



**A GENDERED APPROACH TO DEMOBILIZATION: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CASES**

**INTRODUCTION**

The GOC-FARC peace talks, which began in August 2012, have reached a crucial phase in which the Sub-Commission on the End of the Conflict is defining Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs to be implemented at the much-anticipated moment when the FARC ceases armed activity. While there are many components to be taken into account in the design and implementation of DDR processes, crosscutting gender considerations are essential to ensuring that the DDR process is effective. In addition, the inclusion of women and their perspectives in the broader peacebuilding process is essential to the stability of peace, and research has even found that the degree of physical security that women experience in a country is a strong predictor of the solidity of peace there.<sup>i</sup> This spotlight will therefore focus on the kinds of gender considerations that must be integrated to the DDR process, and will examine cases in which a gendered approach to DDR has been applied.

**WOMEN IN THE FARC**

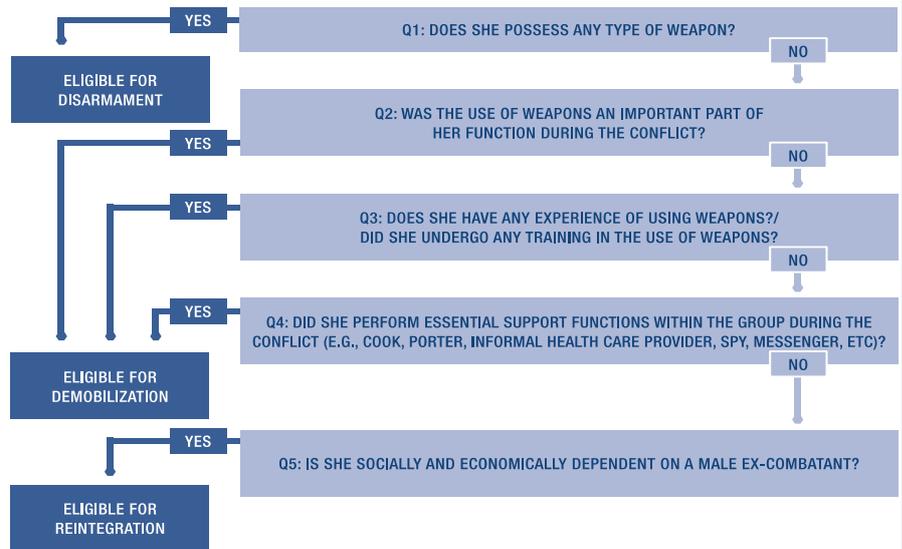
The target population for the DDR currently being designed are the FARC combatants currently active in the group. Within that population, women have a range of roles and experiences that make their needs and interests in the DDR process unique. Approximately 25% to 40% of the FARC are women, and their ages range similarly to those of men – from approximately eight years old to over 60.<sup>ii</sup> Although the FARC claims to have embraced “gender equality”, the group has specific requirements and roles to which women must adhere. In addition, these roles vary within the organization, with some blocs giving both men and women combat roles in which they are expected to carry a gun and fight, and others limiting them to cooking, nursing, and other stereotypically female non-combat chores.<sup>iii</sup> In addition, many women in the FARC are forced into marriage, sexual relations, and abortions (which are mandated in any case of pregnancy) among other forms of gender-based violence. While men are allowed to have as many sexual partners as they desire, women are judged by internal FARC justice mechanisms and can be punished – including with death – if considered too promiscuous.<sup>iv</sup> These gender-specific experiences and others mean that they will have specific and acute needs upon entering a DDR process.

**GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN DDR PROCESSES**

The International DDR Standards (IDDRS) highlight the following planning phases and activities as crucial to gender-responsive DDR:<sup>v</sup>

Phase	Activity	Notes
Negotiations	DDR planning and design	Discussions must include diverse female stakeholders
Assessment	National and/or international teams must assess the ex-combatant population in terms of gender needs	This should cover all areas, from demographic data to the various roles women had in the group, and possible types of gender-related victimization
Gender training	Personnel who will implement DDR must be trained in gender integration	Topics include: gender mainstreaming; human rights; gender-based and sexual violence; gender roles and relations; and gender identities.

Subsequently, gender must be taken into account in all phases of DDR. First, the following criteria must be taken into account when assessing women’s eligibility:<sup>vi</sup>



**DISARMAMENT**

Women often do not carry weapons in conflict, so one-person-one-weapon programs are not effective in including them in disarmament processes. However, they can be important sources of information about the location of hidden weapons, so female ex-combatants should be interviewed during disarmament, but separately from men. In addition, women in local communities can be sources of information about female combatants who have self-reintegrated and could be eligible for DDR. Support from local women is essential to the success of the DDR process, especially the later reintegration phase when women’s groups can play essential roles in maintaining social cohesion and integrating ex-combatants.<sup>vii</sup>

## DEMOBILIZATION AND CANTONMENT

Information campaigns calling ex-combatants to assemble for cantonment must take into account that women may have lower literacy than men and may not have access to the same information. At the site of cantonment, women should be given the option of living separately from their male partners, or in families.



Domestic duties such as fetching water and cooking should be split equally between men and women so as to introduce new and more balanced social roles. All toilets and other facilities must be separate and well lit, and other precautions must be taken to prevent gender-based violence in the cantonment area. Gender-specific healthcare services are also essential, both for physical health and for mental traumas and other effects of conflict and possibly gender-based and sexual violence. Finally, education about women's rights and other appropriate preparations for reintegration are essential at this time, as female ex-combatants look towards their new lives in civilian society.<sup>viii</sup>

## REINTEGRATION

When demobilization and cantonment have concluded, safe transport should be provided for women to return to the communities of their choice, with minimal risk of gender-based violence and re-recruitment along the way. Alternatives to humanitarian cash payments must be evaluated and offered, as such lump sums often disadvantage women, whose payments may be confiscated by male partners or commanders.<sup>ix</sup> Female ex-combatants must be informed of local reintegration support sites and provided transitional assistance, to ensure as smooth a transition as possible to community life.

In terms of social reintegration, psychosocial services must deal with a range of gender-specific issues, including the effects of gender-based violence and the adjustments that women must make to shed the roles they had in the illegal armed groups and reintegrate into society in such a way that they do not feel pressure to take on stereotypical functions, but rather can construct their new lives as they chose. With respect to economic reintegration, the options open to ex-combatant women should be equal to those available to men, to ensure their meaningful participation in the labor market and ability to provide for their families if they wish and need to do so. Income generation projects should cater to women's preferences, and should not offer them only stereotypical options such as beauty salons and sewing. Above all, economic reintegration options should empower women to maintain their financial independence. More broadly, reintegration strategies for women should be connected to post-conflict social development that aims to provide women increased social and economic opportunities.<sup>x</sup>

## RELEVANT EXAMPLES AND CONCLUSION

In Liberia in 2004, after initial issues implementing demobilization processes with a higher than expected number of ex-combatants, the DDR implementing agencies conducted an assessment of female ex-combatants' needs in the local context. The resulting DDR process incorporated a number of gender-sensitive elements to ensure inclusivity of ex-combatant women, including separate transport, separate sleeping and living quarters, and separate medical services. After low initial interest in participating, almost all female ex-combatants participated in the program.<sup>xi</sup> Meanwhile, in the same year in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, women were not combatants but were eligible for reintegration assistance if they had been supporters of the armed groups. Many more women than expected applied for assistance, and there were many problems with ensuring that the benefits reached them and were not intercepted by male partners or commanders.<sup>xii</sup> Finally, in Colombia, the AUC demobilizations of 2003 to 2006 did officially include a gender perspective, however some have called into question the effectiveness of this gendered approach in motivating women's buy-in to the process.<sup>xiii</sup> The Colombian Reintegration Agency (ACR) has gradually integrated a more effective gender approach to its reintegration program, of whose population 12% are women. This means that female ex-combatants are able to choose their income generation activities, receive childcare support in some territorial group offices, and are encouraged to maintain their financial independence in their civilian lives. It remains to be seen whether a strong gender perspective will be taken in the FARC DDR programs, but with so much at stake, the hope is that all vulnerable groups within the ex-combatant population will receive appropriate differential treatment.

<sup>i</sup> "The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States" Hudson et al., International Security, 2007. <http://bit.ly/1p8MAP9>

<sup>ii</sup> "El sufrimiento de mujeres combatientes y desmovilizadas." Verdad Abierta, January 27 2015. <http://www.verdadabierta.com/desmovilizados/5588-testimonios-de-mujeres-exguerrilleras-que-desertaron-de-grupos-armados-ilegales>

<sup>iii</sup> Focus group with female ex-FARC combatants, March 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> Verdad Abierta, Op. Cit.

<sup>v</sup> International DDR Standards 5.10 Women, Gender, and DDR. <http://unddr.org/uploads/documents/IDDRS%205.10%20Women,%20Gender%20and%20DDR.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> "Women in Armed Groups Are More Than Just an Exotic Novelty". Williams, K. The Institute for Inclusive Security, June 2015. <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/women-in-armed-groups-are-more-than-just-an-exotic-novelty/>

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> "Gender-sensitive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration", Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2009.

[http://www.gssrtraining.ch/images/stories/PDF/defensegender/example3\\_Liberia.pdf](http://www.gssrtraining.ch/images/stories/PDF/defensegender/example3_Liberia.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> "Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration." UNIFEM, October 2004.

[http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/media/publications/unifem/gettingitrightdoingitright\\_bt.pdf?v=1&d=20140917T101012](http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/media/publications/unifem/gettingitrightdoingitright_bt.pdf?v=1&d=20140917T101012)

<sup>xiii</sup> Mendez, A. Militarized Gender Performativity: Women and Demobilization in Colombia's FARC and AUC. University of Ontario, August 2012. <http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ddr-militarized-gender-performativity-women-and-demobilization-in-colombias-farc-and-auc.pdf>