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What place for religious actors in the reintegration of ex-combatants?

Religion fostering human security in South Sudan's
Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process

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Abstract

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have been prominently featured in United Nations' peacebuilding operations from the last decade of the twentieth century onwards. Yet, the place occupied by religious actors in the drafting and implementation of DDR programmes has been largely absent both in policy and in academic literature. The present work identifies the assets brought by religious actors to human security in peacebuilding contexts and makes the argument for the same assets to be used in DDR. Thus, the present work aims to contribute to the development of DDR policy and to grasp how an integrated DDR approach that includes religious actors is needed to sustain peace. The South Sudanese DDR process is analysed as a case study on how the failure of past DDR programmes could be mitigated if religious actors were approached as central to the reintegration of ex-combatants. The present discussion thus makes an analysis of past DDR lessons in the South Sudanese context and argues that the DDR process cannot result in sustainable peace if religious actors are not taken into account.

Keywords: Disarmament; Demobilisation; Reintegration; Ex-combatants; Religious actors; South Sudan; Human security; Peacebuilding

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Finally, this thesis is especially dedicated to my mom and dad, who are my first and biggest supporters. I borrow these words from Kahlil Gibran, for they may do better than my own to make justice to the lifelong debt of gratitude I owe them:

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

My parents gave me absolute freedom to be who I wanted be. They always treated me and my sister as patient archers, waiting for their arrows to be sent forth. This thesis is thus dedicated to them, for they also dedicated most of their lives to serve me. I could not be any more of a woman without them.

Table of Abbreviations

ARN	Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización (Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation)
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CVR	Community Violence Reduction
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPO	United Nations Department of Peace Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
EU	European Union
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army)
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
FBI	Faith-Based Institution

IAWG	Inter-Agency Working Group
IDDRS	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
IDDRP	Interim Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz (Special Jurisdiction of Peace)
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIAC	Non-International Armed Conflict
ONUCA	United Nations Observer Group in Central America
PDET	Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (Development Programs with Territorial Focus)
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
R-ARCSS	Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SIDDR	Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement

SPLM/A-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/ Army-in-Opposition
SPLM/A-IG	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/ Army-in-Opposition
SSDDRC	South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission
SSPDF	South Sudan People's Defence Forces
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TJ	Transitional Justice
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in the Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WAM	United Nations Weapons and Ammunition Management
WFP	World Food Programme

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1. Introduction

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes have been at the core of peacebuilding activities worldwide for more than three decades. The United Nations has played a paramount role in standardising the implementation of DDR programmes in post-conflict settings and it has developed a comprehensive institutional layout for practitioners through the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), launched in 2006. Nevertheless, the professionalisation of DDR programmes has not stagnated their development. On the contrary, the evolving nature of modern wars and the scarcity of lasting peace settlements requires even more rigorous analysis to the lived realities of conflict and to the adequate methods to guarantee that a sustainable peace based on human security can be achieved. As DDR practice becomes more grounded on community-based and people-centred approaches, there are aspects that its institutional framework appears to be obliterating. This study presents the argument that religion has been one of these aspects and it brings light on how religious actors would benefit DDR practice. Thus, it analyses the South Sudanese DDR process as a case study and uncovers the potential that religious actors can have in the reintegration of ex-combatants in South Sudan.

1.1. Purpose and Scope

Presently, peacekeepers have to face increasingly complex operational conflict theatres, which are characterised by the interaction between a wide range of actors, identities, practices, norms and beliefs. Acknowledging this reality, the UN has advocated for growing sensitivity in post-conflict operations, and particularly during Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes. In fact, community-led approaches are much more present in peacebuilding today, but it remains unclear if the place occupied by community actors, namely the religious ones, is reflected on UN's guidance to DDR practitioners. Therefore, the present study consists of a review of DDR and religious studies' literature so as to reflect on South Sudanese DDR experiences in light of past lessons from DDR programmes.

DDR programmes directly affect the prospects of achieving sustainable peace within communities, and particularly when it comes to the reintegration of ex-combatants. Therefore, in a century marked by highly fragmented and multifaceted armed conflicts, it is increasingly important to address the hurdles and opportunities to DDR effectiveness. As peacebuilding doctrine has historically evolved to respond to new realities of conflict, so has DDR developed new responses to adequately meet the demands of war-torn societies. This thesis argues that the inclusion of religious actors is essential to the evolution of DDR. It aims to better inform DDR policymakers by examining the peacebuilding potential of religious institutions and individuals in post-conflict settings, particularly in South Sudan.

The research question that guides this thesis is: “Can religious actors positively impact DDR today?”. This research-based work, thus, builds on a wide range of policy and academic literature on DDR experiences that took place from the 1980s until today. Despite some existing assessments of how peacebuilding works in inter-religious environments, the purpose of this study is not so much to understand the complexity of inter-religious conflicts themselves, but rather to clarify how a DDR integrated approach that includes religious actors can contribute to best DDR practices. Hence, the aim of this study is to analyse the important place that religious actors have proven to occupy in peacebuilding and to uncover their absence in UN DDR policy and practice.

There are a few disclaimers to the scope of this thesis’ argument that should be considered. First of all, as the argument emphasises the relation between DDR and sustaining peace in the post-war period, so a detailed analysis to the roots of the conflict is excluded from this study. On the one hand, this paper does not address the religious potential as a driver of armed conflict. On the other hand, it does not address religious extremism as an obstacle to peacemaking efforts. Although religious extremism may contribute to violence, this thesis does not examine religion as a driver of conflict. Instead, it focuses on the peacebuilding potential of religious actors and their possible contribution when integrated into DDR processes.

Secondly, the connection between democratisation and DDR processes is not mentioned here. While democratisation approaches are often interlinked with post-

conflict settlements, the purpose of this research is to understand how to sustain peace, rather than how to build democracy in a state.

Lastly, this work does not examine extensively the merits and weaknesses of DDR in comparison to other peacebuilding tools. Not rarely, the Security Sector Reform (SSR) and the Transitional Justice (TJ) frameworks are used in simultaneous with DDR, but the comparative advantages that these frameworks bring to peacebuilding are not analysed here. DDR remains a central framework in both peacebuilding scholarship and UN practice. Furthermore, as South Sudan has implemented DDR programmes since 2005, this thesis focuses on the role of religious actors within DDR, rather than comparing DDR with other peacebuilding frameworks. Such comparisons fall outside the scope of the research question and offer limited insight into the role of religion in ex-combatant reintegration.

The ultimate purpose of this work is, then, to offer a new perspective on the previous approaches to the reintegration of ex-combatants in South Sudan. As a DDR programme is one of the first responders to the security needs in the aftermath of conflict, this study intends to build on the South Sudanese DDR experience by examining it through a human security lens. Hence, more than offering an irreducible and definitive solution to the violence experienced in the country, this study presents a religious-based proposal as a likely positive improvement on South Sudan's DDR experience.

1.2. Methodology

The present research consists on a literature review on the state-of-the-art concepts, lessons and guidance on DDR practice. Therefore, the research begins by examining the policy framework created for DDR and the current guidance provided to practitioners on the field, and then it dissects the main challenges to DDR processes today. In particular, it analyses the reintegration phase of DDR as the most problematic and difficult to implement so far. To provide a practical example to the research, this study also delves specifically into the lessons taken from the DDR process in Colombia. As the

Colombian transition from conflict to peace remains one of the most debated cases in peacebuilding literature, it is a pertinent benchmark case on DDR practice today.

It is worth noting that the desk research that grounds this thesis lacks direct communication with practitioners on the field. However, this apparent detachment from practice is intentional, since the purpose of the present study is to build on previous reasoning from policy and academic literature on DDR. As modern conflicts tend to alter realities on the ground very quickly, there is an intentional reliance on academic literature because the conclusions on the challenges and opportunities presented by each DDR programme have a more “permanent” character than the insights of practitioners at a given moment. In addition, in order to propose a place for religious actors within DDR policymaking, this research is grounded on the prior understanding of the sidelining of these actors within DDR policy. Therefore, the “lessons” extracted from DDR academic literature, with the IDDRS as a policy background, offer insightful material prone to an in-depth analysis of the possible research gaps in these contexts.

To sum up, the present work is based on a wide literature review, complemented by an analysis of the peacebuilding assets that religious actors can bring to United Nations post-conflict approaches, and particularly to DDR. Furthermore, it uses the practical case study of South Sudan to build on current DDR practice and to make the case for religious actors’ inclusion in DDR processes. In other words, the present thesis focuses on what was written on DDR in the past and on how religious actors can be added to the policy and to the practical lessons acquired from past DDR experiences.

1.3. Outline

This study is structured in a constructive way, that is, it builds on the lessons obtained from previous DDR programmes and capitalises on the role of religious actors as relevant assets for peacebuilding through a human security lens. Hence, after the Introduction, the second chapter of this study provides a tripartite analysis to the context in which DDR emerged, its evolution according to developments in the field and its institutionalisation at the UN level. First, the chapter analyses how the concept of

peacebuilding led to the introduction of DDR in the UN discourse and practice. Second, it informs on the changes in DDR framing and concrete application throughout its different “generations”. Third, the chapter instructs on how the UN’s standardised templates for DDR programmes evolved into an integrated framework that serves as international guidance for professionals in the area.

The third chapter capitalises on the more policy-oriented literature review of the second chapter by informing on what is currently known about DDR processes in concrete contexts. By reviewing mostly academic literature, it starts with a discussion on the current pertinence of the DDR framework and it evolves to an analysis of the impact that DDR programmes have had in different countries. Colombia is used as a benchmark case to exemplify the comparative challenges brought by subsequent generations of DDR templates. Only by analysing the existent “lessons” of DDR, one can discern common challenges faced by processes taking place in various parts of the world and at different times. Furthermore, this chapter takes the insights of academics who have thought about past DDR experiences to weigh in their implementation of human security needs advocated by DDR’s third-generation approaches.

The review of academic conclusions is the basis for wider deductions on the role that religion can play in efforts for sustaining peace. Chapter four, thus, starts by explaining the relation between religion and peace and it questions the absence of religious actors in DDR policy. Then, it is argued that religious actors occupy an important place in peacebuilding contexts, highlighting their contributions through normative guidance, humanitarian support and conflict mediation. This description of religious roles in post-conflict settings is then followed by a discussion on their apparent neglect in DDR policy. Moreover, the chapter further insists on the relevance of religion within the DDR framework and how human security inherently requires practitioners to look at religious actors as potential catalysers of peace.

After a comprehensive literature analysis and a discussion on the role of religion in DDR, this research then looks at the South Sudanese DDR process as a case study. The fifth chapter briefly looks at the recent history of conflict in South Sudan and to the subsequent DDR programmes implemented. It then engages with the striking drafting and

implementation issues raised by DDR practitioners and beneficiaries, especially in regard to the challenges faced in the reintegration phase of the programmes. Accordingly, it examines the challenges of the process in South Sudan and makes the case for religious-based reintegration of former combatants as a possible solution to DDR's inability to contribute meaningfully to peace at the community level. By contextualising the human security demands of the communities affected by violence in South Sudan, the chapter discusses how DDR programmes are more likely to meet these security goals if South Sudanese religious actors are integrated in the reintegration of ex-combatants.

To conclude, this thesis aims to reinforce the relevance of religious actors in DDR policy-making and it elaborates on the case of South Sudan's DDR process as an enriching insight to the current challenges to the reintegration of ex-combatants. Overall, if DDR aims to safeguard human security, religion cannot be merely regarded as one of many social or communitarian aspects of peacebuilding. In other words, religious actors have to be addressed separately in DDR policy as imperative assets to sustain peace. Today, I argue, religious actors can be powerful tools to achieve effective DDR outcomes.

2. The Historical Context of DDR

In order to discuss the role that Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) policies have played in conflict and post-conflict settings, it is relevant to understand the broader context in which its framework and practice emerged. A number of questions have guided the developments of DDR policy, including what DDR initiatives should concretely result in; how to break the links between commanders and lower-ranking fighters; the type of combatants that should benefit from DDR initiatives; the role war-made networks should play in post-conflict settlements; the categories of goods that should be provided for ex-combatants; and the extent of community involvement in the reintegration process. Since the 1980s, groups of national agencies and ministries, UN bodies, observation missions and monitoring groups, as well as receiving communities, have been part of local and national attempts to safeguard peace and to transform the relation between former fighters and their communities.

2.1. Historical foundations of UN DDR

Upholding the cessation of hostilities to ensure a sustainable peace in war-torn states has been a long-standing preoccupation of the international community. Within this context, DDR's roots can be pinpointed to the peacebuilding discourse that arose in the United Nations around the 1990s. Firstly, DDR stemmed from Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*,¹ which introduced peacebuilding in the UN discourse as a framework to be incorporated right after the end of a conflict so as to prevent the resurgence of violence. Secondly, DDR was a consequence of the Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations, commonly known as the Brahimi Report,² which established the link between peacekeeping, peacebuilding and socioeconomic development. Thirdly, DDR relates to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm in regard to innocent civilians

¹ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*, Report of the Secretary-General A/47/277 – S/24111 (United Nations, 1992), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?v=pdf>.

² United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (Brahimi Report)*, Panel Report A/55/305 – S/2000/809 (United Nations, 2000), <https://www.unv.org/publications/report-panel-united-nations-peace-operations-brahimi-report-a55305>.

inadequately protected by the respective governments, for it can be linked to post-conflict societal rehabilitation and rebuilding.³

Drawing upon Andy Knight's work, it is possible to study the developments within DDR doctrine and practice from the UN's own evolution of its peacebuilding efforts. From the beginning, and in accordance with Boutros-Ghali's agenda, DDR was framed in the terms of achieving positive peace, that is, to actively operate for the sake of human security and community recovery. The cessation of hostilities is a starting point for the implementation of the programme, but the prolongation of this status is entangled with the DDR process itself.⁴ Nevertheless, DDR's obligation of contributing to stability and security does not attribute to the programme the responsibility of completely preventing the relapse into violence. To put it differently, although the programmes are to be designed to thwart the resort to armed conflict, they cannot replace the political will of the conflicting parties and the voluntary adherence of ex-combatants do demobilise and disarm.⁵ To do this would be to pose a burden on practitioners far too unrealistic and disconnected from the lived realities of conflict and of the communities who decide to reinitiate hostilities.

A myriad of actors can be involved in DDR. The national stakeholders, such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), political parties and community leaders, hold the peace and war decision in their hands. The prolongation or modification of the *status quo* is firstly dependent on their will and intent, for external support only provides a complementary role to the DDR process. Besides the national actors, the UN is at the forefront of the support provided to national efforts of stabilisation and societal recovery. The UN's global reach and acceptance legitimate its action among other organisations, civil society groups and individuals, so it is natural that the history of DDR is built in parallel with the history of UN peacebuilding activities. Furthermore, the European Union

³ W. Andy Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa: An Overview', *African Security* 1, no. 1 (2008): 25–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19362200802285757>.

⁴ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 30.

⁵ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 33–34.

has given a notable financial contribution to these initiatives, especially those taking place in Africa. Its organisational nature based on regional cooperation has also fostered rapprochement with the African Union (AU), alongside which it has delivered political and development support, as well as promoted human rights respect.⁶

The participation of multiple players in post-conflict settlements was what first prompted the UN to create an integrated approach to DDR. Moreover, the work of the several UN agencies involved in the programmes lacked coordination and the DPKO's short-term security measures often prevailed over the work of entities like the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which were crucial to the maintenance of the peace continuum.⁷ The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), for instance, led the process from disarmament to reintegration of combatants, but there were a lot of communication gaps with other peacebuilding organisms that were relevant to address the needs of the victims of war.⁸ DDR was, then, the first mechanism purposefully created to deal with the link between stabilisation efforts and the post-conflict responses to be given to ex-combatants and their communities of origin and of reinsertion. So as to fill in this gap in the UN peacebuilding operations, the UN Security Council developed the concept of DDR as follows:

(a) Disarmament. Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes.

(b) Demobilization. Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion.

⁶ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 30–33.

⁷ Desmond Molloy, 'DDR: A Shifting Paradigm & the Scholar/ Practitioner Gap', *Canadian Peacekeeping Press of Pearson Peacekeeping Centre*, 1 December 2008, 5.

⁸ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 40–42.

(c) Reinsertion. Reinsertion is the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Reinsertion is a form of transitional assistance to help cover the basic needs of ex-combatants and their families and can include transitional safety allowances, food, clothes, shelter, medical services, short-term education, training, employment and tools. While reintegration is a long-term, continuous social and economic process of development, reinsertion is a short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs, and can last up to one year.

(d) Reintegration. Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance.⁹

The African context helped shaping the two initial stages of DDR, since conflicts in the continent tended to draw high volumes of combatants and to fuel the proliferation of lethal weapons among communities. The disarmament and demobilisation of groups of combatants became imperative to dismantle continuing and embedded cycles of violence. However, these efforts would only be complete once a majority of soldiers and rebels could find alternative means of livelihood other than being actively part of the war-made networks of violence. In other words, the tendency of these surplus troops to “spoil” peace led the UN to lend them particular attention under its peacebuilding efforts.¹⁰ This way, the three stages of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration were acknowledged to be essential sequential measures towards the realisation of lasting peace in war-torn societies.

The relation between DDR and other methods and sectors of intervention also merits attention. On the one hand, DDR’s peacemaking objectives have often conflicted with transitional justice’s goals of accountability and justice for perpetrators. Furthermore, DDR is designed to encourage peaceful relations between ex-combatants and non-combatants, while the direct beneficiaries of transitional justice measures are the

⁹ United Nations. Secretary-General, *Administrative and Budgetary Aspects of the Financing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Note by the Secretary-General*, A/C.5/59/31 (United Nations General Assembly, 2005), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/>.

¹⁰ Knight, ‘Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa’, 27.

victims, rather than the perpetrators of human rights abuses.¹¹ Consequently, accountability can, at times, hinder DDR efforts, for fear of prosecution or public shaming can limit ex-combatants' will to disarm and demobilise. On the contrary, not taking into account justice for human rights violations committed by these individuals can also generate feelings of resentment and victims' outcry.¹² As DDR policy has only recently acknowledged the needs of transitional justice, its complementarities are mostly being explored within the realm of social reintegration of ex-combatants.¹³

In addition, DDR is usually connected to another conventional security approach, the Security Sector Reform (SSR). From the 1990s on, DDR and SSR operations started to occur almost simultaneously, if nothing else because they were both mainly implemented by UN agencies and associated NGOs.¹⁴ Therefore, the common original concern with ex-combatants led to the growth in security promotion activities both through the eyes of stabilisation measures and of social reinsertion and reintegration. In other words, both DDR and SSR operate as social technologies that try to balance security risks within peacebuilding interventions.¹⁵

In light of this, the first UN DDR interventions in post-conflict settings occurred in 1989, both within the work of the UN Transition Assistance Group in Namibia¹⁶ and in El Salvador through efforts of the UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA).¹⁷ Although the UN's institutional framework for DDR only emerged in 2006 with the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), the UN was already very much involved, from the mid-1990s, in larger peace missions with DDR mandates or with the intent to support

¹¹ Chandra Lekha Sriram and Johanna Herman, 'DDR and Transitional Justice: Bridging the Divide?', *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 462–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903395999>.

¹² Stina Torjesen, 'New Avenues for Research in the Study of DDR', *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 415, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903345754>.

¹³ Sriram and Herman, 'DDR and Transitional Justice', 465–68.

¹⁴ Nat J. Colletta and Robert Muggah, 'Context Matters: Interim Stabilisation and Second Generation Approaches to Security Promotion', *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 428, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903345762>.

¹⁵ Colletta and Muggah, 'Context Matters', 444.

¹⁶ José Miguel Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR: A Policy Review through the Prism of Colombia's DDR Experience', *Helicon* 10, no. 13 (2024): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.helicon.2024.e33361>.

¹⁷ Inter-Agency Working Group, 'Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards', IAWG, 2014, 13, <https://www.unddr.org/operational-guide-iddrs/>.

NGOs, civil society and other national organisms in the design and implementation of these programmes. In fact, the first Secretary-General's report on "The Role of UN Peacekeeping in DDR" was issued in 2000,¹⁸ six years before the IDDRS were released.

Since the mid-1990s, DDR programmes have had to adapt to different conditions. Presently, the increase in Non-international Armed Conflicts (NIACs) with localised hostilities and the involvement of non-state actors leads to less predictable outcomes to a war other than an uncontested victory by one of the warring parties. In addition, the decreasing number of political settlements and of conflict resolution has detached DDR from Comprehensive Peace Agreements (CPAs) and has led to a more *ad hoc* and context-specific implementation of the programmes.¹⁹ The armed groups involved in conflicts are multiple, more fragmented and the designation of several groups as terrorist organisations has further complicated DDR practice. Additionally, conflict settings tend to be affected by cross-bordering health crises and insecurity is highly likely to expand to a regional scope.²⁰ In these scenarios, DDR has had to adapt and to change its embryonic character as a short-term stabilisation mechanism to an all-encompassing mechanism of resilience in post-conflict settings. Thus, since 1989, the UN launched more than 20 peacekeeping operations with integrated DDR mandates and it has supported more than 30 DDR programmes implemented in non-mission settings.²¹ Currently, the UN has Peacekeeping missions with specific DDR mandates in Libya (UNSMIL), South Sudan (UNMISS), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).²² Nevertheless, it still operates in other settings as a major supporting stakeholder to the peace settlements.

¹⁸ Secretary-General, *The Role of United Nations Peacekeeping in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* (United Nations, 2000), 113–26, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187541100X00139>.

¹⁹ Department of Peace Operations and Bonn International Centre for Conversion, *The Evolving Nature of DDR: Study on Engaging Armed Groups Across the Peace Continuum* (DPO, 2021), 6, <https://peacekeeping.un.org>.

²⁰ Department of Peace Operations and Bonn International Centre for Conversion, *The Evolving Nature of DDR*, 6–7.

²¹ United Nations, *35 Years of UN Secretariat Support on DDR*, DDR Bulletin Issue 2/2025, DDR Bulletin (United Nations, 2025), <https://www.unddr.org/the-ddr-bulletin/the-ddr-bulletin-issue-2-2025/>.

²² United Nations, *Special Edition on DDR/ RR in the DRC and Great Lakes Region*, DDR Bulletin Issue 1/2026, DDR Bulletin (United Nations, 2026), https://www.unddr.org/the-ddr-bulletin/the-ddr-bulletin-issue-1-2026/#Operational_Updates.

The achievements and utility of DDR are still widely debated. There is a structural lack of impact assessments on DDR programmes and the existent policy literature is mostly based on studies that are commissioned by and for the UN agencies and that are not made available to the public. The Integrated DDR Standards – which will be analysed later – seek, then, to mirror the policy instructions to which practitioners resort to.²³ Furthermore, two major contradictory studies are widely referenced in the academic literature: James Pugel’s report on the Liberian experience notes that the reintegration of ex-combatants was facilitated by DDR programmes, especially when it came to resettlement and community acceptance;²⁴ On the contrary, Humphreys and Weinstein find that economic and political reintegration could not be achieved through DDR, for the traumatic experience of past violence prevailed over community acceptance of ex-combatants.²⁵ This documentation of inconsistent findings creates a gap between scholars and practitioners that leads to ambiguous conclusions on the efficiency of DDR programmes.²⁶

Nevertheless, the great detail of the UN-created framework and the large numbers of individuals working in post-conflict settings making use of the IDDRS have maintained the standards relevant and upheld their status as the international reference guide to apply in post-conflict settings. In populations coming out of wars, UN DDR has aimed to sustain the social fabric and human capacity within communities attempting to overcome violence and suffering.²⁷ The IDDRS further complemented its initial stabilising role to encompass the provision of humanitarian, financial and technical assistance to war-torn societies. A subsequent optimistic report from UN staff on the empirical realities of reintegration have also revealed that, in numerous countries, ex-combatants were able to leave the previous networks of violence and found sustainable

²³ Franziska Seethaler, *Assessing the Impact of DDR Programmes: Possibilities and Challenges* (United Nations University, 2016), 4, <https://share.google/6PybtReijCW5oMhoi>.

²⁴ James Pugel, *What the Fighters Say: A Survey of Ex-Combatants in Liberia February-Marcy 2006*, UNDP & ANPPCAN Report (United Nations, 2007), <https://www.prio.org/publications/3796>.

²⁵ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, ‘Demobilization and Reintegration’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 4 (2007): 531–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002707302790>.

²⁶ Molloy, ‘DDR: A Shifting Paradigm’, 12.

²⁷ Knight, ‘Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa’, 26.

methods of livelihood as farmers, entrepreneurs, teachers, political and civic leaders, among others.²⁸ Hence, today, DDR programmes are considered to be a *sine qua non* condition for UN operations in the aftermath of violent conflicts.

2.2. The three generations of DDR

In the roughly 35 years in which the UN has institutionally recognised DDR as part of its programmes, the design and implementation of policies have changed drastically. It should be noted that none of the three generations that represent the institutional development of DDR holds hierarchical superiority over the others.²⁹ Even though the development of each generation derived from insufficient responses provided by its predecessor, all three represent different types of practices to cover specific demands. In the field, various generational approaches can be applied simultaneously without undermining the overarching goal of reintegrating ex-combatants and contributing to sustainable peace.

2.2.1. The “traditional” DDR

Different from later DDR generations, the initial programmes were not designed to implement human or community security, but rather immediate national stabilisation in the aftermath of a conflict.³⁰ The first generation of DDR can be traced back to the 1980s, when previous measures of disarmament and demobilisation of ex-combatants were deemed insufficient to prevent ex-fighters from resorting to violence again.³¹ International DDR programmes thus started to engage with national actors in a more systematic way by establishing technical processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reinsertion of ex-combatants as a part of the peace process. Throughout the decade, DDR responded to populations in the aftermath of international and civil wars that ended through peace operations or with the unequivocal victory of one of the warring parties.

²⁸ United Nations, *35 Years of UN Secretariat Support on DDR*.

²⁹ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 15.

³⁰ Willemijn Verkoren et al., ‘From DDR to Security Promotion: Connecting National Programs to Community Initiatives’, *International Journal of Peace Studies* 15, no. 2 (2010): 1.

³¹ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 1.

Therefore, DDR was edified as an embedded mechanism within the peace process negotiations, so its original focus was on giving an immediate security response to populations at the end of conflicts.³²

A realm of programmes, mainly introduced in Southern Africa and in Latin America, had a relatively clear sequencing of tasks: the collection of weapons should be followed by the cantoning and decommissioning of commanders and lower-ranked military personnel and, lastly, by the distribution of payments and the promotion of livelihood “start-up kits”, which could include the provision of natural resources and other materials, the access to vocational training and skills workshops, among others. These provisions’ goal was to smooth ex-combatants’ reinsertion in their home communities.³³ The main challenges of first-generation approaches stemmed from its disconnection from the specific contexts in which they were introduced. By resorting to a homogenous set of rules within which DDR should be applied, these interventions revealed insensitiveness to the local demands of each context. In addition, the deficient identification of target groups combined with asymmetrical disarmament led to incomplete demobilisation and to the sidelining of reintegration measures.³⁴

2.2.2. The second generation

As a response to the problematic issues raised by “traditional” DDR approaches, a second generation of policies and practices arose in the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s. The introduction of community-based approaches meant a shift in DDR’s objectives from the restoration of the monopoly of violence of the state to the safeguarding of human security.³⁵ Context-sensitive demands for maintaining a peaceful status fuelled synergies between DDR, Transitional Justice and Security Sector Reform, which began to operate interdependently to bring about evidence-based responses. New

³² Robert Muggah and Chris O’Donnell, ‘Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration’, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015): 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.fs>.

³³ Verkoren et al., ‘From DDR to Security Promotion’, 2.

³⁴ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 3–4.

³⁵ Verkoren et al., ‘From DDR to Security Promotion’, 25.

practices, notably the now commonly applied Community Violence Reduction (CVR), prompted a shift from individual to community-based processes.³⁶

The initial emphasis on ex-combatants' disarmament and demobilisation had to upgrade to the adoption of active steps to guarantee they developed sustainable livelihoods and to promote reconciliation with their victims and the wider communities of reintegration. In Southeast Asia, in Africa and in the Balkans, different practices were advanced in the field so as to reduce the capabilities of "peace spoilers", as well as to set the conditions for longer-term development in each of these contexts.³⁷ With careful analysis of the conditions leading to community security, second-generation DDR saw the elimination of the dependence on networks of war and violence as imperative.³⁸ As many of these DDR processes developed without CPAs in the background, there was no clarity on how to create a standardised template which would fit every post-conflict situation. Thus, there was a big incentive for DDR to naturally become tailored to the contexts in which it was operating.³⁹ In the case of the UN, the tailoring of DDR programmes to each context was facilitated by a dialogue between its specialised agencies' aims of peacebuilding, notably UNICEF and UNDP, with the DPKO's technical objectives of peacekeeping.⁴⁰ This integrated approach can be seen in parallel with the emerging framework for Integrated DDR Standards, also at the UN level.

Despite the changes to DDR's objectives and *modus operandi*, the UN reports continued to reveal an overreliance of practitioners and programme designers in the traditional models. Reintegration, in particular, remained largely overlooked and poorly implemented, with biased selection of beneficiaries deepening the gap between former fighters and the communities. Moreover, DDR programmes were often planned without taking into account the traumatising obstacles to reconciliation, with development

³⁶ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 4.

³⁷ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 3–4.

³⁸ Verkoren et al., 'From DDR to Security Promotion', 1.

³⁹ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 4.

⁴⁰ Molloy, 'DDR: A Shifting Paradigm', 5.

agencies retreating from DDR programmes due to programme diversions from their original goals.⁴¹

2.2.3. The third generation

Lastly, a third generation focused particularly on the reintegration dimension of DDR. In the 2010s, the increasing fragmentation and proliferation of conflicts with non-state armed groups revealed the unpreparedness of DDR to deal with the issues of violent extremism and terrorism. Far from the initial operations within CPAs, the third generation aimed to offer viable alternative livelihoods to combatants who wished to exit armed groups even before a peace agreement was signed. Furthermore, ex-combatants started to be framed as more than mere passive agents among which DDR benefits should be distributed. They were incentivised to embrace new identities and to develop professional skills that would widen their employment prospects and which would allow them to impact positively on local economies. In fact, ex-combatants' political alignments and insights as former members of warring parties proved, in the past generations, to be fundamental to inform and develop good practices of reintegration and of trust rebuilt with the larger communities.⁴²

Moreover, interim stabilisation measures and national development plans are being implemented in order to reach more people. Instead of solely targeting former fighters, the post-2010s practices usually intend to offer support to individuals and communities which might not be directly related to the warring parties. The operations in Yemen, the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, Mali and the Niger Delta show how DDR is finally being interpreted as a political process with overarching implications.⁴³ Colombia's ongoing "Paz Total" DDR initiative, which has undergone all three generational approaches, also renders rather hopeful expectations for DDR practitioners worldwide, since there was constant adaptation of the methods of reintegration of ex-combatants to meet the requirements of a sustainable peace in each given moment.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 3–4.

⁴² Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 8.

⁴³ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 5–6.

⁴⁴ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 2.

Nowadays, DDR is usually part of a broader set of measures, namely counter-terrorism, stability operations, counter-insurgency and long-term peacebuilding activities. The settled peace DDR required to be implemented in the 1980s has been replaced by an active participation in the negotiation of peace agreements and in the concern with the long-lasting permanence of former fighters within their receiving communities.⁴⁵ The third-generation approaches aim, then, to address the socioeconomic and political drivers of conflict in order to manage situations of ongoing violence or fragile peace settlements.

2.2.3.1. A fourth generation?

Overall, the development of DDR policies from the first to the third generation reveal a transition from a state-centred security approach to an integrated approach that contributes to longer-term sustainable peace settlements and that interacts with the specific social, economic, political and community aspects of security.⁴⁶ While there is no academic consensus on the emergence of a new DDR generation, the UN seems to have started to embrace a new perspective on how to design and implement its practices. In fact, one of the latest issues of the DDR Bulletin, the UN semimanual publication on the state of DDR in the field, already includes a section dedicated to a fourth generation of programmes, referred to as a reaction to violent extremism and new conflict landscapes. The publication also associates a new generation of practices with the needed emphasis on voluntary exit from armed groups.⁴⁷

2.3. The IDDRS and the UN

Besides a wide scope of academic literature on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, its practice is first and foremost based on operational guidelines provided by policy literature. Nevertheless, there is a dynamic of mutual construction between the developments of DDR practice and of DDR policy, for both practitioners and policy-makers interact continuously to inform DDR frameworks. Given DDR's prevalence in

⁴⁵ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 1.

⁴⁶ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 2.

⁴⁷ United Nations, *35 Years of UN Secretariat Support on DDR*.

the broader context of the UN peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding efforts, its policies are mainly based on the context of operations either mandated or supported by the United Nations instruments, bodies and agencies.

Hence, the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), first elaborated in 2006, was the first comprehensive framework for DDR practice. The IDDRS were discussed and formulated by a UN-working group established in March 2005, the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG). Today, the IAWG is composed by twenty-six UN entities and it maintains its triple goal of compiling good practices and resources, of monitoring the developments and the impacts of DDR on the field and of providing technical and strategic advice.⁴⁸

It is important to note that, in tandem with the first IDDRS, a set of good practices was also developed by the Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (SIDDR). In 2004, the Swedish Government, through the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), commissioned SIDDR so as to provide a degree of predictability when it came successful implementation of DDR programmes.⁴⁹ In a context where the relapse into violence after the implementation of DDR programmes was a reality,⁵⁰ the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden presented its Final Report to the UN Secretary General in 2006.⁵¹ In parallel with the work being developed by the IAWG, the SIDDR largely focused on the political nature of DDR in the early stage of post-conflict settings. Accordingly, SIDDR complemented the first IDDRS framework by emphasising the dynamic nature of DDR and its proper sequencing according to the specific context where programmes were to be implemented. In other words, the later academic conclusions on

⁴⁸ Inter-Agency Working Group, 'Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)', Integrated DDR Standards, September 2020, <https://www.unddr.org/the-iawg/>.

⁴⁹ Nat J. Colletta et al., *Interim Stabilization: Balancing Security and Development in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2008), 16.

⁵⁰ Colletta et al., *Interim Stabilization*, 14.

⁵¹ Jens Samuelsson Schjorlien and Lena Sundh, eds, *Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration - Final Report* (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2006), 1–48, www.sweden.gov.se/sidder.

the relevance of “local ownership” in the design and implementation of DDR was already discussed in SIDDR’s Final Report.⁵²

In spite of useful insights from the Stockholm Initiative, the UN IAWG’s main set of DDR standards, the IDDRS, was and continues to be the international reference guide to which DDR planners and practitioners resort to. In fact, the IDDRS provide an internationally-backed framework for UN integrated implementation of DDR in the field.⁵³ As a result, the first published IDDRS were mostly informed by the experiences and lessons taken from the first wave of DDR operations.⁵⁴ Its norm-setting goal supported the attempt of standardising and professionalising DDR so that it would encompass the goals of security and development in post-conflict settings. Since 2006, the IDDRS have been constantly altered, and several modules have been added to the framework in order to encompass the new challenges faced by practitioners in the field. After several revisions to the UN approach to DDR between 2014 and 2017, the first IDDRS comprehensive review was launched in November 2019.⁵⁵

The 2019 revised IDDRS are composed of modules aggregated within six “big” levels: General IDDRS (level 1), Concepts, Policy and Strategy of the IDDRS (level 2), Structures and Processes (level 3), Operations, Programmes and Support (level 4), Cross-cutting issues (level 5) and Linkages with other Processes (level 6).⁵⁶ The standards are framed in a way which legitimises its use both in peacekeeping and non-peacekeeping contexts, and it is directed to all individuals and organisations engaged in DDR, whether being UN or non-UN mandated staff.⁵⁷ They are also meant to contribute to the entire

⁵² Schjørlien and Sundh, *Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration - Final Report*, 21.

⁵³ Molloy, ‘DDR: A Shifting Paradigm’, 5.

⁵⁴ Muggah and O’Donnell, ‘Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration’, 3.

⁵⁵ Inter-Agency Working Group, ‘Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)’.

⁵⁶ United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)* (United Nations, 2026), <https://www.unddr.org/the-iddrs/> It is important to note that all references to the IDDRS are connected to a URL that can become obsolete. Moreover, the specific reference to each module can become outdated, due to the constant evolving nature of both the IDDRS and its respective website. For more information on the IDDRS modules that are being cited in this document, April 25, 2026 should be considered the access date.

⁵⁷ Inter-Agency Working Group, ‘Operational Guide’, 14.

peace continuum and should give priority to community-based approaches to reintegration support.

The five categories of people to whom DDR should be directed towards are the ex-members of armed forces and other combat groups, the abductees or victims, their dependents and families, the civilian returnees or “self-demobilised” individuals and the community members.⁵⁸ However, in order to reach the broader communities it affects, the standards envision a set of DDR-related tools and of reintegration support mechanisms that complement DDR programmes. Among these tools, the most commonly used are “transitional weapons and ammunition management (WAM), community violence reduction (CVR), initiatives to prevent individuals from joining armed groups designated as terrorist organisations, DDR support to mediation, and DDR support to transitional security arrangements”.⁵⁹ Thus, the current framework envisions not only a people-centred and gender-responsive approach, but also one that is context-sensitive and that revolves around good planning and local ownership.

In mission settings, that is, in contexts of peacekeeping operations, political missions or good offices engagements, DDR mandates usually follow a UN Security Council Resolution and require support from a country team that is composed with the help of UN agencies on the field. On the contrary, in non-mission settings, the reintegration section of the programme is led by the UN, but both disarmament and demobilisation are usually managed and deployed through national institutions.⁶⁰ In Sudan, for example, a national DDR commission was created to cover these DDR phases, whereas the UN mission in the country was tasked with supporting the drafting and implementation of the commission’s decisions.⁶¹ In these cases, CVR initiatives gain further importance due to the lack of an ongoing internationally-mandated peace

⁵⁸ Level 2 United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

⁵⁹ Level 2, Module 2.1. United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

⁶⁰ Level 2 United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

⁶¹ Sami Abdulhalim Saeed, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Initiatives in Sudan: A Brief Summary* (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2024), 15–18, <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2024.27>.

operation. Even though DDR programmes adopt different formats in each of these scenarios, they always end up being shaped by the political dynamics both at the national and at the local levels. Beyond claims of neutrality, the IDDRS incentivise for cooperation with different stakeholders in an effort to acknowledge the politics influencing DDR. In view of this, a DDR programme should be sensitive to the context where it is developed and deployed and it should be designed in accordance with the local necessities without choosing sides in a conflict.⁶²

Despite refraining from strictly sequenced formulas, the IDDRS establish a clear distinction between the usual initial phases of disarmament and demobilisation and the later stage of reintegration of ex-combatants. Effectively, reintegration is taken as the longer-term process that contributes to a sustaining peace, rather than a mere cessation of hostilities. Differently from the other stages, the reintegration process is much less focused on short-term measures, but rather on all-encompassing initiatives that can include rehabilitation, repatriation, reconstruction and reinsertion, among others.⁶³ Hence, integrated DDR planning requires the input of all stakeholders involved in the conflict and in the post-conflict settlement, so as to reach a community agreement on the needs of the individuals taking part in hostilities and of the victims of the harm it caused. Even though the framework gives particular attention to certain categories of individuals, it also attests to common obstacles affecting disproportionately determined societal groups, with a particular focus on women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and migrants. Food and health assistance, with an emphasis on HIV/ AIDS, are also distinctively regarded as cross-cutting problems to tackle in post-conflict settings.⁶⁴

Finally, the IDDRS recognise the complementarity and sometimes overlap with other disciplines and peace proposals, namely Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Transitional Justice (TJ). It also adds up on other ongoing post-conflict issues, particularly the management of natural resources and the imperative of dealing with organised crime.

⁶² Level 2 United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

⁶³ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 31.

⁶⁴ Level 3 - Level 5 United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

The final level of the IDDRS builds on the material conditions that are likely to increase the resurgence of conflict and it reflects on the incorporation of vulnerable groups in the communal response to these issues.⁶⁵

One of the major problems stemming from the 2019 revised IDDRS is its incomplete nature when it comes to the unfinished development of the modules. As a matter of fact, the latest Operational Guide to the IDDRS dates from 2014 and it is adapted to an out-dated version of the standards. Moreover, due to the constant debates within the IAWG, new modules were added to the 2019 proposal which still lack theoretical development. To illustrate this confusion between the 2019 proposed framework and the actual IAWG's doctrine, the current IDDRS framework includes, in level 6 ("linkages"), a dedicated module to DDR and "Armed Groups Designated as Terrorist Organisations". Notwithstanding, this module is not only missing from the 2019 framework, but it is also presented as being under-developed and having been merely "validated conditionally".⁶⁶

Therefore, by looking at all the fragmented guidance provided by the IAWG, it is quite challenging to grasp if practitioners are receiving the fully-developed modules of the IDDRS as guidance, or if the operational guidance from 2014 is the one being followed. If the latter is the case, the IDDRS might be facing a problem of not accompanying the developments in the field. In fact, if the latter 2019 review was meant to encapsulate the developments from the third DDR generation, the incomplete doctrinal guidance provided by the IAWG is an alarming signal that practitioners are dealing with out-dated standards to respond to challenging new environments.

Even so, in spite of criticisms regarding its frequent theoretical disconnection from practice,⁶⁷ the IDDRS, alongside its Operational Guide, continue to be the reference manual to guide DDR operations. Lastly, it is worth noting that, today, there is a clear distinction between the "DDR program", which corresponds to the set of activities developed over a certain period of time, and the "DDR process", which covers the

⁶⁵ Level 6 United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

⁶⁶ Level 6 - Module 6.5 United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*.

⁶⁷ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 4.

individual trajectory throughout the program and encompasses the personal competences, necessities and experiences that characterise it.⁶⁸ While there was an interplay between these two terms in the first UN-led peace operations, the current IDDRS fully recognise that DDR programmes are the backbone of DDR processes, that is, programmes are designed and implemented as a means so as to ensure that ex-combatants are fully disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated.

To conclude, the IDDRS have provided the policy background to DDR practice and its modules have been constantly changed and developed to reflect the new challenges faced by practitioners in the field. By providing instructions on how to act in different settings, the standards have been in continuous dialogue with the evolution of post-conflict scenarios and with the respective responses they require from DDR.

⁶⁸ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 8.

3. Peacebuilding and DDR today

Having analysed the theoretical foundations of DDR, one must now turn to its concrete impacts in post-conflict settings. This chapter assesses the strengths and limitations of DDR as a peacebuilding tool and it evaluates contemporary programmes in light of current policy standards. In other words, the second chapter's focus on policy literature is now complemented by the academic literature on DDR experiences across the world. This intersection between DDR norms and their application on the field is particularly relevant to dissect what have been the impacts of DDR on its twenty-first century goal of enhancing human security.⁶⁹ To help better grasping the challenges and opportunities of DDR in the field, the Colombian DDR process is also presented here as a benchmark case.

3.1. The “lessons” of DDR

The generational approach to DDR, despite giving relevant insight on the debates among policy-makers from the 1980s until today, does not show a linear positive evolution. The mixed results held by DDR experiences in Central Africa are the clearer example of how there is no formulaic prescription of a DDR template that can guarantee successful results in every context.⁷⁰ In fact, different contexts where DDR was applied were translated into a variety of experiences in terms of community acceptance and success of these programmes. Although the generational framework is useful, individual DDR experiences provide important insights into the effects of policy change in practice. These “lessons” of DDR experiences create the interaction *par excellence* between research and practice⁷¹ and contribute to a better understanding of what is known about DDR in post-conflict settings worldwide.

3.1.1. Recent developments and current pertinence

⁶⁹ Molloy, ‘DDR: A Shifting Paradigm’, 3.

⁷⁰ Sally Sharif, ‘A Critical Review of Evidence from Ex-Combatant Reintegration Programs’, *Politics of Return*, 2018, 5.

⁷¹ Muggah and O'Donnell, ‘Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration’, 8.

It is worth noting that stating that DDR's chief concern in post-conflict environments is to prevent the return to violence does not imply that DDR's goal is to prevent combatants from resorting to conflict again.⁷² DDR seeks to provide ex-combatants with alternatives to violence, but its success ultimately depends on political commitment and participant engagement.⁷³ While DDR can support transitions to peace,⁷⁴ it cannot by itself prevent renewed conflict.

Having this in mind, DDR designers and executors have tried to adapt DDR measures to the conditions on the field, so as to prompt political leaders and decision-makers to accept the transition to a DDR process more easily. As a consequence, there is a consistent and continuously increasing body of academic literature on DDR that is based on the so-called “lessons” taken from the implementation of DDR programmes. While some authors specify on the lessons acquired in specific locations, cross-geographical analysis is quite common and it allows for the identification of common hurdles faced by DDR practitioners in different contexts.

Even though DDR processes have been framed as imperative in transitions to peace since the 1990s, isolating its direct contribution to peace remains difficult.⁷⁵ There is also a substantive gap in literature on the possible contribution of DDR to confidence-building, to reducing postwar crime and to healing wartime trauma. Still, the “lessons” of DDR remain a relevant tool to assess the impact of these programmes.⁷⁶ The sections that follow examine some of the most recent ones.

3.1.2. Cross-regional lessons

⁷² Johan Schulhofer-Wohl and Nicholas Sambanis, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs: An Assessment*, Research Report (Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2010), 7, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1906329>.

⁷³ Nicole Ball, ‘Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Mapping Issues, Dilemmas and Guiding Principles’, *Center for International Policy*, 2006, 4.

⁷⁴ Jairo Munive and Finn Stepputat, ‘Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs’, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015): 8, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.go>.

⁷⁵ Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs: An Assessment*, IX.

⁷⁶ Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs: An Assessment*, 3.

Setting realistic goals and implementing technical recommendations provided by past DDR lessons is as important for practitioners as for the beneficiaries of DDR. For instance, in internationally-supported DDR processes, which are the most common, practitioners must carefully consider the profile and number of combatants to be addressed by the programme, so as to prevent both the marginalisation or the unjust attribution of benefits to ex-combatants.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the success of DDR is very dependent on the means used for policy selection in each context: civic and political participation of the receiving communities, transparency in communication of the programme benefits, and ex-combatant input for policy design are generally considered to be key fundamentals to DDR effectiveness.⁷⁸

When it comes to DDR lessons common to different settings, DDR planning has faced the challenge of targeting each programme to specific types of combatants. In other words, ex-fighters of non-state armed groups and of national armed forces need to undergo the DDR process through different programmes, which should be carefully drafted to address the specific needs of each group. DDR outcomes are shaped by the organisational structure and financing mechanisms of armed groups. Evidence from Nepal, Colombia, Libya⁷⁹ and Liberia⁸⁰ suggests that wartime networks often continue to influence post-conflict behaviour and reintegration trajectories, since the command hierarchies created during the war do not disappear in its aftermath. Thus, DDR programmes should be adapted to the predictable trajectories presented by commanders and rank-and-file soldiers, depending on the type of armed group they belonged to. McQuinn states that, during a conflict, “resource-wealthy” armed groups are more likely to engage in indiscriminate violence, whereas “resource-poor” ones are much more reliant on political and religious ideologies to attract recruits and to use violence in a more disciplined way. Moreover, the command profile of the groups allows to distinguish

⁷⁷ Jairo Munive and Stine Finne Jakobsen, ‘Revisiting DDR in Liberia: Exploring the Power, Agency and Interests of Local and International Actors in the “Making” and “Unmaking” of Combatants’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, no. 4 (2012): 367, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2012.724792>.

⁷⁸ Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs: An Assessment*, 16–17.

⁷⁹ Brian McQuinn, ‘DDR and the Internal Organization of Non-State Armed Groups’, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 5, no. 1 (2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.412>.

⁸⁰ Munive and Jakobsen, ‘Revisiting DDR in Liberia’, 369.

between groups with formal systems based on elaborate codes of conduct and informal groups operating under *ad hoc* rules.⁸¹ The predictable constraints that the financing architecture and command profile of these groups pose to individual trajectories in the aftermath of war should, then, be considered in DDR designing.

Across contexts, ex-combatants prioritise their socioeconomic rights, such as access to housing, food, healthcare and livelihoods.⁸² Going beyond peace projects merely based on civil and political rights would, then, allow the UN to tackle larger impediments to effective reintegration, namely corruption and the embezzlement of DDR funds, a phenomenon encountered in the experiences of DDR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone,⁸³ as well as in Liberia⁸⁴ and in Nigeria⁸⁵. These cases show that when populations experience inequality and lack basic living conditions, they become more prone to re-engage in violence.

The evolution of DDR practice has also fuelled its connection to the deeper political dynamics of the context where programmes are implemented. Evidence from Burkina Faso, the CAR, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Haiti, Liberia, Mali, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone and South Sudan demonstrates that DDR is inherently political and must be integrated into broader peacebuilding, SSR and rule-of-law reforms.⁸⁶ Accordingly, societies coming out of conflict need to be included in nation-wide recovery projects to ensure long-lasting peace.⁸⁷

⁸¹ McQuinn, 'DDR and the Internal Organization of Non-State Armed Groups', 3–5.

⁸² Moussa Theodore Zidouemba, 'Prioritizing Social and Economic Rights in United Nations Peace Operations in Africa: A Pathway to Sustainable Peace', *International Peacekeeping* 32, no. 4 (2025): 756, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2025.2487131>.

⁸³ Zidouemba, 'Prioritizing Social and Economic Rights', 763–66.

⁸⁴ Walt Kilroy, 'Does a More Participatory Approach to Reintegrating Ex-Combatants Lead to Better Outcomes? Evidence from Sierra Leone and Liberia', *Conflict, Security & Development* 14, no. 3 (2014): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2014.923151>.

⁸⁵ Iro Aghedo, 'Winning the War, Losing the Peace: Amnesty and the Challenges of Post-Conflict Peace-Building in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 3 (2013): 276–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909612453987>.

⁸⁶ William Robert Avis, *DDR Case Studies*, K4DD Rapid Evidence Review (Institute of Development Studies, 2024), 4, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19088/K4DD.2025.009>.

⁸⁷ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 46.

When it comes to target groups of particular vulnerability, numerous cases bring to light children as the primary victims of violence, and so DDR must be more wary of the urgent need to extract them from war-based networks and to disarm them. Accordingly, gender issues are often overlooked by DDR drafting, for “young men with guns” are usually the most common demographic tackled by programmes.⁸⁸ People with disabilities, elderly citizens and poor individuals are also frequently excluded from DDR programmes.⁸⁹

The great novelty brought by third-generation approaches to DDR was the inclusion of local individuals in policy drafting so that context-specific solutions could be found.⁹⁰ However, local ownership of DDR is still reclaimed in several contexts where, rather than exercising a complimentary and supporting role, international institutions are still at the forefront of DDR. Nationally and locally conducted initiatives are widely recognised as being the most adequate not only to meet the participants’ expectations, but also to contribute to sustainable peace. In Timor-Leste, veterans’ participation and the use of local institutions such as the *suco* (or village) helped align DDR with local security needs and expectations, illustrating the benefits of nationally-led approaches.⁹¹ Likewise, evidence from Liberia and Sierra Leone suggests that ex-combatant participation increased social capital and improved reintegration outcomes. To prevent communal resentment, ex-combatants’ participation was framed as utilitarian to benefit the communities, rather than as a rewarding mechanism for former human rights abusers.⁹² This shows that sharing the decision-making power with DDR stakeholders and beneficiaries improves the local ownership of the process. Evidence from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC similarly suggests that stronger local participation contributed to

⁸⁸ Knight, ‘Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa’, 44; Kilroy, ‘Does a More Participatory Approach to Reintegrating Ex-Combatants Lead to Better Outcomes?’, 276.

⁸⁹ Yukako Tanaka-Sakabe, ‘Accommodating Incomplete DDR, Security Sector Development, and Veterans’ Issues to Peacebuilding Efforts: National Responses, Suco, and Local Security in Timor-Leste’, in *Adaptive Peacebuilding*, vol. 94, by Cedric De Coning (2018), 228, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/94/2/301/4851911>.

⁹⁰ Zidouemba, ‘Prioritizing Social and Economic Rights’, 758.

⁹¹ Tanaka-Sakabe, ‘Accommodating Incomplete DDR’, 219; 228.

⁹² Kilroy, ‘Does a More Participatory Approach to Reintegrating Ex-Combatants Lead to Better Outcomes?’, 280–81.

more effective DDR outcomes, whereas externally driven programmes often struggled to gain legitimacy.⁹³ Even though the three countries had a similar legacy of tribal xenophobia and hatred-driven hostilities, the lack of genuine participation of DDR's local stakeholders culminated in worse-off processes both in Burundi and in the DRC, in comparison to locally-driven DDR in Rwanda.⁹⁴

Despite the main conclusions on past DDR being examined above, other lessons can be drawn from other DDR processes, such as the inadequacy of weapons-for-cash models in certain contexts,⁹⁵ the lack of financial resources to sustain lasting programmes or the resort to complicated schemes of benefit attribution to former fighters.⁹⁶ Yet, the lessons on the reintegration of ex-combatants are the most abundant, so they require a separate analysis.

3.1.3. The case for reintegration

Reintegration is seen by the UN as the long-term process through which combatants acquire civilian status, constituting the phase of DDR that aims to preclude rearmament, the resurgence of violence and, ultimately, the return to war.⁹⁷ Despite its importance, reintegration obstacles seem to be the most prevalent in different DDR contexts.⁹⁸

The context and the politics that encapsulate former fighters' reintegration process after war are currently more relevant for practitioners than necessarily the "mechanics"

⁹³ Martin Edmonds et al., 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Local Ownership in the Great Lakes: The Experience of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo', *African Security* 2, no. 1 (2009): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19362200902766383>.

⁹⁴ Edmonds et al., 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Local Ownership in the Great Lakes', 39–40.

⁹⁵ Knight, 'Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa', 47.

⁹⁶ Tanaka-Sakabe, 'Accommodating Incomplete DDR', 215.

⁹⁷ Laura Camila Barrios Sabogal, 'From Cantonments to Settlements: Lessons for Reintegration of Former Combatants from the Colombian Peace Process', *International Peacekeeping* 31, no. 5 (2024): 603, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2024.2391765>.

⁹⁸ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 4; Munive and Jakobsen, 'Revisiting DDR in Liberia', 363; Sharif, 'A Critical Review of Evidence'; Simon Saldner, 'Contextualising Reintegration: Conceptualising and Measuring Ex-Combatant Reintegration Relative to Civilians', *Civil Wars* 22, no. 4 (2020): 472, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2020.1765540>; Verkoren et al., 'From DDR to Security Promotion', 7; Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 3.

or the instruments used by programmes themselves.⁹⁹ In today's DDR, reintegrated combatants seem to undergo two types of transformation: an identity one, in which they transition from combatant to civilian; and a behavioural one, in which combatants become fully reintegrated and socialise peacefully in their communities of reinsertion.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the return of combatants necessarily creates a disruption between the host communities, who were directly or indirectly affected by the conflict, and the combatants, who were the main perpetrators of violence.

Therefore, within reintegration, the expectations of ex-combatants regarding their future are at the core of successful shift to a civic status. To begin with, even the transition into a civilian life can be contested by some combatants, who expect a reintegration into the armed forces.¹⁰¹ The failure to find sustainable livelihoods after going through the reintegration programme can also generate resentment among combatants and ultimately lead to their return to violence.¹⁰² In sum, the discrepancy between the promises made by DDR practitioners, the expectations of former fighters and the reality that they face can deepen grievances that difficult peacebuilding.¹⁰³ Therefore, carefully listening and managing the participants' demands and avoiding false promises are crucial to an effective reintegration.

In addition, the literature on DDR lessons usually differentiates between the economic, the political and the social reintegration of former fighters. Despite earlier literature on "greed and grievance" motivations, recent research suggests that economic marginalisation and unemployment alone do to justify remobilisation, for ex-combatants cannot be reduced to rational utility maximisers.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, DDR lessons show that

⁹⁹ Mats Berdal and David Ucko, 'Introduction to the DDR Forum: Rethinking the Reintegration of Former Combatants', *International Peacekeeping*, 2014, 316, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2013.843971>.

¹⁰⁰ Sharif, 'A Critical Review of Evidence', 4.

¹⁰¹ Jessica Moody, 'Ex-Combatants Thinking Differently: Attitudes to Threatening the State in Post-Conflict Côte d'Ivoire', *Conflict, Security & Development* 20, no. 6 (2020): 732, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2020.1840819>.

¹⁰² Kilroy, 'Does a More Participatory Approach to Reintegrating Ex-Combatants Lead to Better Outcomes?', 276.

¹⁰³ Kilroy, 'Does a More Participatory Approach to Reintegrating Ex-Combatants Lead to Better Outcomes?', 287–88.

¹⁰⁴ Moody, 'Ex-Combatants Thinking Differently', 730; Munive and Stepputat, 'Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs', 8.

political participation of ex-combatants can reduce recidivism into violence.¹⁰⁵ Lastly, remains the most challenging dimension because it requires rebuilding trust between former combatants and affected communities and there is not “one-size-fits-all” approach that can guarantee full reconciliation.¹⁰⁶ Ex-combatants can be immediate targets of suspicion of crimes committed after the war ends,¹⁰⁷ so the social side of reintegration is distinctive from the others because it fosters the interaction between past perpetrators and victims. Thus, community-based approaches are highly regarded as important to foster peaceful social coexistence, for they confer local legitimacy to the DDR process.¹⁰⁸

3.2. Colombia as a benchmark DDR case

Special attention is now given to Colombia as a benchmark DDR case for several reasons: for one, it is arguably one of the most discussed cases in DDR literature; secondly, it is one of the few states where all three generations of DDR were adopted and where various sets of practices were applied in different periods of time; thirdly, DDR in Colombia after 2016 also reflects the implementation of the most recent recommendations of third-generation DDR, so it allows us to take conclusions from the current institutional challenges brought by the latest IDDRS; finally, the DDR process in Colombia is operating in parallel to ongoing violence, which matches the situation analysed later in the case study South Sudan.

The beginning of the Colombian conflict is usually attributed to the late 1940s, in which subsequent civil wars emerged from political contestation and broader socioeconomic inequalities, notably regarding land ownership. Soon, the proliferation of weapons and the escalation of violence became common and drug trafficking networks either provided employment within or were used to fund insurgency groups and

¹⁰⁵ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Sharif, ‘A Critical Review of Evidence’, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Alpaslan Özerdem, ‘A Re-Conceptualisation of Ex-Combatant Reintegration: “Social Reintegration” Approach’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, no. 1 (2012): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2012.667661>.

¹⁰⁸ Sharif, ‘A Critical Review of Evidence’, 9.

paramilitary action.¹⁰⁹ The intricate and protracted nature of the conflict since the 1950s was very much influenced by the rise of numerous guerrilla groups, namely the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP) and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL). The state’s centralised counter-insurgency efforts and its simultaneous incapacity to effectively govern rural areas fuelled these groups’ embeddedness in local dynamics and precluded the end of violence.¹¹⁰ About 80% of the individuals killed during the conflict were civilians, and the violence left a high number of victims of kidnaps, landmines, as well as enforced disappearances and internal displacements.¹¹¹

The CPA signed in 2016 between the FARC and the national government did not end the violence in the country, but it ended the protracted civil war and provided a national response for the perspectives of disarmament and demobilisation of former insurgents.¹¹² Hence, the CPA created the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (ARN), the Development Programs with Territorial Focus (PDET) and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) so as to address the transition to peace in Colombia.¹¹³

When it comes to DDR, the first-generation programmes in Colombia tackled immediate necessities, such as housing and employment, but the reintegration of ex-combatants was not backed by a fully-fledged agenda that also encompassed the needs of host communities.¹¹⁴ Despite increasing cooperation from international agencies,¹¹⁵ second-generation DDR faced similar problems, for reintegration was not context-sensitive and economic issues were once again at the core of the national efforts of peacebuilding. Thus, the transition to third-generation DDR efforts, which are still

¹⁰⁹ Lina Penagos, ‘Experiencing Adaptive Actions Within a Complex Peacebuilding Framework: The Colombian Case’, in *Adaptive Peacebuilding: A New Approach to Sustaining Peace in the 21st Century*, vol. 94, ed. Cedric De Coning et al., Twenty-Century Perspectives on War, Peace, and Human Conflict (2018), 97, <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/94/2/301/4851911>.

¹¹⁰ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 8.

¹¹¹ Angelika Rettberg and Juan E. Ugarriza, ‘Reconciliation: A Comprehensive Framework for Empirical Analysis’, *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 6 (2016): 523, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010616671858>.

¹¹² Gustav Agneman et al., ‘Do Apologies Promote the Reintegration of Former Combatants? Lessons from a Video Experiment in Colombia’, *Journal of Peace Research* 62, no. 4 (2025): 929, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241261560>.

¹¹³ Penagos, ‘Experiencing Adaptive Actions Within a Complex Peacebuilding Framework’, 92; 107–14.

¹¹⁴ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 9.

¹¹⁵ Penagos, ‘Experiencing Adaptive Actions Within a Complex Peacebuilding Framework’, 104.

ongoing, was marked by greater attention to the social and political obstacles hindering reintegration, including the demands of local and national actors in the institutionalisation of DDR.¹¹⁶

The Colombian case shows the importance of DDR, even in the period prior to the CPA, in which public participation and negotiations accounting for the victims' perspectives allowed for peacebuilding to grow from joint cooperation between community leaders, cooperation agencies, government entities and the Catholic Church, the latter working to ease local dynamics of political confrontation.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the Colombian experience of a participatory implementation policy actively included civil society demands and allowed the institution of locally-based solutions for reconciliation, namely in cooperation with religious actors.¹¹⁸ A paradigmatic example of the adaptation of DDR to the Colombian context was the terminology used to address the former FARC-EP members. In fact, words such as “demobilisation” or “reintegration” were replaced by “disarmament” and “reincorporation” in the CPA, in order to distinguish FARC's own DDR experience from past experiences with other insurgent groups in Colombia. Moreover, “reincorporation” was meant to stress the relevance of hearing former combatants' voices in the design of DDR strategies.¹¹⁹

3.2.1. The reintegration of ex-combatants in Colombia

As in most cases, reintegration remains the most challenging phase of Colombian DDR. Although the DDR involved a myriad of actors who participated in the Colombian conflict, the DDR of ex-FARC members can serve as an example, for it represented the largest insurgent group involved in confrontations before the CPA. In fact, the FARC-EP operated as a “mercenary army”, that is, as a highly hierarchical military organisation, able to coordinate highly violent attacks against local communities. Different from other warring groups, the FARC-EP had fought without wider community support, so its member's reintegration *a posteriori* was much more difficult.¹²⁰ The lack of

¹¹⁶ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 10.

¹¹⁷ Penagos, ‘Experiencing Adaptive Actions Within a Complex Peacebuilding Framework’, 92.

¹¹⁸ Penagos, ‘Experiencing Adaptive Actions Within a Complex Peacebuilding Framework’, 115.

¹¹⁹ Rodríguez-Castellón, ‘Evolution and Challenges of DDR’, 10.

¹²⁰ McQuinn, ‘DDR and the Internal Organization of Non-State Armed Groups’, 12–13.

communication between host communities and the government also created an information gap that increased civilian alienation and perceptions of ex-combatants as being part of a privileged group who would benefit from DDR.¹²¹ Nevertheless, in a previous survey to these ex-combatants' perception of reintegration, 97% classified community engagement as fundamental for their reinsertion.¹²²

Several lessons can be drawn from the cohesion provided by wartime networks and their implications for Colombian DDR. On the one hand, the influence of mid-level commanders on post-conflict outcomes depended on local conditions: in secure areas with strong community embeddedness, they were more likely to support peace, whereas in dangerous areas they were more likely to encourage mobilisation, even where community embeddedness existed.¹²³ On the other hand, maintaining wartime cohesion often facilitated reintegration, for mid-level commanders helped rank-and-file soldiers redefine their post-conflict roles and fostered a shared vision of peace. In the case of the FARC-EP, collective camps in which mid-level commanders retained leadership exhibited increased group cohesion, fewer post-conflict security dilemmas, and stronger internal economies and commercial ties with civilian communities. Once led by their wartime commander, FARC ex-members revealed more favourable attitudes towards DDR.¹²⁴

In similarity to other settings, the reintegration programmes in Colombia were premised on the theory that social participation of ex-combatants in their receiving communities fostered reconciliation and minimised the risk of resorting to conflict.¹²⁵ To illustrate this, in 2018, sports, religious and social groups were reported to be the ones most frequented by former fighters when trying to reintegrate society. Therefore, higher

¹²¹ Avis, *DDR Case Studies*, 10.

¹²² Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 10.

¹²³ Susan Brewer-Osorio, 'From Spoilers to Builders: Collective Reintegration, Leadership, and Peace in Colombia', *Conflict, Security & Development* 24, no. 2 (2024): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2024.2332184>.

¹²⁴ Sally Sharif, 'Can the Rebel Body Function without Its Visible Heads? The Role of Mid-Level Commanders in Peacebuilding', *International Peacekeeping* 29, no. 5 (2022): 721–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2022.2128337>.

¹²⁵ Oliver Kaplan and Enzo Nussio, 'Community Counts: The Social Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Colombia', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 2 (2018): 132, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215614506>.

community organisation participation was related to combatants being more socially active, whereas low levels of social participation within communities meant less opportunities for combatants to improve their social participation.¹²⁶ Thus, the Colombian case reveals that social participation can improve broader reintegration into civilian communities.

Today, despite beneficial for the socioeconomic and political reintegration, the community reincorporation of the FARC-EP still presents some challenges, namely due to the common resort to traditional DDR practices.¹²⁷ Notably, the stigmatisation of ex-combatants entails the double issue of community's fear of hosting ex-combatants and, simultaneously, ex-combatants' fear of having their identity as past violence perpetrators exposed.¹²⁸ This has led to mutual refrain from participating in the final phase of DDR programmes, even when coordinated by national actors.¹²⁹

DDR experiences in Colombia are still far from perfect. Overall, Colombian case reveals that ongoing conflicts require long-lasting solutions that can secure reintegration of ex-combatants within civilian communities. There is a vast range of research on Colombia's accountability and forgiveness mechanisms working towards reconciliation and, ultimately, the reintegration of former fighters. However, DDR's recent emphasis on human security, notably with the developments of third-generation approaches, is what differentiates this post-conflict perspective from others. Therefore, the next section presents the argument for DDR approaches with a human security lens as the most adequate to tackle social reinsertion of ex-combatants within their communities, and, consequently, their reintegration.

3.3. Human security in DDR practice

¹²⁶ Kaplan and Nussio, 'Community Counts', 140–46.

¹²⁷ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 13.

¹²⁸ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 3.

¹²⁹ Larissa Rhyn, 'Overcoming Stigma and Fostering Participation: Mechanisms for Community Reintegration in Colombia', *Conflict, Security & Development* 19, no. 2 (2019): 201–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2019.1586157>.

After analysing the recent developments and the general lessons provided by DDR experiences in various contexts, we must now turn to the human security lens that is prescribed by the UN third-generation DDR guidance and that ought to be applied by practitioners.

The concept of human security was first used by the UN in the 1994's UNDP Report on Human Development. The aim of the new concept was to re-centre the focus of security from states to human beings as the main recipients of security. Therefore, human security involves the seven dimensions of economic, food, health, community, environmental, personal and political security, whose joint goal is to guarantee the respect and protection of human dignity.¹³⁰

Although the concept of human security in DDR is acknowledged in the academic literature regarding second- and third-generation approaches to DDR, neither the IDDRS nor its 2014 Operational Guide make a single reference to this term. Once again, there is a clear separation between what scholars assume as a fact in DDR practice and what the UN guidance documents actually prescribe. In fact, Molloy argues that the overall concept of DDR went through a generational development due to the necessity of encapsulating the needs of human security in DDR.¹³¹ Likewise, Muggah and O'Donnell state that second-generation DDR evolved in parallel to the expansion of UN peace support operations and the respective peace and security agendas.¹³² In addition, Verkoren states that, as the standard mechanism to target security threats, original DDR aimed the promotion of state security, whereas the new generations require human security concerns in order to achieve a proper reintegration of ex-combatants.¹³³ Although rarely mentioned explicitly in UN guidance, human security has become a central organising principle of contemporary DDR practice.

In regard to DDR, the introduction of the human security concept in UN's peacebuilding goals prompted the departure from the logistical set of rules regarding the

¹³⁰ UNDP, *Human Development Report* (Oxford Univ. Pr, 1994), 22–25.

¹³¹ Molloy, 'DDR: A Shifting Paradigm', 5.

¹³² Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 3.

¹³³ Verkoren et al., 'From DDR to Security Promotion', 25–26.

collection of weapons and demobilisation of armed groups towards the incorporation of community-based approaches based on the social and economic reintegration of former fighters. In this sense, since the emergence of second-generation approaches, DDR has become more concerned with the larger peacebuilding aims of reduction of armed incidents overall, rather than simply with the collection of arms from former combatants.¹³⁴ Furthermore, DDR is primarily concerned with the stability of peace after war, and security is the means, by excellence, to support and achieve sustainable peace settlements.¹³⁵ Thus, in the broader scope of peacebuilding activities, DDR practice has only recently incorporated the concept of human security in its *modus operandi*. In previous DDR experiences, notably in first-generation approaches, programmes tended to emphasise the need for the state to retain the monopoly of violence, in detriment of more people-centred security concerns.¹³⁶ By focusing on more encompassing and integrated approaches, respectively, second and third-generation DDR programmes aim to provide civilians with more than just military security, so as to ensure that the reintegration of ex-combatants contributes to a lasting peace.

Ultimately, as third-generation DDR emphasises the concerns of practitioners regarding reintegration, it moves even further away from state-centred security approaches towards human security. In fact, as third-generation approaches are committed to achieve a sustainable peace, the security they aim to provide to societies must be all-encompassing, so that combatants can fully demobilise, disarm and reintegrate their communities by reconciling with civilians. In this sense, the integrated approach prescribed by the IDDRS, despite not mentioning the term “human security”, clearly envisions post-conflict settings in which both individuals and communities not only coexist peacefully, but are also free to exercise their rights without fear from security threats of any sort. In other words, people-centred DDR approaches are necessarily an answer to human security demands from war-torn societies.

¹³⁴ Molloy, ‘DDR: A Shifting Paradigm’, 7.

¹³⁵ Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs: An Assessment*, 21.

¹³⁶ Verkoren et al., ‘From DDR to Security Promotion’, 25.

4. Religious actors at the nexus of DDR and Human Security

The current status of DDR shows that third-generation approaches put human security at the core of UN peacebuilding efforts in the aftermath of conflict. Having reviewed previous policy and academic literature on DDR, I now turn to the place occupied by religion in post-conflict settings. Even though the phases of disarmament and demobilisation are grounded on more technical and logistical provisions to ex-combatants, it seems odd that the reintegration phase makes so little mention to religion, given that the latter often occupies an overarching role in the lives of individuals of conflicting societies. In the third chapter's case of Colombia, for instance, in which DDR lessons are abundant, the place that religion occupies in peacebuilding, notably through the Catholic Church, speaks to a distinct moral element that can be relevant to other reintegration contexts. Hence, the present chapter attempts to uncover the place that religion occupies in the larger efforts to sustain peace, as well as the role that DDR can attribute to religious actors so as to genuinely achieve human security.

4.1. Why religion matters

The present chapter is not so focused on dissecting the reasons why religion has been neglected in UN DDR policy, but rather on what this absence means for UN human security goals and why it should be reversed.

Notwithstanding, it is important to situate DDR's stance towards religion within the broader context of peacebuilding. As a matter of fact, the secularist paradigm, which dictates a clear separation between politics and religion, dominated 20th century's peacebuilding efforts. However, in the last decades, this paradigm has been questioned by peacebuilding and religious studies, for it has proven inadequate to address the realities of non-Western societies,¹³⁷ in which a clear separation between religion and politics is often inexistent. Thus, in many cases, the UN's traditional view of religion in a

¹³⁷ Gerard F. Powers, 'Religion and Peacebuilding', in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers, Studies in Strategic Peacebuilding (Oxford University Press, 2010), 319–22.

depoliticised and tribal manner does not correspond to the reality faced on the ground.¹³⁸ In addition, the effectiveness of UN peace operations today is entirely dependent on the tailoring of programmes to each context, which translates into a necessary interaction with the religious elements that can intervene, directly or indirectly, in the dynamics of peace and conflict.

As it was deeply embedded in UN's peacebuilding work, DDR naturally emerged and developed as an expression of its neo-liberal stance in regard to religion and its relation to power. In fact, until second-generation DDR, the state-centred security approaches that guided Western politics were mirrored by the drafting and implementation of DDR programmes.¹³⁹ Therefore, it is possible that the marginalisation of religion in UN DDR is a reflection of a secular paradigm which has proven to be inapt to the local demands of populations in post-war settings. Consequently, the spiritual and ritual components of conflict management are central to “de-Westernise” DDR frameworks.¹⁴⁰

4.1.1. Religion as an absentee in DDR policy

In regard to the *UN Guidance for Effective Mediation*, Posada-Téllez notes that religion holds a more meaningful position in the UN efforts on conflict mediation than the policy literature suggests.¹⁴¹ Thus, similar to what happens with UN policy documents on mediation, the *Operational Guide to the IDDRS* also makes very limited references to religion: in level 2, politically-sensitive DDR must include the religious groups associated with armed groups as targets of DDR, as assets during peace negotiations and as necessary to foster community receptivity of the programmes; in level 3, national ownership dictates that religious leaders and groups are to be included in stakeholder mapping, and integrated DDR should pay attention to the religious traditions in each setting; in level 4, non-

¹³⁸ Alejandro Posada-Téllez, ‘Making Peace with God: What Place for Religion in United Nations Mediation?’, *International Peacekeeping* 31, no. 4 (2024): 444, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2024.2337689>.

¹³⁹ Colletta and Muggah, ‘Context Matters’, 429.

¹⁴⁰ Lydie C. Belporo, ‘Flat-Pack Reintegration? National Ownership, Promises and Flaws in Cameroon’s Disarmament and Demobilization Program for Ex-Boko Haram Combatants’, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2025): 115, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.3939>.

¹⁴¹ Posada-Téllez, ‘Making Peace with God’, 457.

discrimination on the basis of religion is mentioned several times, while the public support of religious leaders is considered key in the areas of psychosocial care and UN policing; level 6 calls for religious diversity representation in SSR and urges practitioners to engage with religious leaders and communities when applying TJ mechanisms. These examples of mentions to religion in the IDDRS, nevertheless, are mainly related to procedural or loosely vague instructions. In other words, religious actors are often referred to in a sequence of enumeration of several actors, without meriting special attention.

Having said this, I argue that a religious-sensitive approach to DDR is imperative to ensure that programmes have local ownership and are suitable to the context in which they are implemented. Similarly, it is relevant noting that the IDDRS already constitute a notable institutional development in order to achieve both these goals in DDR practice. In fact, the latest web-version of the standards includes a whole level dedicated to the so-called “cross-cutting issues”, which looks at the interactions between DDR and the groups that are likely to suffer from additional discrimination during the process to re-establish peace. The IDDRS ground this contextualised approach on recommendations towards the inclusion of “target groups” in DDR design and implementation. Although constructive, this division of DDR beneficiaries between groups of people that can be found virtually in any DDR scenario - such as women, children, youth, and migrants - might be insufficient for a fully context-sensitive and locally-owned approach to DDR. In fact, there are certain types of communities that, depending on the context, might be difficult to taxonomise in the IDDRS. Therefore, I argue that the recommendations provided on the inclusion of these “target groups” should be complemented by guidance towards “target types of integration”. In effect, as DDR has developed towards becoming more inclusive and adaptive to each context, the IDDRS can instruct practitioners more firmly on how to engage with local actors associated with community and peacebuilding. Religious actors, accordingly, should be indicated in the standards as being particularly

apt to reintegrate ex-combatants through the religious communities they insert themselves in.¹⁴²

It is worth noting that, despite the relatively underdeveloped account that the IDDRS make of religious actors, the latter's intersection with the work of DDR practitioners has been acknowledged by several authors. To enumerate a set of cases, Nigeria's reintegration was shaped, on the one hand, by the feeling of communities' betrayal faced by frontline DDR implementers, who reported that populations were often compliant with rebels on the basis of religious affiliation;¹⁴³ On the other hand, the sense of hope and redemption revealed by ex-combatants, which was often grounded in religious beliefs, contributed to the post-traumatic growth of the receiving communities, as well as for an acceptance of the former warriors' genuine repentance.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, in Pakistan, the rehabilitation centres that combatants frequented before returning to society included "religious training", for the discussion and interpretation of religious texts was seen as integral for participants to transform their radicalised religious views. Even though the programme failed to involve the communities in the reintegration process, the religious education provided in the centres was praised by several of the rehabilitees, who embraced more moderate visions of religion.¹⁴⁵ Also in terms of reintegration, in spite of the participation of Colombian former fighters in social activities being overall quite low, "religious participation" fared much better than the other categories. Including participation in activities and in meetings of organisations, "religious participation" made up a greater proportion of community participation of individuals going through reintegration programmes.¹⁴⁶

Lastly, the application of DDR in Cameroon, which aimed to reintegrate former combatants of the Boko Haram terrorist group into civilian life, was based on an

¹⁴² This matter is further developed in section 4.3.

¹⁴³ Celestina Atom, 'Guardians of Peace, Victims of Betrayal: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Military Personnel Navigating Scepticism, Trust, and Hope in Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor', *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 44 (2025): 100.

¹⁴⁴ Atom, 'Guardians of Peace, Victims of Betrayal', 114.

¹⁴⁵ Ilam Khan, 'The Resurgence of Militant Groups in Pakistan's Borderlands: Analyzing Shortcomings in Rehabilitation and Reintegration Strategies', *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 38 (2024): 13.

¹⁴⁶ Saldner, 'Contextualising Reintegration', 468–69.

integrated assessment of the local practices and actors that helped transform DDR into a public policy instrument.¹⁴⁷ In order to address the specific demands of combatants who chose to dissociate, that is, who severed formal and psychological ties with the militant group,¹⁴⁸ the DDR programme was designed on the basis of ownership by local actors, practices and places. Based on Cameroon's strategies for combatants exiting terrorist groups, Belporo recognises that ownership of DDR should always include a mystical and spiritual component, as well as the input of religious authorities in regard to traditional practices of forgiveness and reconciliation.¹⁴⁹

To sum up, given that religion is often an integral aspect of the cultural, political and social life in most non-Western countries, I argue that it may be one of the key dimensions to which DDR practitioners should pay attention to. As local ownership and context-sensitive approaches dominate today's DDR policy, the interaction with religion on the ground is not only inevitable, but also desirable to act adequately in post-conflict scenarios.

4.2. Religious peacebuilding

In view of this, religious peacebuilding is a distinctive category of conflict transformation that includes “the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterised by an *ethos* of tolerance and nonviolence”.¹⁵⁰ In other words, religion can be used to promote peace once it is approached integrally within the social and political dynamics of the post-war period. Religion has also historically played a distinctive role in fostering nonviolent resistance by using religious-based norms to demand the end of social injustices and to morally

¹⁴⁷ Belporo, ‘Flat-Pack Reintegration?’, 2025, 108.

¹⁴⁸ Belporo, ‘Flat-Pack Reintegration?’, 2025, 112.

¹⁴⁹ Belporo, ‘Flat-Pack Reintegration?’, 2025, 114–15.

¹⁵⁰ David Little and Scott Coward Appleby, ‘A Moment of Opportunity? The Promise of Religious Peacebuilding in an Era of Religious and Ethnic Conflict’, in *Religion and Peacebuilding* (2004), 5, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/9780791485859>.

restrict physical conflict between humans.¹⁵¹ Thus, faith-based¹⁵² peacebuilding is responsible for the mobilisation of religious terminology and resources to oppose violence in the events of mediation between conflicting parties, promotion of interfaith dialogue, reconciliation and relationship-building in war-torn societies.¹⁵³

Religion can take many forms: it can be a dimension belonging to the social and cultural life of individuals, a philosophical category, a general practice of societies, and many others. As its definition remains highly contested in academia, this chapter is built on a notion that involves both the normative and moral orientation, as well as the concrete actions that purposefully mirror religious beliefs: the discussion hereafter takes on Lombardi and Wellman's definition of religion as "a socially enacted desire for the ultimate, embodied in practices that have ultimate significance, with the understanding that these practices include both rituals directed to gods or spirits and also obedience to moral laws with ultimate consequences".¹⁵⁴

Given that different authors subdivide the different aspects of religion in very different ways, the present work draws from Wilson's triple distinction between religious narratives, identities and actors. While, "narratives" are composed of a set of beliefs, language, imagery and rituals that characterise a religion, "identities" refer to minority and majority groups that self-identify with similar narratives and that are linked to the same actors.¹⁵⁵ Finally, the category "actors" includes "official religious institutions and representative organisations such as churches, temples, mosques; civil society

¹⁵¹ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 10.

¹⁵² It should be noted that this thesis is based on literature pieces that refer both to "religious" actors and to "faith-based" actors as having the same meaning. Although the synonymy between these two terms is not true for all religious studies' literature, this happens to be the case for the bibliography used here. Therefore, the present study uses the two terms interchangeably as having the same meaning.

¹⁵³ Powers, 'Religion and Peacebuilding', 323.

¹⁵⁴ Clark B. Lombardi and James K. Wellman, Jr., 'Introduction: Religion and Human Security: An Understudied Relationship', in *Religion and Human Security: A Global Perspective*, ed. Clark B. Lombardi and James K. Wellman, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 2012), 9.

¹⁵⁵ Erin K. Wilson, 'Relearning Religion: Connecting Theory with Practice', in *Religion and World Politics: Connecting Theory with Practice*, 1st edn, by Erin K. Wilson (Routledge, 2022), 26–30, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781003037057>.

organisations that identify as faith-based; and individuals and/or groups who hold official leadership positions within religious organisations or institutions”.¹⁵⁶

When it comes to religious narratives, there are virtues common to most religions and that can be used to promote peace. Forgiveness, kindness, charity, equality and tolerance, among others, lay the ground for religious norms and beliefs that can be used to uphold peace once they’re incorporated in political agendas with a peacemaking aim.¹⁵⁷ More than contributing to healing within post-conflict societies, these religious ideals of compassion and repentance can also promote inter-group identification, since they provide a common ground for empathy and equality among humans.¹⁵⁸ In South Africa, for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu combined Christian symbolism and values with *ubuntu*, an African traditional concept referring to the “organic wholeness of humanity”.¹⁵⁹ Thus, by taking local religious and social values to appeal to shared goals among communities, a religious leader produced a common meaning for tolerance and forgiveness within the South African society. This does not mean, as many fear, that religion should necessarily be aligned with specific political movements, but rather that, intentionally or not, religious narratives often have a political impact. Therefore, it results from the depoliticisation of religion that the work of national institutions contributing to the end of conflict cannot result in sustainable peace. Put simply, the success of past peacemaking experiences was severely constrained due to failures in recognising the way how religious elements interact political and socially with conflict dynamics.¹⁶⁰

In regard to religious identities, the role of religious communities is also central to maintain relative cohesion of beliefs and practices among people with the same faith. The institutionalisation of religious ideas and rituals can occur through regional or international bodies, partnerships between congregations, missionary and aid initiatives, as well as issue-specific involvement in matters of peace and justice. When the groups

¹⁵⁶ Wilson, ‘Relearning Religion’, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Judy Carter and Gordon S. Smith, ‘Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action’, in *Religion and Peacebuilding* (2004), 281.

¹⁵⁸ Lisa Cahill, ‘Goods For Whom? Defining Goods and Expanding Solidarity in Catholic Approaches to Violence’, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1997, 212.

¹⁵⁹ Cahill, ‘Goods for Whom?’, 210.

¹⁶⁰ Carter and Smith, ‘Religious Peacebuilding’, 280.

that emerge from these interactions reinforce practices of solidarity with and of mitigation of the suffering of war-torn populations, religious peacebuilding is more effective.¹⁶¹

The relation between religion and peace has been previously studied in literature on conflict resolution and peacemaking, and with particular emphasis on reconciliation. The concept of reconciliation in itself can be quite broad, for it is dependent on local expectations and practices. Yet, political reconciliation is built upon, on the one hand, the liberal concepts of human rights, democracy and rule of law and, on the other, on the values of mercy, apology and/ or forgiveness for wrongdoers, the latter being found in religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Likewise, in DDR, the reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, or between ex-combatants and the society at large, is highlighted by several studies as imperative to improve social relations and to heal from the past realities of conflict. A survey to individuals who have survived the conflicts in Colombia found that most of these people prioritise their personal well-being and the rebuilding of a shared future that is grounded on peaceful coexistence, in detriment of more idealistic visions of perfect social harmony.¹⁶²

In some religions, reconciliation can take the form of forgiveness, which operates so as to heal social relations and to move communities away from violent coexistence. Therefore, religious symbols can appeal to human sensibilities¹⁶³ more efficiently than other, rather technical, instruments of international peacebuilding. Furthermore, the relation between peace and reconciliation is often approached by TJ policy studies that wish to understand the mechanics of “everyday peacebuilding”, that is, the contribution of ordinary civilians to the end of armed conflicts and to the upholding of sustainable peace.¹⁶⁴ It follows from this that religion occupies an overarching place in individual lives,¹⁶⁵ and so ignoring its role in peacebuilding can result in contextually inaccurate responses to the end of conflict.

¹⁶¹ Powers, ‘Religion and Peacebuilding’, 330.

¹⁶² Rettberg and Ugarriza, ‘Reconciliation’, 531–33.

¹⁶³ Cahill, ‘Goods for Whom?’, 206–7.

¹⁶⁴ Rettberg and Ugarriza, ‘Reconciliation’, 518.

¹⁶⁵ Little and Appleby, ‘A Moment of Opportunity?’, 1–2.

Finally, the lack of local ownership, besides spoiling DDR outcomes, is also problematic in peacebuilding. In particular, the aftermath of conflict usually requires dialogue on past human rights abuses and on the societal transformation required for their fulfilment in a peaceful future. Although these human rights debates and measures can take place at different levels, local ownership is usually less permeable to the structural problems of mistrust and detachment from traditional practices that typically affect interventions at the national and international levels, respectively.¹⁶⁶ Thus, attributing local relevance to human right-based peacebuilding can include traditional practices such as community exhumations, reburials or other memorialisation customs that can be led and incentivised by faith-based elements.

4.2.1. Religious actors' contribution to peace

Even though religious narratives, identities and actors all contribute to peacebuilding, the abundance of studies on the place occupied by religious actors in sustaining peace merits a more careful analysis on their role. Even though religious communities and individuals have proved to be comparatively less effective in peacebuilding when compared to official religious establishments,¹⁶⁷ the full scope of this piece builds on the contribution of all religious actors to peacebuilding. Regardless, every so often one needs to keep in mind their interaction with identities and narratives, since religious actors' work cannot be disconnected to these realms.

To bring up religious actors as peacebuilders can be seen an undesirable choice, for conflict often brings to light the direct correlation between religious beliefs and ideological fanaticism. Opposing this argument, however, Faith-based Institutions (FBIs) have also proved to be effective in preventing and countering violent extremism by using religion as a moral and normative force for peaceful narratives. In reality, religious institutions can identify early signs of ideological polarisation and they can clarify moral

¹⁶⁶ Naomi Roht-Arriaza, 'Human Rights and Strategic Peacebuilding: The Roles of Local, National, and International Actors', in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers, Studies in Strategic Peacebuilding (Oxford University Press, 2010), 232–39.

¹⁶⁷ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 12.

ambiguities that are usually exploited by extremist leaders to galvanise people to violence. Furthermore, they can help the state drafting community-based approaches grounded on deradicalising perspectives and on respect for human rights and pluralism.¹⁶⁸

Sometimes, religious bodies can also operate differently from other civil society organisations, because a lot of believers resort to them on the basis of their institutional authority to regulate religious practices and doctrines. Although this is not always the case, there are plenty of religious institutions that have this institutional power in their specific contexts, namely “church dioceses and synods, Islamic councils and mosque networks, Buddhist monastic associations, Hindu temple boards, and faith-based schools or universities”.¹⁶⁹ In other cases, religious bodies are also able to have a political impact without compromising their own independence, that is, they can influence conflict dynamics and public policy in peacetime without engaging in peacebuilding activities that can be considered as too politically aligned.¹⁷⁰ In addition, in the aftermath of conflict, FBIs exercise similar services to the ones of secular NGOs, from providing access to food, water, education, refugee and health services, infrastructure, among others. Yet, while many NGOs concentrate their efforts in the provision of one or two of these services, FBIs are keener to provide a larger number of these services simultaneously.¹⁷¹ Indeed, FBIs are more focused on helping people in need as a way to practice their faith, so they tend to have a more comprehensive or holistic vision of a population’s demands.

Furthermore, there are several characteristics that place religious leaders in a particularly good position to incentivise peace. Firstly, they are capable of reaching to people within and across communities. Secondly, their moral authority makes them respectable figures in the community, frequently with a higher degree of legitimacy than other stakeholders. Thirdly, they have a greater ability to mobilise resources and

¹⁶⁸ Khusnul Fathon Effendy et al., *Countering Religious Radicalism: A Systematic Review Of Faith-Based Institutional Strategies And Challenges*, no. 45 (2025): 84–88.

¹⁶⁹ Effendy et al., *Countering Religious Radicalism*, 69.

¹⁷⁰ Powers, ‘Religion and Peacebuilding’, 324.

¹⁷¹ Christine Schliesser et al., ‘Orientation: What Do They Have That Others Don’t?’, in *On the Significance of Religion in Conflict and Conflict Resolution* (2020), 83.

people.¹⁷² Moreover, where the state apparatus fails to address the most basic needs of populations, religious bodies can often be last remaining of trust and credibility among civilians, who legitimate these actors as long-term players who are embedded in the lived realities of conflict.¹⁷³

As relationship-building within and across different communities is central to sustainable peace, the public outreach of religious actors is essential for the development of inter-personal identities linked to social change. In addition, the authority of these actors as credible spiritual leaders fosters trust and populations' perception that the services they provide are impartial and solely aim to respond to people's needs.¹⁷⁴ As for their networking capabilities, religious actors not only have connections to international institutions who can back their efforts on the ground, but they also have privileged access to field-based communities who are more likely to volunteer to work. This also means that FBIs can have access to larger sums of funding to be directed towards aid and social support of populations.¹⁷⁵

With these characteristics, religious actors are recognised to act in the distinct areas of conflict management, conflict resolution and structural reform of war-torn societies. In order to prevent conflicts and enforce peace, religious actors can act both as a physical and moral presence to disincentivise violence, as well as constant interpreters of shifts in community identity regarding possible inter-personal divisions. Moreover, they can educate believers on healing and on other mechanisms of conflict transformation, sensitising the population for non-discriminatory and tolerant practices.¹⁷⁶ In war settings, religious leaders and FBIs usually share the same pain and suffer from the same violence as their communities, so they are perceived to be deeply rooted in the lived realities of conflict.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, they can contribute to peacemaking by promoting a long-term vision for a shared peace that is drawn upon the discursive and cultural practices of

¹⁷² Posada-Téllez, 'Making Peace with God', 452.

¹⁷³ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 3.

¹⁷⁴ Schliesser et al., 'Orientation: What Do They Have That Others Don't?', 80–81.

¹⁷⁵ Schliesser et al., 'Orientation: What Do They Have That Others Don't?', 81–83.

¹⁷⁶ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 6–10.

¹⁷⁷ Powers, 'Religion and Peacebuilding', 331.

communities and that derives from past experiences of suffering.¹⁷⁸ These actors take the rituals, beliefs and the normative concepts embedded in the lives of the populations they wish to support and they bring more holistic perspectives to life after war and offer mechanisms to deal with trauma, to give meaning to everyday life and to transform painful memories into reconciliation realities.¹⁷⁹ From this valorisation of a community's memory of war, it also follows that religious actors are more prone to build post-conflict institutions taking into account the root causes of conflict and fostering not only religious, but also civic and political leadership to uphold peace.¹⁸⁰

Notwithstanding the positive influence that religious actors can exercise on peacebuilding, the UN position towards their input remains ambiguous. When interacting with the UN, religious actors' inputs have been often regarded as useful in mediation and other peacemaking activities, even so that UN mediators are encouraged to promote societal change in areas such as sexual and gender-based violence through the voice and public outreach of religious leaders.¹⁸¹ However, even when the qualities of these leaders are recognised, their interaction with UN mediators tends to occur in an *ad hoc* way, that is, there is little mention of how the religious narratives and identities intersect with UN's mediation goals. This situation finds parallels in academic literature on conflict resolution, in which the benefits brought by religious actors are gradually recognised, but often with little understanding on the substance of these contributions.¹⁸² Moreover, there is no clear guidance provided for local religious leaders on the strategies they should develop and on the roles they should embody in order to adapt to the contextual realities they face. It results from this that, frequently, local conflict resolution mechanisms are overshadowed by UN principles, and local religious principles and practices end up being overlooked.¹⁸³ Furthermore, religious actors are often missing from other roles within UN

¹⁷⁸ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 11–12.

¹⁷⁹ Schliesser et al., 'Orientation: What Do They Have That Others Don't?', 84–88.

¹⁸⁰ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 13–15.

¹⁸¹ Posada-Téllez, 'Making Peace with God', 452.

¹⁸² Schliesser et al., 'Orientation: What Do They Have That Others Don't?', 79.

¹⁸³ Posada-Téllez, 'Making Peace with God', 460–62.

operations, such as peacekeeping and holding negotiations between warring parties, sometimes at the cost of integrated peace processes.¹⁸⁴

4.2.2. Religion and the concept of Human Security

As it was addressed in chapter III, current DDR is concerned with achieving a sustainable peace with resort to a human security lens. It is thus important to understand the interplay between human security discourses and religiously motivated action.

Some authors have gone as far as advocating that modern approaches to security derive from the religious command of equal respect for all humans, an idea that is present, for example, in the Judeo-Christian and in the Islamic traditions.¹⁸⁵ Even though they might not resort to the specific term of human security, it is a fact that this concept is used by religious actors whenever they advocate the restraining of unlimited power and the application of justice, peace and wealth distribution for all peoples. In practice, religion has paid special attention to the realities of discrimination and inequality, which also consist of two major threats for human security.¹⁸⁶ As an example, Khosravi analyses the roots for human security in Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam, and concludes that the believers of these faiths are under the obligation to refrain from doing harm to others. Employing different terminologies, the religious texts make reference to human security as one of the essential factors of liberation from agony, protection from threats to human dignity and, ultimately, preservation of the human society. Therefore, the author infers that not only these religions use human security as the basis for humanity's welfare, but also that having faith in God entails the respect for all the seven dimensions of human security.¹⁸⁷

Besides involving dimensions of physical security and of protection from human rights violations, the concept of human security requires that individuals feel that they are

¹⁸⁴ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 9.

¹⁸⁵ Giorgio Shani, 'Religion as Security: An Introduction', *Critical Studies on Security* 4, no. 3 (2016): 309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2016.1221194>.

¹⁸⁶ Malektaj Khosravi, 'The Importance of Human Security from the Perspective of Three Great Divine Religions: Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam', *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 12, no. 1 (2021): 69–70, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v12i01/65-78>.

¹⁸⁷ Khosravi, 'The Importance of Human Security from the Perspective of Three Great Divine Religions', 76.

free and that they can lead their lives with sufficient autonomy. Thus, by resorting to faith-based narratives shared by members of a community, local religious leaders are working directly in the realms of mental and emotional assistance, thus reinforcing the personal sense of freedom of individuals and shaping human security to the cultural aspects of the population they are collaborating with.¹⁸⁸

Accordingly, human security requires the freedom from hatred and fear that frequently characterise post-conflict societies. Therefore, religious peacebuilders can only advocate for pacific social change once they are able to create a social and religious capital powerful enough to counter pleas for vengeance and, at times, religious extremism. To put it differently, religious actors can make a case for attitudes of forgiveness and tolerance towards perpetrators with the moral authority of religious values on the background.¹⁸⁹ From the standpoint of a person who endured great suffering, to forgive violence perpetrators would be perhaps unthinkable without a reconciliatory approach embedded in religious principles. Even though the engagement with religious ideals does not translate into perfect social harmony and communities' disposition to absolute forbearance, it can definitely benefit individual well-being, reconciliation and, ultimately, prompt personal and community security.

It is hard to define what religiously motivated action means in every context, and the same issue arises when it comes to its translation into the practice of human security. Based on the embeddedness of religious actors in the dynamics of peace, though, it is clear that the religious setting in which these faith-based actors support communities can be used to improve human security. As Lombardi and Wellman state, religion usually affects human security in a determined context to the extent that religious practitioners influence human security in that same context.¹⁹⁰

The social stability that is aimed by religious actors' nonviolent endeavours after wars entails the necessary pre-conditions that sustain human security. Nevertheless, third-

¹⁸⁸ Lombardi and Wellman, Jr., 'Introduction: Religion and Human Security: An Understudied Relationship', 8–9.

¹⁸⁹ Little and Appleby, 'A Moment of Opportunity?', 5.

¹⁹⁰ Lombardi and Wellman, Jr., 'Introduction: Religion and Human Security: An Understudied Relationship', 10.

generation DDR is yet to acknowledge possible links between UN staff cooperation with religious actors in the field and positive DDR outcomes. The lessons about community approaches in DDR regularly refer to religious leaders as one type of community authorities, but there is a consistent lack of studies concerning religious leaders' actions in DDR *per se*. Even in widely debated DDR cases, such as the Colombian one, the contribution given by religious actors in the social reintegration of ex-combatants is only one factor in a listing that connects reintegration with a myriad of community actors. In other words, there is a consistent lack of studies that dedicate their attention specifically to religious actors acting towards DDR. Nevertheless, the way religion intersects with human security clears the way for deeper interaction between the former with DDR processes. As it will be further discussed, the inclusion of a module dedicated to “target types of integration”, namely “religious-based reintegration”, is in line with one of the most recent goals of DDR and of UN peacebuilding: to achieve human security.

4.3. Acknowledging the potential of religious actors in DDR

After breaking down the correlation between religious peacebuilders and human security, it becomes imperative to reflect on how can religious actors use their skills to improve DDR efficiency. Once the assets of religious-based action have been acknowledged in peacebuilding studies, there is a case to be made for the inclusion of religion in DDR policy. I argue that, so as to look at war-torn societies through a human security lens, UN DDR operations need to encapsulate religious sensitivity, that is, they need to assure that UN staff takes into account the local religious actors, identities and narratives that might shape societal beliefs and the day-to-day lives of community members. To this end, I suggest that religious actors' own characteristics and functions, which have been absent from DDR policy, should be put at use during the reintegration of ex-combatants in post-conflict societies. Besides requiring locally-owned and context-specific measures, former fighter reintegration involves psychosocial, economic and moral support, which are types of assistance that can be provided by FBIs on the ground. In the eyes of their local communities, religious bodies often hold the legitimacy necessary to provide these services already. However, to be perceived as equally

legitimate by international peacebuilding organisms, FBIs often voluntarily undergo training, such as humanitarian skills' instruction, so as to be included in wider peacebuilding projects.¹⁹¹

The reintegration of ex-combatants concerns the reinsertion of people who were previously involved, at the very least, in human rights violations. Therefore, the interventions of religious actors in relation to ex-combatants' reintegration have some similarities to the ones made with inmates. In fact, several rehabilitative interventions have previously employed religious and spiritual counsellors in order to provide psychosocial support and mentorship to juvenile prisoners who violated human rights in the past.¹⁹² By emphasising the inmate's potential for positive actions in the communities, counsellors' efforts were found led to better integration results. In addition, a study on Pakistani jails noted that the attitudes of prisoners towards programmes of interpretation of Islamic sacred texts were usually positive, with reports revealing moral, physical and psychological well-being being upgraded by religious interventions.¹⁹³ Similarly, Christian ministries aimed at supporting the exit from gangs in Central America have successfully resorted to discourses of individual transformation, emotional rituals and social networks outside of gangs to support reintegration processes.¹⁹⁴ Although a deeper engagement with the extensive scholarship on ex-offender reintegration falls outside the scope of this piece, it is still worth pointing out that the literature has more readily acknowledged the role of religious actors in this context than in the reintegration of former combatants.

Religious actors should be particularly involved in the social dimension of reintegrating ex-combatants, since the traumatic experiences and the limited connections that former fighters hold in peaceful times create challenges that are predominantly

¹⁹¹ Emma Tomalin and Olivia Wilkinson, 'NGO-Isation, Local Faith Actors and "Legitimate" Humanitarian Action in South Sudan', *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2023): 46–48, <https://doi.org/10.7227/JHA.109>.

¹⁹² Eelco Kessels et al., *Implementing Evidence-Based Rehabilitative Interventions*, Report (Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2017), 24–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20261.8>.

¹⁹³ Rais Gul and Amir Zada Asad, 'Role of Religious Interventions in the Reintegration of Prisoners (A Case Study of Selected Jails of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa/KP, Pakistan)', *Al-Idah* 36, no. 2 (2019): 38.

¹⁹⁴ Robert Brenneman, 'Wrestling the Devil: Conversion and Exit from Central American Gangs', *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. S (2014): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2014.0062>.

present when these individuals try to reinsert in the respective receiving communities.¹⁹⁵ Hence, religion may be used to tackle a double-sword issue: ex-combatants feeling stigmatised by host communities and host communities fearing and distrusting ex-combatants.

It is worth reaffirming that local actors' interests and agency shape DDR outcomes, particularly through their role in the reintegration phase.¹⁹⁶ The scope and planning of the DDR process itself is continuously negotiated on the ground, involving local stakeholders and mirroring specific contextual aspects of the conflict.¹⁹⁷ Additionally, the tasks of determining and prioritising certain security needs, as well as of drafting and introducing responses to those demands, are usually placed on the hands of communities.¹⁹⁸ The communal aspect of human security, thus, relies both on the support given by local actors to ex-combatants and on societal acceptance of reintegrating former perpetrators of violence.¹⁹⁹ Through their activities of worship, education and charity, as well as their narratives of compassion, empathy and solidarity, FBIs have the potential to respond to the human suffering, present in DDR, in a locally-based and reconciliatory manner. In addition, as DDR tends to overshadow local spiritual approaches to peace, the symbolic and material capital brought by religious institutions is key to ensure local ownership of the programmes.²⁰⁰ Moreover, these institutions are notably apt to negotiate religious, political and social pressures, so they can be active agents of social cohesion through the advocacy of universal values of humankind in the form of spiritual values.²⁰¹

By recognising the ubiquitous presence of religious beliefs and practices in many societies, DDR could request religious actors' advice on how to better provide human security to communities. Religious leaders can cooperate with secular institutions and

¹⁹⁵ Kaplan and Nussio, 'Community Counts', 134.

¹⁹⁶ Munive and Jakobsen, 'Revisiting DDR in Liberia', 364.

¹⁹⁷ Muggah and O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', 6.

¹⁹⁸ Verkoren et al., 'From DDR to Security Promotion', 4.

¹⁹⁹ Saldner, 'Contextualising Reintegration', 458.

²⁰⁰ Lydie C. Belporo, 'Flat-Pack Reintegration? National Ownership, Promises and Flaws in Cameroon's Disarmament and Demobilization Program for Ex-Boko Haram Combatants', *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 14, no. 2 (2025): 114, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.3939>.

²⁰¹ Effendy et al., *Countering Religious Radicalism*, 83; 88.

other political leaders to promote a common vision for human security, one that is based on happiness and well-being.²⁰² Therefore, FBIs can serve as mediators between the groups of believers and DDR practitioners.

When it comes to DDR and religion, Rhyn makes quite an interesting suggestion in regard to the latter's inclusion in the last phase of the process. The author states that the social reintegration of ex-combatants ought to be done on the basis of interest rather than geographic communities. In other words, communities that share a common interest or passion are more apt to engage in reintegration projects than communities without shared values and goals.²⁰³ Religious identities, ergo, can approach reintegration on the basis of their common vision of faith, which can shape more consistent and robust programmes.

Based on information currently available to the public, the UN does not have a singular document encapsulating best practices for religious-sensitive approaches in DDR. The IDDRS must, then, be further developed in this matter to ensure that the opportunities of working with religious actors are enjoyed to the full extent. It follows from this that a module on “religious-based reintegration” should be included in the standards as a type of reintegration of ex-combatants in the religious communities that they wish to belong to. Contrary to what happens with the vulnerable groups mentioned in the IDDRS, religious communities are often quite difficult to delimitate in post-conflict scenarios. Therefore, practitioners should be prepared to get local advice from religious actors on how to best reintegrate former fighters in their faith communities. If this attitude is adopted, in a setting where religion plays a relevant role in community bonding, practitioners who follow the IDDRS's guidance will simultaneously pay attention to the religious narratives that ex-combatants self-identify with and to the communities that can provide them with faith-based support during reintegration. For example, in Nepal, the local Hindu gender norms have dictated that women who return home from war suffer disproportionately from domestic violence, public shaming, pressure to change their

²⁰² Khosravi, ‘The Importance of Human Security from the Perspective of Three Great Divine Religions’, 66.

²⁰³ Rhyn, ‘Overcoming Stigma and Fostering Participation’, 200.

appearance, among others.²⁰⁴ In this case, a Hindu female ex-combatant should be recognised by DDR practitioners as being especially vulnerable to gender-based discrimination and as having that discrimination embedded in the dynamics of the religious community she wishes or is likely to reintegrate. Therefore, DDR should target the ex-combatant both for being a female and for needing religiously-informed approaches to support a meaningful reintegration within that community.

It is clear that the approach to DDR is as important for successful outcomes as the design of the programme itself²⁰⁵ and religious-sensitive approaches can often provide context-specific solutions to reintegration challenges. Yet, as soon as they were implemented, past DDR programmes have discontinued local religious initiatives, such as awareness-raising for reconciliation or public forgiveness ceremonies, a decision that has severely undermined ownership of DDR processes.²⁰⁶ In addition, on the part of communities, there are often divisions along ethnic, religious, political and other socio-cultural lines that can obstruct the reintegration of ex-combatants.²⁰⁷ Consequently, community-formed identities have been found to play a bigger role in reintegration efforts than necessarily individual ones.²⁰⁸ This reality justifies the building of new networks of reintegration as an alternative to war-based ones. Religious actors, which frequently communicate within and across social groups, are in a particularly powerful position to sustain these new networks of reintegration support.

Due to its power and to its financial resources, the UN has the capacity of engaging and creating networks between stakeholders in post-conflict settings, including religious actors.²⁰⁹ Therefore, the inclusion of these individuals as an asset in UN DDR is essential to sustain peace in the aftermath of war. This thesis suggests, then, that the interplay between religious actors and DDR efforts should start with the proper training of UN workers to engage permanently with local FBIs and to reflect on the possibilities for

²⁰⁴ Luna K C, 'Do Local Norms Affect Women Ex-Combatants Reintegration in the Postwar Era?', *Global Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksaf015>.

²⁰⁵ Ball, 'Mapping Issues', 7.

²⁰⁶ Belporo, 'Flat-Pack Reintegration?', 2025, 115.

²⁰⁷ Özerdem, 'A Re-Conceptualisation of Ex-Combatant Reintegration', 62.

²⁰⁸ Munive and Stepputat, 'Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs', 7.

²⁰⁹ Posada-Téllez, 'Making Peace with God', 455.

harmonisation between each DDR programme's goals and the human security aims of religious actors.

Revisiting the observation about the IDDRS status in section 4.1., I argue that providing DDR practitioners with guidance towards “religious-based reintegration” might increase context-sensitivity. DDR generations have evolved much due to practitioners' inferences about the challenges to each approach on the ground. Thus, the IDDRS, more than providing prescriptive guidance to practitioners, also provide the tools through which DDR workers can understand what circumstances are posing obstacles to the implementation of DDR programmes. Therefore, by orienting DDR staff to take into account local dynamics of religion, for instance, it might be easier to understand how FBIs can promote human security and be effective DDR partners.

To conclude, DDR is shaped by the contexts in which it is implemented and it operates as an inherently political enterprise.²¹⁰ Thus, as a contextual aspect in many DDR settings, religion can shape the outcomes and applicability of DDR. In many cases, religious leaders in local communities and institutions can be fundamental elements of cooperation in the reintegration of ex-combatants, thus reducing possible security threats (or the perception of threats) to communities and to individuals who gave up fighting. Hence, the lack of religious-informed guidance within DDR policy contrasts with the positive impact that religious peacebuilding has had in the work towards human security in different contexts. Ultimately, human security involves relevant dimensions, such as community and personal security, which require interaction with the local actors that operate in each context. Hence, as religion occupies a ubiquitous role in the lives of many people, leaving it aside in DDR planning and implementation is a political decision that can hinder a context-sensitive implementation of the programmes.

²¹⁰ Torjesen, ‘New Avenues for Research’, 414.

5. Case study: South Sudan

The choice of South Sudan as a relevant DDR case study is, first and foremost, based on the fact that it combines both international and local efforts to ensure DDR coordination.²¹¹ Secondly, South Sudan is a great example of a highly volatile and fragile peace settlement, where DDR solutions cannot be found in a straightforward manner, that is, they require context-based and integrated approaches so as to ensure that the minimum human security conditions are met. Thirdly, religious actors have been historically part of local peacebuilding in South Sudan, and so their relation to DDR programmes is worth analysing. Lastly, the South Sudanese DDR process has become central to human security in South Sudan, at least, since 2011, and yet most DDR activities on the field remain at a very early stage.²¹² Notwithstanding, the South Sudan DDR Commission, the main national organism leading the programme's implementation, continues to advance the conditions for DDR on the ground, even with South Sudan at the brink of civil war again.²¹³

As part of Sudan until 2011, the birth of the South Sudanese DDR process is mostly linked to the DDR that took place after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Sudanese territory. Therefore, institutional DDR efforts in South Sudan started to be implemented even prior to its recognition as an independent state, that is, between 2005 and 2011. Since the beginning of the peace process, DDR was viewed by scholars and policy-makers as critical to ensure sustainable peace in South Sudan.²¹⁴ Nevertheless, the establishment of the United Nations mission in South Sudan in 2011 included a mandate to support a renovated DDR process in the newly independent country. However, the DDR efforts not only faced many challenges, but they were also severely hindered

²¹¹ Guy Lamb and Theo Stainer, 'The Conundrum of DDR Coordination: The Case of South Sudan', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 7, no. 1 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.628>.

²¹² Jaïr Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, SIPRI Research Policy Paper (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2023), 15, <https://www.sipri.org>.

²¹³ For example, Radio Tamajuz, 'DDR Commission Secures Release of 49 Children from Armed Groups', News, *Radio Tamajuz*, 2 July 2026, <https://www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/ddr-commission-secures-release-of-49-children-from-armed-groups>.

²¹⁴ William Deng Deng, 'Linking DDR, Security Sector Development and Transitional Justice in Southern Sudan', in *Post-War Security Transitions*, by Véronique Dudouet and Hans J. Giessmann (2012), 194.

and even interrupted by the return of conflict to South Sudan. Despite a foreseeable possibility of DDR to be stopped if South Sudan re-enters a full-scale civil war again, it is still worth looking at the lessons of past programmes in the country and understanding to what extent DDR has failed to guarantee human security. Hence, I argue that South Sudan's prospects for DDR should also develop locally-based solutions for reintegration, and that there is a possible place to be occupied by religious actors in this process.

5.1. History of conflict and DDR efforts in South Sudan

As South Sudan only became independent in 2011, the first DDR programmes taking place in its territory were actually part of peace agreements between warring factions in Sudan. As a result of Sudan's independence in 1956, rebel movements from Southern Sudan were quickly mobilised to resist what they perceived as the Khartoum-based marginalisation of the South, which led to a civil war. This exclusion of the southern population from policy and decision-making was notably visible in the attempts of the central government to promote Islam in the whole territory of Sudan.²¹⁵

Despite lacking specific DDR provisions, the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement of 1972 already predicted the need to demobilise and reintegrate combatants from the first Sudanese civil war (1955-1972). By that time, Southern Sudanese combatants were addressed separately in the Agreement,²¹⁶ for Southern Sudan had gained a statute of regional autonomy within Sudan.²¹⁷ However, lack of political will to sustain peace is pointed out one of the main drivers for the remobilisation of former combatants that led to the second civil war in Sudan (1983-2005).²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Christopher Tounsel, 'Christianity in (South) Sudan: Historical Backgrounds, Contemporary Contestations, and Future Directions', *Religion Compass* 17, nos 5–6 (2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12460>.

²¹⁶ Saeed, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Initiatives in Sudan*, 14–15.

²¹⁷ Tounsel, 'Christianity in (South) Sudan'.

²¹⁸ Luka Biong Deng Kuol, 'South Sudan: The Perils of Security Governance and the Treacherous Path to Democratic Transition', *International Relations and Diplomacy* 13, no. 2 (2025): 59, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2134/2025.02.002>.

5.1.1. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement

The brutal 22-year long conflict that erupted in South Sudan in 1983 was arguably the most significant demonstration of rupture between the Sudanese central government and the southern populations, who felt marginalised by Khartoum and whose struggles were embodied by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and its leader, John Garang.²¹⁹ Subsequently, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the SPLA gave new momentum to DDR programming by prescribing the creation of both temporary and permanent DDR institutions to achieve, respectively, social stabilisation in the short-run and human security in the long-term. The most relevant institution created was the national DDR Commission, composed by SPLM and SAF representatives and detaining the final responsibility for DDR decision-making, although backed by international institutions.²²⁰ To that end, the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) was established, with a specific mandate to support the implementation of the CPA and to help both the Governments of Sudan and Southern Sudan in the drafting and execution of the DDR programme. With UNDP taking the lead on the support to the reintegration of ex-combatants, UNMIS' work was coordinated with the South Sudan DDR Commission (SSDDRC), the regional political body created for the implementation of DDR.²²¹

The biggest challenges to CPA's DDR prescription were the delays in implementation and the inexistence of consensus between stakeholders on how to implement DDR. Moreover, the CPA allowed the security sector in the South to be managed, almost in its entirety, by the SPLM. This led to the militarisation of the security governance,²²² that is, to the reliance of the Southern Sudanese institutions on traditional concepts of security and on traditional DDR approaches,²²³ rather than on the broader concept of human security in which peace should be grounded.

²¹⁹ Tounsel, 'Christianity in (South) Sudan', 2.

²²⁰ Jairo Munive, 'Context Matters: The Conventional DDR Template Is Challenged in South Sudan', *International Peacekeeping* 20, no. 5 (2013): 592, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2013.853962>.

²²¹ Saeed, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Initiatives in Sudan*, 15–18.

²²² Luka Biong Deng Kuol, 'South Sudan', 60.

²²³ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 10.

Although the CPA created a distinctive momentum for the DDR process in Sudan, the effectiveness of programme's introduction in the South was also much hindered by the situation of insecurity in the whole country. In fact, as the CPA was perceived by some militias, and notably the SPLA, as more of a ceasefire than a peace settlement, the progress of DDR was very slow. In Southern Sudan, disarmament only started in 2009, which reveals the poor impact that DDR actually had on the post-conflict situation in Sudan.²²⁴

5.1.2. South Sudan since 2011

Besides ending the war between north and south, the CPA paved the way for a referendum in the Southern region, which culminated in a massive support of the South Sudanese towards independence from Sudan.²²⁵ As secession was formalised in 2011, UNMIS ceased its activities, including the DDR-related ones, giving way to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). As a peacekeeping mission, UNMISS had to work mainly in a context where SPLM's dominance was clear in South Sudan. In fact, after winning the 2010 elections, the SPLM consolidated its power by becoming a political party and assuring the predominance of SPLA combatants in the political and security institutions in the newly created state in 2011.²²⁶

Despite the CPA and the 2011 independence operating as key elements of peacebuilding, mistrust and political tensions between two men paved the way for a civil war erupted in South Sudan, which lasted from 2013 until 2018. To this day, South Sudan's political violence can be mostly associated to the power struggle between President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar, the leaders of the two SPLM factions, the SPLM in-Government (SPLM-IG) and in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), respectively.²²⁷ Besides contributing to the militarisation of the security governance in

²²⁴ Munive, 'Context Matters', 585.

²²⁵ John Everett-Heath, 'South Sudan', in *The Concise Dictionary of World Place-Names*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199580897.001.0001/acref-9780199580897-e-9382>.

²²⁶ Munive, 'Context Matters', 591.

²²⁷ Center for Preventive Action, 'Instability in South Sudan', Council on Foreign Relations, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan#SouthSudansCivilWar20132018-0>.

South Sudan, the SPLA's management of the security sector paved the way for the preponderance of the two major ethnic groups, the Dinka and the Nuer, which already dominated SPLA's ranks since the second Sudanese civil war.²²⁸ Moreover, Kiir's forces have been largely associated with the Dinka, the same connection existing between Machar's forces and the Nuer.

In addition, militias loosely aligned with the two men continue to be relevant armed groups in South Sudan. Notably, the White Army is a Nuer-dominated group that tends to side with Machar's forces, while the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) have become the official military force of South Sudan, answering directly to Kiir's political leadership. Thus, the civil war that began in 2013 was a result of the collective mobilisation of armed soldiers and militias, who defected to either side according to ethnic affiliation to the Dinka and the Nuer.²²⁹ Hostilities between these two communities have, since then, characterised the ongoing violence in South Sudan, with civilians being targeted on the basis of ethnicity. The level of displacements and deaths until 2018 was massive and ethnic divisions were accentuated between combatants and civilian communities.²³⁰

To put an end to the civil war started in 2013, the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed between the Government of South Sudan, led by President Kiir, and by the SPLM/A-IO, led by Machar. The R-ARCSS reinstated the urgency of continuation of the DDR process and there was international recognition that further engagement of donors with South Sudanese DDR was necessary to ensure peace in the country.²³¹ Although the agreement intended to inaugurate a renewed post-conflict South Sudan, the peace process has been hindered by several episodes of inter-communal violence, a fragile economic situation, climate shocks and disease outbreaks. There is an ongoing humanitarian crisis, and South Sudanese still lack access to the most basic services and are exposed to violence outbreaks

²²⁸ Luka Biong Deng Kuol, 'South Sudan', 60.

²²⁹ Center for Preventive Action, 'Instability in South Sudan'.

²³⁰ Tounsel, 'Christianity in (South) Sudan', 2.

²³¹ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 2.

almost on a daily basis.²³² Nevertheless, regional institutions, such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, remain on the field to support the implementation of the R-ARCSS provisions.²³³

5.1.2.1. Recent developments

Overall, since independence, South Sudan has been marked by intra and inter-community violence, political disputes and outbreaks of civil war.²³⁴ The renewed hostilities between government and opposition forces since 2025 has aggravated the prospects for the DDR process. After an offensive launched by the White Army to take up government-controlled territory, and subsequently to the Vice-President Machar's house arrest, violence erupted once again between the national armed forces and the SPLM/A-IO. Since then, South Sudan is experiencing an amalgam of crises that leads to a great deficit in human security, namely the spread of sexual violence, killings, restrictions on the access to humanitarian aid, poverty, shortages of food and clean water, among others.²³⁵ Moreover, with South Sudan on the brink of civil war again, UNMISS has found imperative to renew its mandate until 2027.²³⁶

Given the uncertain status of the peace setting envisioned for South Sudan in the R-ARCSS of 2018, it remains quite relevant to analyse past mistakes and possible solutions for the ongoing resort to hostilities in the country. As DDR aims to achieve human security and, ultimately, contribute to long-lasting peace, it is relevant to understand what the remobilisation of former combatants means for DDR effectiveness. Consequently, it is worthwhile reflecting on the potential outcomes that an integrated DDR approach could bring to South Sudan.

²³² World Bank, 'South Sudan', World Bank Group, 2026, <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/southsudan>.

²³³ Geneva Call, 'South Sudan', Geneva Call, 2026, <https://www.genevacall.org/location/south-sudan/>.

²³⁴ World Bank, 'South Sudan'.

²³⁵ Geneva Call/ Appel de Genève, *Preserving Humanity on All Fronts - Geneva Call - Annual Report 2025* (Geneva Call, 2025), 31, [genevacall.org](https://www.genevacall.org).

²³⁶ United Nations Peacekeeping, '5 Facts on the UN Mission in South Sudan', UN Peacekeeping, 5 May 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/news/5-facts-on-the-un-mission-in-south-sudan>.

5.2. A diagnosis of DDR challenges in South Sudan

The situation in South Sudan after the signature of the CPA is intimately linked to DDR. In fact, one of the main provisions of the CPA was the significant reduction of both the SPLA and the SAF. As such, disarmament and demobilisation became key implementation instruments of the peace agreement. Still, DDR programmes in South Sudanese territory have progressed very slowly since 2005, mainly due to incomplete reintegration of former combatants, which created further obstacles to the accomplishment of the security provisions existent in the subsequent peace agreements in the country.²³⁷

5.2.1. The UN and the national DDR programmes in South Sudan

The primary UN engagement with DDR was made through UNMIS, whose mandate included support for the DDR, as stipulated in the CPA. However, the CPA did not stipulate the details of the programme's implementation, and so the Interim DDR Programme (IDDRP), which provided the national framework for the DDR process, was only created in 2007, alongside a national reintegration policy. Even though both the SAF and the SPLA agreed to initiate a transparent and inclusive DDR process, the political commitment after the signing of the CPA weakened and the “fittest” fighters were excluded from the drafted programmes. As a matter of fact, the IDDRP targeted mainly “special groups” of armed people to be DDR beneficiaries, specifically the disabled, elderly, children and women combatants. This removed the SAF and the SPLA's obligation of disarming and demobilising a big portion of their young and male fighters, which made up the biggest portion of these armed groups.²³⁸

The theoretical commitment to human security was present since the beginning of the first DDR programmes. For instance, even before the IDDRP, the CPA already had a section that was dedicated to the DDR process, which aimed to “contribute to creating an enabling environment to human security and to support post-peace-agreement social

²³⁷ Saeed, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Initiatives in Sudan*, 10.

²³⁸ Mark Malan and Charles T. Hunt, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The UN and the Protection of Civilians in South Sudan*, no. 275, ISS Paper (Institute for Security Studies, 2014), 5, <https://issafrica.org>.

stabilisation across the Sudan, particularly war-affected areas”.²³⁹ However, the inertia and the bureaucratic disengagement,²⁴⁰ in parallel with unclear DDR objectives set by the national DDR Commission,²⁴¹ left little results from the programme’s introduction. Thus, the IDDRP was replaced by the Multi-year DDR Programme in 2009, which set concrete objectives and aimed to distribute benefits to reintegration among ex-fighters. Yet, a long time passed from the CPA signature until the introduction of these DDR measures, which led a lot of combatants to self-demobilise without reporting and registering in the programme.²⁴²

During this period, UNMIS was part of an integrated UN DDR unit, alongside UNDP, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP). These institutions assisted the South Sudan DDR Commission (SSDDRC)²⁴³ throughout the first IDDRP and the Multi-year DDR Programme. While the DPKO, through UNMIS, had a mandate to guide the planning and the logistical implementation of the programmes, the UNDP was to focus on the reintegration component of DDR.²⁴⁴ Additionally, the UNDP was able to subcontract other international partners to assist on the reintegration, of which the most notable were the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC).²⁴⁵ In spite of these coordinated efforts, not only UNMIS did not prioritise DDR implementation in its state-building activities, but also the DDR programmes were viewed by other international organisations in the field as less relevant than other security measures of peacebuilding. Furthermore, the whole process was not nationally-owned, because the international actors’ disengagement resulting in national stakeholders’

²³⁹ Government of the Republic of the Sudan and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army, *The Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Sudan People’s Liberation Army* (2005), 136.

²⁴⁰ Munive, ‘Context Matters’, 593.

²⁴¹ Guy Lamb, *Assessing the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in the Context of Instability and Informal Economies: The Cases of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan*, Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP) (World Bank, 2012), 56, <https://www.worldbank.org>.

²⁴² Munive, ‘Context Matters’, 593.

²⁴³ The SSDDRC replaced the previous national DDR Commission

²⁴⁴ Malan and Hunt, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 5–6.

²⁴⁵ Lamb, *Assessing the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, 57.

disenchantment with the process as well. Ultimately, a very small number of combatants got to benefit from the programme before UNMIS' liquidation, at the time of South Sudan's independence.²⁴⁶

The South Sudanese civil war (2013-2018) meant significant delays and even halt in DDR programmes' implementation. Moreover, the proliferation of community-based incidents of violence resulted in the transition of UNMISS' mandate from its initial concern with state-building activities to the new priority of protecting civilians.²⁴⁷ This meant that UNMISS-led DDR activities ceased in 2013, for its new strategy prioritised rule of law and justice sector engagement.²⁴⁸ Still, the SSDDRC introduced a new DDR strategy from mid-2013 on, in cooperation with UNMISS and with the implementation support from the World Bank's Transitional DDR Programme and the German government. Backing this strategy, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Japan, Norway and Italy provided the largest sums of funds to support the SSDDRC's work.²⁴⁹

Consequently, the R-ARCSS opened the doors to a unity government between President Kiir and Machar, who became first Vice-President of South Sudan. Although the unity government created by the R-ARCSS left expectations that armed militants from both factions could be unified into one single South Sudanese armed forces, the disarmament and demobilisation of armed militias did not materialise and no unity army was formed.²⁵⁰ Moreover, with the R-ARCSS, UNMISS placed national DDR as one of its main activities, but a lot of relevant UN member-states responsible for financing the mission remained disenchanted with DDR prospects for South Sudan. As a result, South Sudanese opposition and civil society movements urged international donors to overcome their frustrations with the past challenges to DDR. Still, the resources allocated to UNMISS remained quite limited.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ Malan and Hunt, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 5–6.

²⁴⁷ Malan and Hunt, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 1–2.

²⁴⁸ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 1.

²⁴⁹ Lamb and Stainer, 'The Conundrum of DDR Coordination', 10.

²⁵⁰ Center for Preventive Action, 'Instability in South Sudan'.

²⁵¹ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 2.

5.2.2. Challenges of DDR in the various programmes

By aggregating different data sources, Rodríguez-Castellón situates the IDDRP in within first-generation approaches, which emphasised changes within the military and the police. In other words, the DDR provisions were mainly focused on traditional security arrangements and the reintegration of ex-combatants did not receive any particular attention within the programmes as a whole.²⁵² The same author also considers the DDR interventions that took place in the independent South Sudan to be embedded in second-generation logics. South Sudanese-led DDR, thus, was envisioned as an integral part of broader political processes and it aimed to engage with local communities in order to address different types of violence.²⁵³

In South Sudan, the DDR programmes were very much formulated around the logics of peacemaking and, as happens with many DDR processes, the lack of context-sensitive approaches created obstacles to the local implementation of the programmes.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, the SPLA and SAF's lack of political will towards DDR implementation, between 2005 and 2011, was largely due to the overarching influence of the international actors in the drafting of the programmes. The fact that the first DDR programmes did not take into account local norms and actors in their drafting made their execution significantly less attractive to the decision-makers at the national level.²⁵⁵ In reality, DDR did not receive enough input from the national actors at stake, namely the SPLA, which was very reluctant to demobilise. Additionally, the DDR approaches did not reflect the security conditions and the priorities of the south, so the terms of the programmes were imposed on national stakeholders, rather than nationally-owned.²⁵⁶

The lessons from lack of ownership in DDR due to an inadequate account of the South Sudanese security conditions are still reminiscing in the most recent developments of the DDR process in the country. Security governance in South Sudan still lacks a comprehensive vision on how community dynamics are central to the mobilisation of

²⁵² Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 5.

²⁵³ Rodríguez-Castellón, 'Evolution and Challenges of DDR', 6.

²⁵⁴ Munive, 'Context Matters', 597.

²⁵⁵ K C, 'Do Local Norms Affect Women Ex-Combatants', 3.

²⁵⁶ Munive, 'Context Matters', 592–94.

civilians to take up arms.²⁵⁷ In countries like South Sudan, picturing the state as the owner of the monopoly of violence does not correspond to the lived realities of conflict: the inability of the state to guarantee the minimum human security conditions has been a major factor of mobilisation of civilians, who find themselves in the imperative to take security into their own hands.²⁵⁸ Thus, in order to be in contact with the local dynamics of violence, the security sector needs to be subject to civilian oversight, for the government is incapable of reaching every community and of halting activities related to tackling local insecurity,²⁵⁹ namely the circulation of light weaponry, the formation of client-based structures of violence and the mobilisation of civilians to war.²⁶⁰ As the South Sudanese security sector needs to be restructured around inclusive and people-centred approaches, so does DDR need to be reformulated around these principles in regard to ex-combatants demands.

5.2.3. The reintegration of ex-combatants in South Sudan

Initially, the reintegration failures of UNMISS-led DDR were also associated with the inability of the Sudanese government to have the monopoly of violence.²⁶¹ This assessment, based on a traditional vision of state as the ultimate bearer of the security governance, is not coherent with the reality in South Sudan, where security is not only upheld by state institutions, but also by communities.²⁶² In fact, in spite of previous attempts to provide incentives for ex-combatants' permanent disarmament and demobilisation, such as sums of money in exchange for arms, alliances within ethnic patronage networks and historical grievances have operated as key mobilising factors for ex-combatants to resort to violence once again.²⁶³

²⁵⁷ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 12.

²⁵⁸ Deng Deng, 'Linking DDR, Security Sector Development and Transitional Justice in Southern Sudan', 192.

²⁵⁹ Luka Biong Deng Kuol, 'South Sudan', 67–69.

²⁶⁰ Saskia Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians: Mobilization and Demobilization in Sudan* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 178.

²⁶¹ Malan and Hunt, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 7.

²⁶² Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 12.

²⁶³ Sharif, 'A Critical Review of Evidence', 6–7.

The reality of reintegration in South Sudan poses a very clear challenge to first- and second-generation DDR approaches. While these approaches conceptualise reintegration as the return of civilians to safe communities, in South Sudan this is often not the case. The omnipresence of arms circulating among civilians is translated into unrealistic disarmament goals.²⁶⁴ Put another way, South Sudan's case shows that reintegration without disarmament might lead to more realistic and contextually coherent DDR programmes. Furthermore, the temporal gap between the CPA signature and the actual planning of reintegration opportunities for former fighters left a lot of them without life prospects for a long period of time. Naturally, a large group of ex-combatants ended up remaining in the national army or joining an independent armed militia, for post-conflict South Sudan left them with no employment opportunities and not rarely with no home or family to which to return.²⁶⁵

Notwithstanding the reduced number of combatants reaching the reintegration stage, its lessons in post-CPA Southern Sudan were largely embedded in community-related challenges, namely: the lack of trust between ex-combatants and host communities, as well as the latter's lack of involvement in the drafting and implementation of DDR; the asymmetric implementation of reintegration programmes among different communities, with a disproportionate attribution of benefits in the capital region, Juba; and the lack of reintegration programmes adapted to each receiving community.²⁶⁶

By 2011, UNMISS was operating according to the logics of strict sequencing of disarmament-demobilisation-reintegration, so it is not so surprising that it was unable to invest a lot of its time and resources into the reintegration of ex-combatants. It can be argued that the reality of arms proliferation and of patronage-based mobilisation of civilians to fight means that reintegration efforts are unlikely to even start if the UN is waiting for disarmament to be complete first. Therefore, the bad human security conditions in independent South Sudan remained virtually unchanged by the few

²⁶⁴ Sharif, 'A Critical Review of Evidence', 12–13.

²⁶⁵ Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians*, 158–62.

²⁶⁶ Saeed, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Initiatives in Sudan*, 32–35.

reintegration programmes introduced.²⁶⁷ This situation was further harmed by the claim, on the part of national actors, that the international community's vision of DDR was based on misleading interpretations of power relations and political manipulation processes at the local level, which were frequently relevant to understand which reintegration measures were adequate to each local context.²⁶⁸

Therefore, after 2011, UNMISS decided to take on a more concrete and individualistic approach to reintegration, where former fighters would receive money from international donors, as well as a “reinsertion package”, that is, a collection of food rations, soap, mosquito nets, clothes and other items. Only after receiving these packages, ex-combatants would be eligible for professional skills training, in which each individual could opt to receive technical and material support and expertise on areas such as agriculture and livestock rearing, business and entrepreneurship or education.²⁶⁹ This personalised approach was still focused on the so-called “special” groups of fighters that had been highlighted in previous DDR drafting, but it also aimed to reach the rest of combatants.²⁷⁰

Despite the evolution from post-CPA DDR, the lack of national ownership in the process was still striking, as the SSDDRC frequently adopted programmes according to the interests of the international donors and without sufficient input from SPLA members. The conventional DDR template based on individualistic formulas also precluded community-based DDR implementation. In other words, the progress that was registered in the reintegration levels was largely due to the effort of community leaders, who tried to frame, among the communities, the reinsertion ex-combatants as a “normal” event in the aftermath of war.²⁷¹

The R-ARCSS brought a more comprehensive approach to the DDR process in South Sudan, for the new agreement advanced DDR as a key component of the security

²⁶⁷ Lamb, *Assessing the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, 58.

²⁶⁸ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 4–5.

²⁶⁹ Lamb, *Assessing the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, 58–59.

²⁷⁰ Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians*, 184.

²⁷¹ Lamb, *Assessing the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, 61.

sector reform.²⁷² The focus on the socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants was also framed as essential to mitigate the potential threat to peace caused by demobilised fighters. However, the one-off payments and vocational training provided were considered insufficient to transform combatants into civilians. Behind this was, once again, the lack of community violence measures, which were necessary for DDR programmes to be in touch with ex-combatant needs in South Sudan.²⁷³

Today, the high dependence on international funding and the lack of political will on the part of Juba-based political actors remain ubiquitous issues throughout the South Sudanese DDR process, and the reality since 2018 has not changed very much in this aspect.²⁷⁴ The current stalled implementation of DDR is further connected to the rooted communal and subnational violence as a continuous reality, persisting mostly in the forms of cattle raiding, land disputes and fights between locally-based ethnic militias.²⁷⁵

Notwithstanding, the disconnection of DDR programmes from community-based approaches has not yet been recognised by the SSDDRC has a problem in itself. This is not surprising because, as a World Bank project on lessons of reintegration concluded, DDR community support projects should not be introduced at the core of South Sudanese DDR, but rather as part of a broader reconciliation approach.²⁷⁶ I argue that this inference is valid within first and second-generation DDR approaches, which were the ones applied in South Sudan. However, as third-generation DDR had not taken place in South Sudan at the time of the project, the study does not reflect how integrated DDR approaches, focused on human security, would require community-based projects at its core.

²⁷² Dengathoi Galuak Dengathoi et al., 'Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan: A Documentary Analysis', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 17, no. 3 (2026): 77, <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2026-0101>.

²⁷³ Van der Lijn, *No Exit, Without an Entry Strategy: Transitioning UNMISS SSR Activities*, 11–13.

²⁷⁴ Deng Deng, 'Linking DDR, Security Sector Development and Transitional Justice in Southern Sudan', 194.

²⁷⁵ Dengathoi et al., 'Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan', 78.

²⁷⁶ World Bank, *Republic of South Sudan National DDR Programme 2013–2014 Pilot: Pilot Reintegration Project: TDRP Key Learning Report*, Pilot Reintegration Project Documentation Series (Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP), World Bank, 2014), 30, <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/republic-south-sudan-national-ddr-programme-2013-2014-pilot-pilot-reintegration>.

In light of this, there is a more recent consensus on how DDR planning for South Sudan requires addressing the communal socio-political roots of conflict and to be grounded, among others, on local reconciliation initiatives and on the repairing of communal grievances so as that ex-fighters are not perceived as threats.²⁷⁷ Accordingly, if DDR is isolated from community security considerations, local violence can actually be exacerbated. As ethnic-based grievances remain the primary source of community insecurity, the reintegration programmes cannot leave aside a community-based approach to peace.²⁷⁸ Therefore, the inclusion of civil societies, community and religious leaders is imperative to make ex-combatants needs compatible with the broader societal recovery demanded by the receiving communities.²⁷⁹

Altogether, since the 1990s, the situation in South Sudan is characterised by uninterrupted contestations of power between tribal militias, which has created a series of local “civil wars” within South Sudanese communities.²⁸⁰ Because of this, former fighters were constantly remobilising, creating a big gap between the combatants who were originally demobilised and the ones who actually ended up becoming civilians.²⁸¹ In the bigger picture, the peace project that was envisioned by the CPA and later by the R-ARCSS was grounded on political arrangements among the elites of the SPLA, leaving aside the voices of communities regarding personal grievances. In the case of South Sudan, this elite-based nature of the security arrangements led, among others, to the inability of the peacebuilding projects to promote reconciliation within communities and to mitigate the inter-generational societal trauma that scarred the population.²⁸²

²⁷⁷ Dengathoi et al., ‘Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan’, 84.

²⁷⁸ South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC), *Baseline Study on the Reintegration Status, Challenges and Opportunities of Former Combatants, Women and Children Formerly Associated with Armed Groups in South Sudan* (South Sudan DDR Commission, 2022), 7, <https://www.undp.org/south-sudan/publications/baseline-study-reintegration-status-challenges-and-opportunities-former-combatants-women-and-children-formerly-associated>.

²⁷⁹ Wilson Lual Lual Malong, *The Roles of South Sudan Government in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: A Case of South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission*, 30 September 2022, 18, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7127494>.

²⁸⁰ Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians*, 145.

²⁸¹ Malong, *The Roles of South Sudan Government in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, 10.

²⁸² Jok Madut, ‘Lessons in Failure: Peacebuilding in Sudan/South Sudan’, in *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa: Lessons Learned for Policymakers and Practitioners*, ed. Terence McNamee and Monde

As of 2026, the outcomes of the DDR process in South Sudan remain very disappointing, especially given the financial, political and social investments that were made since the CPA to introduce DDR as a priority for national and international stakeholders in the country's peace process. While demobilisation has neither been effective nor stable, the reintegration phase did not reach the majority of former fighters,²⁸³ making human security prospects very grim.

5.3. Religious-based reintegration: a missing link in South Sudanese DDR?

The suffering felt by populations is still a product of South Sudanese taking up arms against each other.²⁸⁴ Hence, there is a striking vacuum in South Sudan's peacebuilding history when it comes to the reconstruction of inter-communal relationships, the rebuilding of families and the surpassing of personal and collective trauma. In fact, peacebuilding in South Sudan is understood by political stakeholders as an urgent response that has to be provided by the Juba-based political establishment. However, these same stakeholders often reveal little capacity and political will to bring South Sudan's insecurity crisis to an end.²⁸⁵ Moreover, the lack of a national post-war reconstruction plan has undermined peacebuilding at the local level. Consequently, the picture of fragmented and disconnected peace projects in the South Sudanese territory have weakened the social values that tie communities together. This has, to some extent, led demobilised combatants to find it hard to disconnect from their war-made identity and to create an alternative one based on communal values.²⁸⁶ As a result, for individuals who do not feel connected to the communities they reintegrate, it becomes much easier to

Muyangwa (Springer International Publishing, 2021), 364–65, <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-46636-7>.

²⁸³ Dengathoi et al., 'Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan', 77.

²⁸⁴ Madut, 'Lessons in Failure: Peacebuilding in Sudan/South Sudan', 370.

²⁸⁵ Lucy Poni Modi et al., 'South Sudan's Costly Conflict and the Urgent Role of Religious Leaders', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2019): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1608660>.

²⁸⁶ Madut, 'Lessons in Failure: Peacebuilding in Sudan/South Sudan', 365.

resort to violence again and to commit human rights violations against people of their own kin. Similarly, local strongmen also become much more apt to explore these grievances and to incentivise young men to return to fight.²⁸⁷

In South Sudan, DDR has underexplored how this combatant-community relationship can be improved by religious actors. In a context where communities are already divided, reintegrating ex-combatants presents different challenges than when they are reintegrated into safe and united communities. Hence, the following sections understand how reintegration can be improved by religious actors in South Sudan.

5.3.1. Religious actors and peace in South Sudan

As of 2020, the general composition of religious affiliation in South Sudan was based on a majority of Christians (60,5% of the population), followed by Muslims (6,2%), by very small minorities of Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews (less than 1% each) and by a fragmented affiliation to other religions (32,8%).²⁸⁸ This justifies that religious peacebuilding literature in South Sudan tends to focus mainly on Christian actors, identities and norms. However, the place occupied, for instance, by mosques and Muslim-based organisations in the peace transition and in the creation of the South Sudanese nation is undeniable.²⁸⁹

Although the history of prior engagement of South Sudanese people with other religious practices and beliefs is quite complex, the nation's current relation to Christianity stems first and foremost from the politics of British colonial policies, in the region, which viewed the South as a necessary Christian buffer zone to tackle the spread of Islam across Central Africa.²⁹⁰ After Sudan's independence from British colonialism, the Khartoum-based administration wanted to promote Islam as the main religion of the new state, which culminated in Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir's policies of forced conversion to the Muslim faith. As a result, the history of South Sudan's independence

²⁸⁷ Madut, 'Lessons in Failure: Peacebuilding in Sudan/South Sudan', 366.

²⁸⁸ Conrad Hackett et al., 'Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2020', Religious Demographics, Pew Research Center, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.58094/5shf-2d69>.

²⁸⁹ Noah Salomon, 'Freeing Religion at the Birth of South Sudan', in *Politics of Religious Freedom* (Chicago, 2015), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7208/9780226248646-029>.

²⁹⁰ Tounsel, 'Christianity in (South) Sudan', 2.

and John Garang's²⁹¹ leadership of the SPLM/A are also embedded in the broader picture of liberation against Sudan's marginalisation of Southern Christians from decision and policy-making in the country.²⁹²

The Southern Sudanese, therefore, interacted with religious actors much before independence. In colonial Sudan, the American Presbyterian Mission, the Roman Catholics and the Church Missionary Society were the primary mission organisations located in the Southern region of Sudan, focusing mainly on Christian evangelistic work.²⁹³ Today, different religious-related institutions are present in South Sudan. To name a few, the Action by Churches Together, Christian Aid, Caritas and Trócaire,²⁹⁴ as well as the New Sudan Council of Churches,²⁹⁵ have been involved in humanitarian response, in high-level human rights advocacy, in mediation efforts with the South Sudanese government, among others. It is important to state that these institutions serve the South Sudanese people as a whole, and not only the Christian individuals and communities. This is in accordance with the national reality of the country, where tribes, regions and families are not traditionally divided on the basis of religion. As Salomon concludes, not only the gathering spaces for religious communities are open to everyone, but also a family with "a father who follows the prophet Ngundeng, a Christian Mother, and Muslim son is not at all uncommon".²⁹⁶ Without religion at the core of inter-personal divisions, this opens up space for inter-religious dialogue to occur more easily than dialogue between different ethnicities, which we have concluded to be ubiquitous sources of violence in South Sudan.

²⁹¹ Although the intertwinement of John Garang's religious-based discourse with the creation of South Sudan is a very relevant point to the understanding of religion in South Sudan, the analysis of the present thesis relates to the work of religious actors, and notably after 2011. The SPLA Christian identity and the religious narratives used by Garang remain outside of the scope of this thesis.

²⁹² Modi et al., 'South Sudan's Costly Conflict and the Urgent Role of Religious Leaders', 38.

²⁹³ Tounsel, 'Christianity in (South) Sudan', 2.

²⁹⁴ Lydia Tanner and Leben Moro, *Missed Out: The Role of Local Actors in the Humanitarian Response in the South Sudan Conflict* (Oxfam GB, CAFOD and Trócaire in partnership, Christian Aid, Tearfund, 2016), 15, <https://doi.org/10.21201/2016.606290>.

²⁹⁵ Jonathan C. Agensky, 'Religion, Governance, and the "Peace-Humanitarian-Development Nexus" in South Sudan', in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, ed. Cedric De Coning and Mateja Peter (Springer International Publishing, 2019), 288, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99106-1_14.

²⁹⁶ Salomon, 'Freeing Religion at the Birth of South Sudan', 292.

When it comes to peacebuilding, church-led initiatives and authorities have also been key actors of promoting peace on the ground in a much more effective and context-sensitive way than broader efforts initiated and/ or implemented by Juba-based institutions. The personal relations and the understanding of what the realities of conflict mean in each community make local religious actors, among others, more prone to be effective in their peace endeavours.²⁹⁷ A widely known example of religious actors working towards national peacebuilding is the Wunlit Peace Conference of 1999, which tried to promote reconciliation between Dinka and Nuer communities and which was facilitated by the New Sudan Council of Churches. Today, church and other religious leaders' promotion of inter-ethnic dialogue in the Wunlit Conference is still recognised one of the most successful people-to-people peace initiatives led by local actors.²⁹⁸

In South Sudanese peoples' recent past, then, religion has played a central role.²⁹⁹ Just in 2023, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope Francis, as representatives of the majoritarian Anglican, Presbyterian, Anglican and Catholic Christian traditions, visited South Sudan and made a collective appeal to peace and reconciliation in the country.³⁰⁰ However, this highly mediatic discourse of world-wide religious leaders on peace has not necessarily meant that national and local religious actors have been equally heard in South Sudanese peacebuilding.

In fact, after the eruption of violence in Juba in 2013, churches reported feeling “invisible” within the humanitarian response coordinated between national and international actors. Frequently hosting displaced people, providing food and with leaders taking personal risks to prevent the entry of armed soldiers in certain communities, these religious actors still reported being left aside by other humanitarian actors.³⁰¹ Similarly, by resorting to international networks of refugee support, faith-based actors have played a role in giving support to South Sudanese refugees abroad, as well as on their return to their homes in the aftermath of war. Still, little attention has been given to the positive

²⁹⁷ Madut, ‘Lessons in Failure: Peacebuilding in Sudan/South Sudan’, 371.

²⁹⁸ Modi et al., ‘South Sudan’s Costly Conflict and the Urgent Role of Religious Leaders’, 41.

²⁹⁹ Tounsel, ‘Christianity in (South) Sudan’, 1.

³⁰⁰ Tounsel, ‘Christianity in (South) Sudan’, 5.

³⁰¹ Tanner and Moro, *Missed Out*, 15–16.

support that religious actors can have in global migration governance and refugee assistance networks led by states and intergovernmental organisations.³⁰² Furthermore, in spite of being involved in previous mediation efforts between Machar and Kiir, religious leaders have felt systematically excluded, since 2011, from negotiations between the two men and from reconciliation projects between the respective factions.³⁰³ Given this systematic exclusion of religious actors from broader efforts of sustaining peace, their relevance to the South Sudanese DDR process must too be scrutinised.

5.3.2. Religious actors and human security in South Sudan

As stated previously, the current community-embeddedness of violence in South Sudan is an extension of the same ethnic-based divisions that have affected the country for decades now. For ordinary people, feelings of despair and hopelessness are very common. As Saskia Baas puts it,

Death and suffering are common aspects of life in South Sudan. [...] So, a normal life in South Sudan is also a life in which one has very little control over one's own destiny and that of others. Things just happen; most of the time, all you can do is pray and trust in God.³⁰⁴

This continued insecurity has made scholars to question the viability of DDR in South Sudan. Munive believes that the South Sudanese case challenges the assumption that DDR processes lead to human security outcomes, and so they should not be implemented.³⁰⁵ Yet, I argue that this critique to DDR's adequacy in South Sudan is flawed: On the one hand, the author grounds his reasoning in an outdated version of the IDDRS, that is, his vision of DDR is based on standardised measures which are neither advocated by the most recent IDDRS, nor by third-generation approaches, as discussed in chapter 2; On the other hand, Munive contends that an international imposition of DDR standards is incompatible with national ownership, which, I argue, is a very reductive approach that can be contradicted by past DDR processes, such as the case of combined

³⁰² Jonathan C. Agensky, 'Religion, Refugees, and International Order: A Global History of Solidarity, Dislocation, and Reintegration in South Sudan', *Global Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (2024): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksae084>.

³⁰³ Modi et al., 'South Sudan's Costly Conflict and the Urgent Role of Religious Leaders', 40.

³⁰⁴ Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians*, 52–53.

³⁰⁵ Munive, 'Context Matters', 586.

efforts between the ARN and the UN in Colombia. Thus, I argue that it is not actually the DDR framework that is inadequate to the South Sudanese context, but rather the outdated “one-size-fits-all” programmes that were applied in the past. In reality, the locally-based solutions brought by third-generation DDR, with ownership of national stakeholders, is key to ensure DDR’s ability to promote human security.

Human security approaches, because they place human beings at the core of peacebuilding, require that religious actors are incorporated and perceived as a solution to insecurity in post-conflict settings.³⁰⁶ More than an objective posed by third-generation DDR, human security was also expected to be achieved by many South Sudanese, who experienced great disappointment with the astounding levels of widespread violence after 2011.³⁰⁷ This is precisely why faith-based actors, which often recognise the grievances of local populations, can be included in broader peacebuilding projects in South Sudan.³⁰⁸ Consequently, I argue that, if religious actors are included in DDR drafting and implementation, the reintegration of ex-combatants in South Sudan has the potential to contribute more effectively to human security.

Most literature on South Sudanese security is focused on the problems brought up by insecurity in state-centred terms. However, third-generation DDR in South Sudan should revolve around human security, and religious actors have the capacity to adequately contribute to this people-centred approach to security. In practice, of the seven dimensions encompassed by the human security concept, religious actors can provide and subcontract social services, infrastructure and social capital³⁰⁹ necessary to cover the economic, food, health and environmental dimensions of security. Personal security, understood as the protection of people from violence from others, has also been promoted by religious South Sudanese actors by sheltering people from violence and by impeding

³⁰⁶ Agensky, ‘Religion, Governance, and the “Peace–Humanitarian–Development Nexus” in South Sudan’, 280–82.

³⁰⁷ Madut, ‘Lessons in Failure: Peacebuilding in Sudan/South Sudan’, 367.

³⁰⁸ Agensky, ‘Religion, Governance, and the “Peace–Humanitarian–Development Nexus” in South Sudan’, 279.

³⁰⁹ Agensky, ‘Religion, Governance, and the “Peace–Humanitarian–Development Nexus” in South Sudan’, 285.

the entrance of armed soldiers in protected communities,³¹⁰ as well as by using religious beliefs and norms as a form of psychological support.³¹¹ Accordingly, religious actors can contribute to political security by resorting to advocacy, discursive practices and human rights' championing to fight power abuses and rule of law violations.³¹² Finally, the community security dimension is arguably the most difficult to achieve in South Sudan. Accordingly, local hostilities are much more likely to happen if DDR does not take into consideration community security goals.³¹³ The following section expands on the contribution that religious actors can give to this dimension of human security.

5.4. Religious-based reintegration: a proposal for DDR practice in South Sudan

In order for the reintegration component of DDR to function, communities need to be at peace with themselves. Acknowledging the role of religious actors as promoters of human security in South Sudan must, then, be complemented by an explanation of how this societal change towards reconciliation and acceptance of ex-combatants can be put in practice by religious individuals and institutions. After analysing the status of South Sudan's DDR and the contribution that religious actors can give to human security, the question one needs to answer now is the following: "Can religious actors positively impact DDR in South Sudan?"

In a straightforward way, the findings in this chapter naturally lead to a positive answer to this. On a more nuanced level, however, I contend that only a third-generation DDR framework, which includes community-based reintegration of former fighters, can adequately frame the peaceful assets brought about by religious actors to the South Sudanese DDR process. Through a human security lens, the introduction of third-

³¹⁰ Tanner and Moro, *Missed Out*, 16.

³¹¹ Lujang John Jangaling and Jatswan S. Sidhu, 'Traditional and Religious Approaches as Psychosocial Support in the Reintegration of Former Girl Soldiers in South Sudan', *African and Asian Studies* 21, no. 4 (2022): 266, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692108-12341567>.

³¹² Carter and Smith, 'Religious Peacebuilding', 294–97.

³¹³ Dengathoi et al., 'Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan', 78.

generation approaches is the most rational solution to tackle the localised violence and the inter-communal divisions that characterise the post-conflict settlement in South Sudan. Hence, if South Sudan aims to achieve human security, I argue that religious actors have to be key elements of a third-generation DDR in South Sudan. The inclusion of religious actors in DDR policies should, thus, be based on their capacity to address ex-combatants' needs, namely the following: psychological support; assistance to remote populations; community-based trust-building, reconciliation and stigma reduction.

Firstly, a lot of ex-combatants went through traumatising events and expressed feelings of psychological discomfort, frustration, sadness and anger in the aftermath of war. Likewise, drug and alcohol abuse, outbreaks of aggressiveness and suicides among former SPLA soldiers were very common forms of self-directed violence in South Sudan.³¹⁴ These behavioural problems frequently undermined the transition of ex-combatants to civilian life, for communities were very receptive of accepting them.³¹⁵ As analysed in chapter 4, and bearing in mind that religious actors are not meant to replace professional medical assistance, religious-based activities can have a positive impact in the reduction of the levels of aggressiveness. Likewise, churches in South Sudan have been reported to be open to dialogue with communities and to support trauma recovery both of fighters and of grieving families.³¹⁶

Secondly, the local grievances that sustain armed groups in South Sudan determine that even peripheral communities are an extension of the contestation that exists among national political elites. Paradoxically, even though the South Sudanese state often cannot reach the most rural and isolated areas of the country, these still experience local conflicts that mirror the hostility between the political leaders in Juba and in other ethnically contested areas of South Sudan.³¹⁷ To reach these peripheries, South Sudanese churches have previously worked in hard-to-access and often dangerous areas, where the state does not reach but populations still suffer from community

³¹⁴ South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC), *Baseline Study on the Reintegration Status*, 60.

³¹⁵ Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians*, 161–62.

³¹⁶ Tanner and Moro, *Missed Out*, 21.

³¹⁷ Dengathoi et al., 'Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan', 83.

security.³¹⁸ Therefore, religious actors can assist reintegration programmes in remote regions of the country, because they are concerned with assisting affected populations even in areas when the state is absent.

Thirdly, several religious-based initiatives can foster community acceptance of individuals who fought in previous wars, such as inter-communal dialogue on stigma, public admission of guilt by violence perpetrators and trust-building workshops. As stigma is an omnipresent reality in reintegration, community security is also very much dependent on reducing stigmatisation of former fighters. Therefore, religious-based activities, such as collective prayers, have been widely successful in the reintegration of female child soldiers in South Sudan, whose process of healing from past trauma and community acceptance was complemented by rituals of community forgiveness.³¹⁹

These three areas of intervention bring light to the continuous interaction between religious actors and community security in South Sudan. Moreover, community members in South Sudan have expressed that, in regard to peacebuilding, they feel better represented by faith leaders than by other non-governmental or international actors in the field.³²⁰ Hence, religious actors' human security inputs show how these individuals and institutions are able to be locally attached to specific communities and, at the same time, remain connected to wider efforts to sustain peace. Therefore, the ability to act with context-awareness and to, simultaneously, coordinate local efforts with religious actors in other communities, can promote a DDR approach that is locally-based and also coordinated at the national level. Moreover, the privileged access to material and human resources within religious networks can allow for more combatants to be covered by DDR benefits.

In South Sudan, the war left a trace of family destruction that has eliminated, for many combatants, the possibilities of returning home. In the post-CPA period, combatants could often rely on church-based institutions to see their basic needs satisfied and to find

³¹⁸ Tanner and Moro, *Missed Out*, 19.

³¹⁹ Jangaling and Sidhu, 'Traditional and Religious Approaches as Psychosocial Support in the Reintegration of Former Girl Soldiers in South Sudan', 265–66.

³²⁰ Tanner and Moro, *Missed Out*, 13.

opportunities to rebuild their life.³²¹ In the absence of the families as a group of people in which a former combatant can rely on, religious actors can foster community-based livelihoods for these former fighters. Hence, the reintegration of ex-combatants needs to be framed within everyday efforts of peacebuilding. Differently from other political stakeholders, religious actors have the legitimacy, within communities, to guide the return of ex-combatants to their home by including them in local resource management dynamics. As an example, religious actors can help reintegrated fighters becoming involved in land access distribution, local defence activities or pastoralist routes, for they dictate everyday lives of civilians.³²²

In an analysis to how South Sudanese long-standing grievances need locally-based solutions, the input of religious actors to peace is reinforced:

Outsiders have had little success in mediating south-south conflict over decades and the most transformative southern peace agreements have been led by South Sudanese. Religious and traditional leaders are influential, relatively independent of military leaders and important barometers of communities' willingness and ability to implement agreements.³²³

As the previous chapters demonstrate, each DDR programme, in order to be effective, has to be context-sensitive and locally-owned. In South Sudan, the reality on the ground is characterised by inter-ethnic violence perpetrated by armed groups and tribal militias that engage in warfare by building on local grievances to attract civilians to become combatants. The SPLA is the clearest example of that engagement, in which local strongmen generate client-based relations to legitimate their leadership as commanders and mobilising individuals to bear arms.³²⁴ In these conditions, DDR is not only difficult to implement, but DDR authorities have to compete with war-based leaderships at the local level in order to create incentives for combatants to lay down their arms rather than for mobilising to fight. However, as in South Sudan there are no strict divisions between religious groups according to ethnic lineages, religious actors can act outside of the

³²¹ Baas, *From Civilians to Soldiers and from Soldiers to Civilians*, 174.

³²² Dengathoi et al., 'Historical and Political Factors Shaping the Outcomes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Programs in South Sudan', 80.

³²³ Center for Preventive Action, 'Instability in South Sudan'.

³²⁴ Munive, 'Context Matters', 591–92.

dichotomy between the Dinka and the Nuer and foster intra- and inter-communal peaceful coexistence.

To conclude, when it comes to sustaining peace, religious actors remain an underutilised resource.³²⁵ With the crisis that South Sudan faces at the moment, the future of DDR is uncertain and programmes are unlikely to continue operating under the new circumstances of ongoing violence. Nevertheless, this reality does not preclude the need to look back at the achievements and lessons of past DDR efforts so that both South Sudanese and international institutions can plan and design better DDR programmes in the future. Hence, I argue that DDR will be more apt to produce peaceful outcomes in South Sudan if religious actors are included in DDR programming by interacting with the localised security dilemmas that impede the social reintegration of ex-combatants.

³²⁵ Agensky, 'Religion, Governance, and the "Peace–Humanitarian–Development Nexus" in South Sudan', 283.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this thesis contribute to the ongoing research on the challenges, applicability and current status of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes within the United Nations peacebuilding work. Therefore, one must now return to the question that initially guided the present research: Can religious actors positively impact DDR today? The findings on this thesis evidence that yes, religious actors can positively impact DDR outcomes. Therefore, religious actors should be included in DDR drafting and implementation so as to provide better human security outcomes among the populations that the programmes intend to affect.

With this thesis, I aimed to understand the extent to which a certain category of local actors, the religious ones, were left aside in policy and academic DDR literature. After having identified this gap, I wanted to put in practice what an integrated DDR approach that took into account these individuals would mean for human security and, ultimately, for sustaining peace. The lack of acknowledgement of religious actors' ability to promote peace within the DDR frameworks should call the attention of DDR policy-makers in post-conflict setting worldwide. Therefore, I argued that South Sudan's prospects for DDR should also develop locally-based solutions for reintegrating former fighters, and there is a particular place to be occupied by religious actors in this process.

The reintegration of ex-combatants is often the weakest link of DDR for two reasons: first, it is not a priority of most governments and peacebuilding actors in the aftermath of war, where the needs of victims and of populations overall occupy the top places in decision and policy-makers' agendas; Second, the reintegration of ex-combatants is often neglected or even consciously rejected by the receiving populations, who, not rarely, object the idea of supporting the social reintegration of past violence perpetrators. Hence, in a world with a growing complexity of conflicts and with scarce sustainable peace settlements, the particular needs of ex-combatants can be disregarded quite easily. This thesis builds its argument on an opposite premise, the one that states that is the job of peace advocates to look at ex-combatants' specific demands through the lens of human security, for peacebuilding is entirely dependent on fruitful relations between former fighters and the communities they return to.

As previously stated, the present thesis does not claim that the inclusion of religious actors in DDR programming and implementation will inevitably lead to a completely successful reintegration of ex-combatants and will prevent recidivism and the resurgence of violence in every case; Rather, this research emphasises the need to study reintegration by resorting to religious actors' peaceful assets as very relevant variables in the process of upholding of human security. In other words, I argue that, where religion has a socially distinctive presence, religious-based reintegration should be a *sine qua non* condition to community security approaches. However, religious-based reintegration cannot, by itself, guarantee that peace is upheld in every circumstance. On the contrary, many other variables are relevant in peace processes, namely economic, political and broader social factors. Nevertheless, as religious circumstances have been notably missing from reintegration literature, this essay re-discovers the community security inputs brought by religious actors and suggests that their intersection with reintegration measures for ex-combatants can possibly lead to better DDR outcomes.

In regard to the case study, the present work does not claim that a religious-based reintegration should replace reintegration through other methods and in other societal realms, such as employment, skills development, different socialisation activities, among others. Simply put, I highlight the possible role that can be developed by religious actors in the reintegration of ex-combatants in South Sudan because it has been overlooked both by policy and academic literature concerning DDR. In fact, deeper research into the framing of DDR through human security would be important so as to understand which other people-centred approaches (besides the religious one) could contribute to sustain peace on the ground. Additionally, and given the general overlooking of religious actors by the IDDRS and by DDR academic literature, their ability to contribute to human security also should be subject to further studying.

To conclude, I contend that the status of DDR should be assessed not only through the analysis of the approaches and actors it incorporates, but also through consideration of those it neglects, as these omissions may significantly affect its capacity to support sustainable peace. I argue that this has often been the case with religious actors, whose potential to contribute to human security through localised approaches to the reintegration

of ex-combatants has systematically been overlooked or dismissed by DDR policy. This literature gap on religious actors contributing to reintegration ought to function as a wake-up call for DDR designers and implementers, so as to guarantee that the lack of proper reintegration of former fighters in their communities does not jeopardise long-lasting peace. Ultimately, minimising the human suffering of war-torn populations should be the goal of peacebuilding in general, and the goal of DDR processes in particular. If religious actors can contribute to reduce this suffering, then, DDR policymakers are doing something wrong by leaving them aside.

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