly with regard to disarmament and demobilisation and the stability and security this has helped bring about. It has also had many weaknesses, because it excluded certain groups and because its embodiment lacked socio-economic transformation. NGOs had a limited role in disarmament and adult demobilisation, but they were part and parcel of reintegration and child demobilisation – they implemented the bulk of these components. Many of the strengths and weaknesses of DDR are therefore the strengths and weaknesses of NGOs.

NGOs did not take part in the conceptualisation and design of the DDR process in any major way. In some cases – such as the shortcomings in dealing with child soldiers – they advocated adjustments. NGOs can thus not be held responsible for the fact that many CDF and women were not eligible for DDR benefits or the fact that most vocational trainings lasted six months only. Many of the shortcomings at implementation level are a different story, however. Criticism about the non-delivery of certificates and toolkits, failure to assess labour market opportunities, or excessive numbers of apprentices implicates NGOs as well. The narrative of David illustrates that some ex-combatants are suspicious of NGOs. Another study came to an equally critical conclusion with regard to the non-delivery of benefits: "Much of the blame seems to rest with the implementing partners" (Richards et al. n.d.: 26). More generally they observed that "ex-combatants also made many complaints about the inefficiency, duplicity and inaccessibility of implementing partners" (Ibid.).

Allegations of NGO misconduct and outright corruption are common. Clearly, allegations of corruption need to be seen in perspective; it makes little sense to criticise Sierra Leonean society and the NGOs operating in it on the basis of Western institutional and financial standards. However, NGOs and UN organisations themselves admit that this is a major problem (Int 33 and 36). The problems are far greater than the occasional misappropriation of money or high overhead. Corruption was endemic, much like the traditional workings of the shadow state (Int 15, 33, 47, 54, and 59). Sierra Leoneans refer to the 'double pie system,' wherein half of the assets make it to their intended destination and the other half disappears into pockets (Int 48). NGO and other entrepreneurs are thus charged with taking as much as 50 percent of the budget in kickbacks. In view of the rife complaints about non-delivery of items, these accusations are plausible. In extreme cases, corruption involved sexual exploitation and prostitution. NGO staffers have requested sexual favours in return for project benefits, particularly in the immediate post-war period when provision of relief items was common (Int 15, 36, and 53). Clearly, there may be big differences between one project or organisation and another. One informant explained how NCDDR and NGO staff had a habit of guiding evaluators, journalists and researchers to effective projects, while cashing in on other projects (Int 15).

On the other hand, NGOs were part of the successes of DDR as well. The ICCs and the reintegration programme resulted in many achievements and have received positive judgements by ex-combatants. This important contribution to the transition in Sierra Leone would not have been possible without NGOs. In addition, NGOs have made efforts to improve and complement the DDR programme – for example advocating for children's issues. As discussed above, a significant portion of the NGO contribution to DDR took place outside of the formal programme by implementing follow-up projects after DDR completion, by integrating ex-combatants into broader community programmes, and by tailor-made assistance to former 'bush wives' and other groups excluded from DDR. Despite the criticism, NGOs are still seen as more accessible and closer to the people than the government (Int 31 and 66). In fact, ex-combatants see NGOs as a valuable channel to influence the government: some 90 percent believe appealing to NGOs can make a difference to government policy and over half think it makes a *major* difference (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004: 44).

7 Conclusions

The smooth elections of the president and parliament and the incipient trial of Charles Taylor in the Special Court in August and September 2007 were significant milestones in Sierra Leone's war-to-peace transition. This transition encompasses many formidable achievements, to which the DDR process was an important contributor. Despite initial setbacks, UNAMSIL, UK forces, ECOMOG and the government succeeded in removing the threat of armed factions, thus consolidating the advances of the CDF, which resulted in a surprisingly high level of stability and security in the country. Reintegration of ex-combatants continues to be a problem, however, and in many ways the root causes of the war were reproduced during DDR and the wider post-conflict transition. Systemic corruption, abuse of power, and marginalisation of youth continue to undermine Sierra Leone's longer-term prospects.

Large numbers of ex-combatants flowed through the DDR programme, but despite the overall accomplishments, DDR suffered from important flaws. Some of these errors may have been inevitable in view of the difficult nature of DDR, but others reveal programmatic shortcomings. The programme has been criticised as a quick-fix intervention aimed at short-term stability and driven by time frames that suited the donors and the government rather than the supposed beneficiaries. As a result the programme has not been transformative – it took away the direct threat of armed groups by treating the symptoms, rather than addressing the underlying social, economic and political causes. David used to be a marginal farmer suspicious of the government; he became a CDF fighter because the army failed to protect his village from the CDF, did not benefit much from DDR and now is once more a farmer who distrusts the government. Margaret was 'bush wife' of the RUF and became a prostitute following the war. After DDR was over, she managed to join a vocational training project, but that initiative was falling apart as its funds dried up. More generally, the DDR process focused on people with modern weapons, thus excluding many CDF fighters, women and ex-CAAFG. Economic reintegration suffered from the lack of market assessments, neglect of the agricultural sector, the brevity of trainings and the non-delivery of start-up kits. Social reintegration was largely dealt with outside of the formal DDR programme. Across the board there were allegations of corruption and misappropriation of money. Finally, the DDR process was ended in an abrupt and chaotic manner and there was no mentionable follow-up.

NGOs were a vital part of the implementation of DDR. The conceptualisation and coordination of the programme was done by the Sierra Leonean government, the UN and other (inter)governmental actors; NGO involvement seems to have been very limited. Reintegration of ex-combatants into the Sierra Leonean army and subsequent SSR programmes have been largely left untouched by NGO activity. Similarly, the execution of disarmament and adult demobilisation was largely carried out by UNAMSIL and NCDDR, with some complementary interventions of NGOs aimed at improving the infrastructure and facilitating training and orientation in the DDR camps. The remaining part of DDR – demobilisation and reintegration of ex-CAAFG and the reintegration of adults – were almost exclusively the domain of NGOs. International and local NGOs ran the ICCs for ex-CAAFG and arranged for family training, reunification and reintegration into the community, as well as the vocational trainings and other programmes aimed at the economic reintegration of adult ex-combatants. Apart from NGO-like agencies, such as GTZ and possibly some private contractors, there were no alternatives to NGOs for executing these components of DDR.

Key aspects of the NGO contribution to DDR took place outside the NCDDR-administered framework. Many NGO activities not considered DDR in fact supported people who were wrongly excluded from DDR benefits, addressed important issues related to DDR, and prolonged processes that were initiated by DDR but cut off due to the short time frames. Examples include projects for 'bush wives' who missed out on the reintegration package and ended up in prostitution, efforts aimed at reconciliation and traditional cleansing of people associated with the rebels, and support to Okada riders who face social, legal and economic difficulties with their self-mastered reintegration. None of these activities were formally part of DDR, but by offsetting the shortfalls of the formal DDR programme, they made very valuable contributions to the actual reintegration of people formerly associated with the fighting forces.

Although useful for longer-term reflection, interviews conducted nine years after the DDR programme began and three years after it ended are not a strong basis for assessing NGO attitudes of that period in time. However, the evidence gathered suggested that involvement with DDR was not a very controversial issue in Sierra Leone. Initially, some NGOs were reluctant to engage with ex-combatants and shirked away from the military and political nature of DDR. Few of the agencies that were not involved cited such principled reasons, however. Most simply had other priorities – IDPs, amputees, war victims – but had no objections to the DDR programme *per se*. Despite a limited initial start-up, the number of NGOs participating in DDR quickly rose. Only a few of the NGOs encountered in this study stayed away from the programme altogether.

Cordaid's partners reflect the trends discussed above. Of the five partners interviewed, two had been heavily involved in the DDR process, particularly the ICCs for ex-CAAFG (Caritas Makeni and Caritas Kenema), one had had limited engagement (GGEM), one had not been involved because it gave priorities to other activities (Cause Sierra Leone) and one had been created only recently (Cotton Tree Foundation).

As in most countries emerging from war, civil society is a problematic concept in Sierra Leone. Traditional institutions have been closely associated with the country's political economy and some of the problems associated with it. The end of the war heralded the massive influx of foreign agencies and funds, sparking off a general mushrooming of local NGOs, which were often driven, at least in part, by entrepreneurial interests. NGOs are a diverse group and the sector as a whole is by no means problem-free. Some of the NGOs involved with DDR were well-known international agencies like Caritas, IRC, CCF and World Vision. Others were local NGOs with some institutional capacity, established constituency and sense of mission. Still, many others were 'portfolio' NGOs created to acquire contracts, implement projects and then disappear. Criticism about inadequate performance and corruption applies to all groups, but is to be particularly levelled at so-called 'portfolio' NGOs.

As outlined above, NGOs were vital to the accomplishments of DDR in Sierra Leone and added further value through activities complementary to the DDR process. The study also revealed important shortcomings in the way NGOs have contributed to DDR. Many of the general deficiencies were due in part to NGO performance: NGOs themselves were largely responsible for the quality (or lack thereof) of trainings and non-delivery of toolkits. Similarly, they bear responsibility for the lack of market awareness related to economic reintegration and neglect of the agricultural sector. Finally, many allegations are levelled at NGOs, including misappropriation of money, the need for bribes or even sexual favours to access benefits, and corruption in general; most agencies acknowledge the occurrence of these problems.

We thus conclude that the involvement of NGOs in Sierra Leone's DDR process was vast.
They enabled and improved a programme that was crucial to the country's transition from war to peace. However, their contribution was impeded by shortcomings mainly with regard to corruption, the exclusion of many ex-combatants from the programme and the failure to address some of the underlying socio-economic causes of armed violence in Sierra Leone.

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List of interviews

Person	Affiliation	Date	Place
Nicole Ball	Center for International Policy, Washington DC	7 May 2007	Amsterdam (phone)
Krijn Peters	University of Wales, Swansea	8 May 2007	Amsterdam (phone)
David Francis	University of Bradford, Bradford	17 May 2007	Amsterdam (phone)
Raphael Williams	Child Protection Officer, Caritas Makeni	1 and 16 June 2007	Freetown
Salua Nour and Aminata Koroma	Country Manager and Social Advisor on Non-formal Education, GTZ	1 June 2007	Freetown
Mr. Joseph Kamanda alias Junior	Former RUF fighter	2 June 2007	Freetown
Festus Minah	Chairman Civil Society Movement Sierra Leone	2 June 2007	Freetown
Sullay Sesay	(former) Information Officer NCDDR	4 June 2007	Freetown
Wilfred Taylor	ADRA	4 June 2007	Freetown
Michael Kamara	Managing Director Cotton Tree Foundation	4 June 2007	Freetown
Mrs. Cecilia Decker and Emmanuel Kanneh	Director and Programme Manager Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement (GGEM)	4 June 2007	Freetown
Mr. Abu-bakarr	Former RUF commander (captain)	5 June 2007	Makeni
Isatu Bargura, Nufratu Kamara, Salamatu, Basinatu Adellulay, Mabwawa Foma, Fatmata Mansaray, Mariatu Conteh, Isatu Samatra, Adama Koroma, Kadiotu Sanioh, Isatu Sesay, Zainab Sesay, Massalay Tarawallie, Annie Marie Max Byu, and Musu Mary Sawoy.	Beneficiaries of the Girls Left Behind Programme	6 June 2007	Makeni

Abdulai Kanu, Alijah I. Dumbuya, Jeremiah D. Monhin, Andrew Parker, Claudius Allen, James A. Turay, Eric Sellu, Musa Kamara, Sorie marrah, Alie Kamara, Emmanuel Conteh and Sheriff V. Bangura	Association of Ex-combatants	6 June 2007	Magburaka
Name unknown (2 men)	Motorbike (Okada) drivers	6 June 2007	Makeni
Josephus Conteh, Abdul Kanu and Joseph Conteh	Portfolio officer, admin assistant and financial officer, Salone Microfinance Trust	7 June 2007	Makeni
Musa Sesay	Area Programme Manager, Christian Children's Fund (CCF)	7 June 2007	Makeni
Peter Bundi	Regional Coordinator North, National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA)	7 June 2007	Makeni
Chernor Jalloh	Director, Access to Justice Makeni	7 June 2007	Makeni
Mr. Bangura	Garage owner with ex-combatant apprentices	7 June 2007	Makeni
Mr. Bikarim and others	Paley Brothers Tailoring Shop, with ex-combatant apprentices	7 June 2007	Makeni
Massallay Tarawallie	Beneficiary of Girls Left Behind Programme	8 June 2007	Makeni
Fatmata Conteh, Adama Jalloh, Alima and Adamsay	Beneficiaries of Girls Left Behind Programme	8 June 2007	Makeni
Zainabe, Fatmata Mansaray and Aminata Serry	Beneficiaries of Girls Left Behind Programme	8 June 2007	Makeni
Gabriel Ngigba	Apprentice Tailor	8 June 2007	Makeni
Issa Sesay	Apprentice Tailor	8 June 2007	Makeni
Mohammed Kargbo	Welder, with ex-combatant apprentices	8 June 2007	Makeni

Alimany Kamara, Osman Conteh, Osman M. Paul, John Baryusia, Issa Nyllerueh, Udosim Conteh, Osman Bach, James Thuwat, Sidique Nooyso, Hassim Tah, Ishmail Hamooi, and Ibrahim Turay	Vice President, Accident Officer, Secretary and members of the Okada Association	8 June 2007	Makeni
Tennessee Williams	Country Director, Action Aid	8 June 2007	Freetown
Justin Morgan	Country Programme Manager, Oxfam	9 June 2007	Freetown
Col. John Milton	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces	9 June 2007	Freetown
Martin Foday	Programme Manager Cause Sierra Leone	11 June 2007	Freetown
Paul Koulen	Strategic Planning Advisor, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator	11 June 2007	Freetown
Dineke van der Wijk, Virginia Perez and Mohamed Sannoh	Programme Director, Protection and Programme Development Manager and Child Protection Programme Officer, Save the Children	11 June 2007	Freetown
Hassan Hassin Feika	Former CDF commander	12 June 2007	Bo
Peter Lansana	Former Manager, NCDDR Economic Reintegration	12 June 2007	Bo
Albert Mambu	Inhabitant of Tissor and ex-CDF	13 and 15 June 2007	Tissor, Kenema
Name unknown (1)	Inhabitant of Tissor and ex-CDF	13 June 2007	Tissor, Kenema
Patrick Jamiru	Director, Caritas Kenema	13 June 2007	Kenema
Musa Kanu, Steven Samu, Minkailu Soki, Foday Gbanie and Musa J. Sevalie	Ex-RUF	13 June 2007	Kenema
Francis Mathias Kallon, Mohamed Conteh, Ahmed Kallon, Mohammed Kenneh, Vandy Sumaila and Framoi Amadou Junior	Ex-CDF fighters	13 June 2007	Kenema

Munda Vandy Hangha	Tailor	13 June 2007	Hangha, Kenema
Mualemu Mohammed Lamine Rogers	Chief Imam of Kagbado-Kambuima area	13 June 2007	Hangha, Kenema
Bockarie Sandy	Ex-CDF commander	13 June 2007	Hangha, Kename
Mr. Holima A. Samai and Mr. Patrick Lamboi	Regional Programme Officer and Regional West Africa Officer ACT/LWF	14 June 2007	Kenema
Dolly Williams	Administration manager, IRC	14 June 2007	Kenema
Juana Keifala. Mohamed Sessay, Mohamed B. Vandi, John M. Kanneh, Idrissa Banjura, and Ahmed Sesay	Bikeriders Renters/Riders Association (BRA)	14 June 2007	Kenema
James Vincent	Academic and former Programme Officer, Conciliation Resources	14 June 2007	Kenema
Boima Morie Kpuagor	Programme Officer, Conciliation Resources	14 June 2007	Kenema
Major Samba	Major RSLAF	14 June 2007	Kenema
Mr. Sulaiman Bangura and Mrs. Rugiatu Kanu	UNICEF	15 June 2007	Kenema
Henry Vagg	Former camp manager, DDR camp Lungi	16 June 2007	Freetown
Jonny Bristow	IMATT	18 June 2007	Freetown
Garth van ‘t Hull	CARE International	18 June 2007	Freetown
Alfred Goba	World Vision	19 June 2007	Freetown
Osman Gbla	Dean Political Sciences, Fourah Bay College	19 June 2007	Freetown
Mr. Jabbi	Chairman, Youth Coalition	20 June 2007	Kono
Name unknown (2)	Learning facilitator and utilities trainer, Progressive Women’s Association for Kono	21 June 2007	Kono

Joseph Sam and Mr. Allan	Operations coordinator and field officer, Center for Victims of Torture	21 June 2007	Kono
Mr. Mannuah and Mr. Chargha	IRC	22 June 2007	Kono
Mr. Alwin	Paramount Chief of Kamara	23 June 2007	Tombodu, Kono
Sahr E. Foniba and Tambu Kembay	Ex-CDF fighters	23 June 2007	Tombodu, Kono
Name unknown and Mr. Jaspa	President and Vice-President, Bike Riders Association Kono	23 June 2007	Kono
Marcella, Lucinda, Agnes and Sia	Inhabitants of Kono	23 June 2007	Kono
Omar Sesay and Amadu	World Vision	23 June 2007	Kono
Salim	Ex-RUF fighter	23 June 2007	Tombodu, Kono
Jaspa	Public Relations Officer, Youth Coalition Kono	24 June 2007	Kono
Sheku Duawai, Amadu Wundu, Mr. Fefegula, Foday Kpange and John I. Fanka	Inhabitants of Geoma Jagor and ex-CDF fighters	29 June 2007	Geoma Jagor, Bo
Moses James Silvalie	Ex CDF commander	30 June 2007	Yamandu, Bo
Hassan Decor Sallu and Sam Gberie	Ex-CDF commander and combatant	1 July 2007	Ndogbogoma Baoma, Bo
Col. Trevor Couch	IMATT	3 July 2007	Freetown

Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All-People's Congress
CACD	Community Arms Collection and Destruction
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
CDF	Civil Defence Forces
CREP	Complementary Rapid Education Programme
CVT	Center for Victims of Torture
CWC	Children's Welfare Committee
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic Congo
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
Ex-CAAFG	Children formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Groups
GGEM	Grassroots Gender Empowerment Movement
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
ICC	Interim Care Centre
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDDRS	Integrated DDR Standards
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMATT	International Military Advisory and Training Team
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NCDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
PAC	Project Approval Committee
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SRSG	Special Representative of the UN Secretary General
SSR	Security System Reform
STEP	Skills Training and Employment Promotion
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone