# Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups

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# FOREWORD

**C**ommunities are increasingly recognized as playing a fundamental role in addressing the challenges and opportunities involved in the reintegration of individuals and groups exiting armed forces and groups. They expect to play a leading role in the reintegration process and also wish to benefit from it. They also seek to harness opportunities for sustainable peace and stability. The joint initiative's partners recognized that guidance on supporting community-based reintegration (CBR) could be further developed to complement the *United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*, the *Madrid Guiding Principles and Addendum on Foreign Terrorist Fighters* and other United Nations Security Council and regional organizations' normative frameworks.

The formulation of the *Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups* took over two years. It was born out of dozens of consultations with members of local civil society organizations from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, nearly 100 reintegration experts, practitioners and policy makers participated from United Nations agencies and a global fund engaged in supporting community-led initiatives to rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals and their families. In addition, detailed research was undertaken, and case studies collected from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Somalia to provide an evidence base for the Guidance Note.

This Guidance Note should be considered as a living document and not as a blueprint for CBR. The partners propose to review the Guidance Note periodically and to enrich it with further evidence, good practices and lessons learned. Those who contributed to the drafting of the Guidance Note were candid, generous, and articulate in describing reintegration experiences. It is the partners' hope that development of knowledge in this area will continue and that CBR approaches will be adopted widely to support the transition from combatant to civilian life and lives away from armed groups and conflict.

The partners' aspiration is that this Guidance Note will inspire and guide future CBR processes and will be useful to anyone participating in or supporting these processes.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**R**eintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups is the process through which they transition sustainably to live as civilian members of society in communities of their choice. The context in which reintegration takes place, the specific challenges, and opportunities, as well as the characteristics and background of those involved, could differ considerably. Depending on the circumstances, these reintegration processes may be supported in a variety of ways and at different levels – and at the same time. Most often, formal reintegration support is provided to individuals, based on an agreed eligibility to participate in a reintegration programme. However, it is increasingly argued that support to reintegration is most effective if community based.

This *Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups* will assist in designing, negotiating and managing support to reintegration processes. In fact, all reintegration processes are community-based, since one of the major aspects of reintegration is to reconnect as a civilian with the community and to play a constructive role in social life. The essence of community-based reintegration (CBR) support is then to assist and empower communities to 'absorb' the women, men, girls, and boys exiting armed forces and groups – socially as well as economically.

The Guidance Note is complementary to the current *UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)* and the *2018 Addenda to the 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles* in the context of armed groups designated as terrorist organizations.

This Guidance Note identifies various possible ways to support communities in increasing their ability to welcome and absorb former members of armed forces and groups. It also helps in creating an awareness of a number of dilemmas and risks involved in external support to CBR. It would for example help preventing harm to (potential and spontaneously ongoing) reintegration processes. And, importantly, the Guidance Note also assists in finding in specific settings the most appropriate balance between the provision of community-based and individual reintegration support. Providing support through the community could indeed mitigate possible negative perceptions in the community that ex-combatants are being rewarded through targeted individual reintegration benefits.

CBR could be supported by enhancing broader processes, as well as through more specific interventions. Such broader support could include:

- Measures to improve human security.
- Improving effectiveness and transparency of governance of communities and local government.
- Supporting community coherence, social acceptance and collaboration and trust among groups.
- Supporting transitional justice processes, social justice, protection of human rights, reconciliation, conflict transformation, social inclusion and political participation.
- Investing in economic revitalization, generating employment and other economic opportunities.
- Rehabilitating infrastructure which would particularly benefit the young, such as educational facilities, health centres, sport facilities and community centres.
- Supporting positive transformations in gender relations.

It should be noted that activities contributing to reintegration would not necessarily be labelled as 'reintegration support'. For example, important contributions to reintegration could be provided by interventions known as community violence reduction, prevention of violent extremism, stabilization programmes, recovery, or more generic development programmes from which former combatants can benefit. And increasing land access through demining campaigns could also have a positive impact on the reintegration of those returning to the community.

More specific CBR support usually involves assisting initiatives, systems and processes at the community level or helping to address priority needs of the community. Essential elements and aspects of CBR approaches are:

- Support benefits ex-combatants because they are members of a community, not based on their status as ex-combatant.
- Activities are community-led and community-owned, and thus based on the community's priorities.
- Gender-responsiveness, including protection and gender-transformative approaches.
- Youth-responsiveness, implying that young persons can influence the design and implementation of activities.
- Allocation and management of resources are transparent at the local level.
- Activities are contributing to broad local capacity development.
- Special attention is given to informing and preparing the community regarding the return of former members of armed forces and groups.
- Activities facilitate reconciliation and enhance the sense of justice and security.
- Activities undertaken are child sensitive.
- Activities of local and external partners are conflict-sensitive, in design and implementation.
- Communities are involved in monitoring of the activities and their impact.

Former combatants and other persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups should ideally play an active role in these community processes. In doing so, they acquire and enhance social and marketable skills and experience. Developing trust and stability would benefit the economic environment and create new opportunities. A positive environment and relations in the community would also help to prevent recruitment of combatants as well as reduce the risk of re-recruitment or recidivism. And CBR support also has the potential to prevent possible radicalisation and re-recruitment and thus weaken the basis for the rise of violent extremism and terrorism.

CBR support will be most effective if specific geographical areas are prioritised based on factors such as the relative number of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (expected) in the area. Among the initial steps in the support of CBR one should consider finding out what the relevant communities currently do to facilitate reintegration, assess the availability of resources and implementation capacity, and ensure that expectations of (support to) reintegration would be realistic.

Depending on the circumstances, CBR support may be effectively combined with other approaches in support of reintegration, such as:

- Entitlement-based dual- or multiple-targeting: including individuals with similar vulnerability profiles as the ex-combatants in the targeting, such as youth at risk of recruitment by armed groups or returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.
- Needs-based support: providing support to broader populations, addressing specific needs that particularly ex-combatants are likely to have.
- Support to ex-combatant-led initiatives, benefiting the broader community.

It is generally seen as positive that efforts to enhance the CBR of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups would also benefit the reintegration of other displaced populations.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**CAAFAG**      Children associated with armed forces and armed groups

**CBR**      Community-based reintegration

**CSO**      Civil society organization

**DDR**      Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

**ICRS**      Information, counseling and referral service(s)

**IDDRS**      UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards

**IDP**      Internally displaced person

**M&E**      Monitoring and evaluation

**NGO**      Non-governmental organization

**SGBV**      Sexual and gender-based violence

# INTRODUCTION

# Background

**D**esigning and managing support for the reintegration into civilian life of ex-combatants[1] and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups is generally challenging. While the length of the reintegration can vary depending on the individual and the context, it is most often a long process and has various social, economic, and political dimensions. It is also ultimately an individual process, with people making choices and undergoing significant changes in their lives. Meanwhile, for various reasons those responsible for the planning, design and implementation of reintegration support often find themselves under considerable time pressure to show progress and results.

The specific circumstances of the exit from conflict have implications for reintegration processes and the ways in which people can best be supported. The contexts in which reintegration takes place are usually dynamic: the various actors and stakeholders in the process differ in each case and are not always clearly identifiable. The reintegration of former members of armed forces and groups may follow formal and verifiable disarmament and demobilization as part of the implementation of a peace agreement, or it may follow a military victory of one of the conflicting parties. Demobilization and reintegration may take place after the end of an inter- or intra-state conflict, or former members of armed forces and groups may be disengaging, returning and reintegrating without having been formally released from their armed group[2] and/or while a violent conflict is still active. In some cases, combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, and supporters were recruited under pressure or even abducted. Combatants and supporters may have been injured and therefore be unable or unwilling to continue their active membership of an armed group. Finally, even within groups and/or in the same settings, individuals may differ considerably – in terms of age, gender, and length of time in the armed structure, as well as in terms of needs, skills, ambitions, and social networks (among other factors).

In the context of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), formal reintegration support is most often provided to individuals based on their eligibility or agreed criteria, to participate in a reintegration programme. These individuals are usually (implicitly or explicitly) provided with some type of entitlement to a certain reintegration support. There is increasing criticism of this model in numerous fora along with arguments that reintegration support needs to be community-based to be fair and effective. However, there is no clear definition of the term 'community-based', and actual experiences of supporting community-based reintegration (CBR) are rarely rigorously assessed and documented.[3]

# Purpose

This Guidance Note on CBR aims primarily to assist those involved in the design, negotiation, and management of support for the reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. It provides a background and basic concepts, essential dos and don'ts, checklists, and specific examples to explore the potential of different approaches to supporting CBR. It also aims to provide guidance for identifying, in each specific setting, the most appropriate balance between the provision of community-based and individual reintegration support. It takes into consideration the needs of specific groups, including men, women, and young people as well as the capacities these people bring.

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1   The term 'ex-combatant' is used to reflect the fact that demobilized people can be former government soldiers or former members (fighters) of armed (government-supported/endorsed and opposition) groups.

2   This is usually called self-demobilization.

3   References to CBR experiences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and Somalia in this paper are mostly drawn from Kingma et al., 2022, a study conducted as background for the preparation of this Guidance Note.

## Audience

The Guidance Note was written for use by those working in institutions involved in shaping, funding and/or managing support for reintegration. These may include government institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) entities (including peace operations) and funding agencies, as well as their national and international implementing partners.

At the same time, the Guidance Note is not only meant for those working in efforts explicitly labelled as DDR programmes. Many others in public and private organizations and CSOs can also have significant impacts on reintegration processes through their activities. Moreover, the considerations and guidance provided are relevant both in settings where the UN or its entities are implicated and where only national authorities and national stakeholders are involved. Politicians, community leaders and other community members will also benefit from a better understanding of the issues raised and options suggested in this Guidance Note.

## How to use this Guidance Note

The guide is written in line with the current *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)*. The most relevant IDDRS modules – 2.40 Reintegration as Part of Sustaining Peace and 4.30 Reintegration – provide a broader context and guidance for reintegration support, as well as additional ideas, approaches, and considerations of what to do (and not to do) in certain circumstances. This guide should therefore be used alongside the IDDRS. The guide should be also a useful complement to the *2018 Addenda to the 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles* in the context of armed groups designated as terrorists.

This guide aims to ensure that readers will remember that communities and their members are usually the primary actors facilitating and supporting – or obstructing – reintegration processes.

It is not a blueprint for providing CBR support. Any reintegration support measure needs to be designed and implemented to address specific challenges in a specific setting, recognising what reintegration opportunities are realistic and available. Planning and implementing reintegration support requires – at a minimum – clear objectives, an open mind and understanding of the context, flexibility, realism and the active involvement of key stakeholders.

The guide can be consulted at the outset of planning and used during discussions to assess challenges, develop realistic objectives and establish key principles for the provision of support, possible risks, and the operational aspects of planned initiatives. It will help to build consensus and to make decisions about the approaches to be adopted.

The guide identifies several concrete interventions to support communities to increase their ability to welcome and absorb ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. It should help to create awareness of the various dilemmas and risks involved in external support for reintegration, and presumably do no harm to individuals and to (active or potential) reintegration processes.

# SUPPORTING REINTEGRATION

# Reintegration: definition and perspectives

The revised IDDRS defines reintegration as:

> **"The process through which ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups transition sustainably to live as civilian members of society in communities of their choice. Reintegration takes place at the individual, family and community levels and has social, psychosocial, economic, political and security dimensions. Reintegration processes are part of the local, national, and regional recovery and development, with the international community playing a supporting role if requested".[4]**

However, some of the policy discourse on reintegration or reintegration programme design continues to (wrongly) suggest that ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are 'being reintegrated' – that they themselves are not the primary actor in the reintegration process. The IDDRS definition clearly implies that reintegration is the process through which these people go after they have disengaged from armed forces or groups. It does not necessarily need to be supported by a programme or other specific measures: it is primarily an individual process of returning to a fully civilian life. Individuals themselves make the effort to go through the transition, (re)connect with the community as civilians and (re-)establish a viable livelihood.[5]

Key aspects of reintegration include:

- A sufficiently safe environment for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. While security can be a general condition and perception, it can also have specific meanings and implications for certain individuals or groups, including female combatants, children and youth, and the families of ex-combatants. Ex-members of armed groups may fear for their security due to stigmatization and distrust in the community. Moreover, a sense of security among existing community members is critical for successful reintegration.

- Women, men, girls, and boys exiting armed forces or groups do not always return to, and reintegrate in, the community from which they originate. A significant number may not be able to do so or opt to settle elsewhere. For example, some may choose to go to areas in which (real or perceived) better employment opportunities exist and/or prefer the relative anonymity of urban environments, especially if they have security concerns and fear stigmatization in their community of origin. It is also worth noting that some ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups returning to civilian life have never really left their communities in the first place (as is often the case with local militia members or part-time combatants).

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4   IAWG-DDR, revised IDDRS Module 4.30 on Reintegration (forthcoming).
5   This will not necessarily be one (formal or informal) 'job'. Such livelihoods are often dynamic and could be based on various sources of income.

- While people may initially have a clear preference about where they want to reintegrate, the process does not always work out as foreseen. Some ex-combatants or persons formerly associated with armed forces or groups might first choose to reintegrate in an urban area but decide to return to their family/village in a rural area after experiencing difficulties – or the reverse. These shifting preferences and processes of trial and error need to be acknowledged and require understanding and flexibility within any organised reintegration support.
- Finally, returning ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups can contribute positively to the local economy. They may, for example, bring new knowledge, skills, and ideas, as well as networks with people and businesses elsewhere, which can help to develop economic activity, including trade, in the reintegration community.

## Reintegration support

Effective support for reintegration processes requires a context-specific approach that responds to actual circumstances, needs, risks and opportunities. The needs, skills and ambitions of those reintegrating must be considered. Policymakers and programme planners should use relevant socio-economic information and thorough conflict-, gender- and age-sensitive analysis to help build consensus with various stakeholders on the most appropriate approach – or combination of approaches – to reintegration support. The more the approach is based on evidence, the more likely it is that the reintegration support provided will be effective and efficient.

The circumstances in which reintegration takes place can differ considerably – for example, they may follow either an intra-state conflict or an inter-state confrontation. However, reintegration processes usually occur in a setting where a violent conflict – long or short – has ended, and where political processes are taking over from violent confrontation, generally as the outcome of some form of peace settlement or an outright military victory. In certain settings, though, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups may reintegrate into civilian life during ongoing conflict. The particular context will determine the most appropriate approach for providing reintegration support and the roles played by different actors and entities. For example, a peace agreement may contain principles or specific elements of reintegration support to be provided and refer to some form of eligibility for individual support.

Ideally, broad guidance for specific initiatives in support of reintegration will be reflected in a national reintegration policy and/or strategy. Relevant national institutions need to ensure coherence and consistency in reintegration support and to provide clear public information. The perspectives, needs and ambitions of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups need to be the starting point for the design of policies and/or strategies and the planning, design, and implementation of (external) support measures. Similarly, the perspectives and interests of receiving[6] communities should be an important consideration in the formulation of reintegration support. In order to be gender-responsive/gender-transformative,[7] reintegration support must consider and address the (often different and gendered) rights, responsibilities, opportunities, vulnerabilities and needs of women, men, girls and boys throughout the process.

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6   The term 'receiving community' is preferred over 'host community', since it is usually the community from which former members of armed groups or armed forces originate. The term does not preclude the fact that some were already living (most of the time) in the communities into which they are reintegrating.

7   For more detail, see the IDDRS, notably modules 4.30 (Reintegration) and 5.10 (Women, Gender and DDR).

# Other factors affecting reintegration

Factors, policies, and programmes outside the sphere of specific reintegration support often have a major impact on reintegration processes. These include:

- Acceptance of the returnees (including children) into the receiving community/society. Those returning will not normally be a homogeneous group, and the (re)acceptance into the community of female ex-combatants, for example, may differ from that of their male colleagues (including due to prevailing gender norms). Ex-members of armed groups designated as terrorist organizations and families with real or perceived affiliation may also face additional difficulties.

> Several cases have demonstrated that if communities do not welcome returnees, supporting economic reintegration will have little impact. In Sierra Leone, combatants who fought in units which had been highly abusive towards civilian populations faced more difficult paths to reintegration. In northern Uganda, women and girls who bore children while with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) faced particularly brutal stigmatization and rejection. In the mid-1990s, cases were reported of Ugandan communities not accepting the return of women from other regions of the country where they had married national army soldiers that were based there. Similar problems occurred in Nigeria when women returned with children fathered by members of Boko Haram.[8] These children, referred to as 'bad blood', were at a considerable risk of rejection, abandonment, and violence.

- The general security situation and perceptions of security.
- The economic environment and existing or potential income-generating and livelihood opportunities.

> Some of the most successful reintegration has taken place in environments of economic recovery and not necessarily due to the best (resourced) reintegration programmes. For example, the successful reintegration of former soldiers in south-western Uganda in the mid-1990s was in great part due to the fact that the local economy was performing well thanks to security, public investment and favourable commodity prices. Following the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia, ex-combatants in the region benefitted considerably from the government's general reconstruction policies.

- Access to basic and social services. Reintegration will normally be somewhat easier in communities with functional health care (including comprehensive reproductive health, maternal health and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and recovery services), education and financial services.
- Protection of land rights and other property rights, including those for women.

Important contributions to reintegration may also be provided by other interventions, such as reinsertion, community violence reduction, prevention of violent extremism, stabilization programmes, cash-for-work projects, reconciliation support, and other more generalised development programmes from which ex-combatants can benefit. Increasing land access through demining campaigns can also have a positive impact on reintegration. Where the overall purpose of such initiatives is to contribute to viable community

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8   International Alert and UNICEF, 2016.

development, community security, increased stability, and the processes of reintegration into civilian life, they will also contribute to the success of reintegration. Elaborating effective reintegration support must therefore focus on the ultimate objective and include all relevant factors and actions – including those not specifically targeting or labelled as reintegration.

| Ex Combatants Targetted | Community Awareness | 50/50 Targeting | Community Benefits | Community Driven |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

In addition, it should not be assumed that ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are all starting reintegration from scratch. Designing a reintegration programme requires sufficient knowledge of any economic activities in which ex-combatants and their families are already involved as well as the possible constraints they are facing. For example, in cases of reintegration into a rural environment, an understanding of ongoing agricultural activities and land access is essential. It is not uncommon that combatants and persons associated with armed forces and groups who are being demobilized already have ongoing economic activities, for example in association with family members. For example, there have been unfortunate situations in which people were delayed in a demobilization centre "being prepared for reintegration" when they were needed on their land for a critical sowing, planting, or harvest season.

Finally, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups usually know their own reintegration challenges best and may also have considerable capacities to contribute to a reintegration programme. They could be involved in various ways, from consultations to staffing and directing (elements of) the programme. For example, formerly abducted children in northern Uganda have been actively involved in the management of reintegration support following their own rehabilitation.

# COMMUNITY-BASED REINTEGRATION (CBR)

# Community

I n discussions of CBR, a broad concept of community is used: a group of people living in the same place and/or having particular values, attitudes, needs and interests in common. Community members usually share a certain level of identity and experiences.

At the same time, while location is important for CBR – an essential element being to bring various groups together in joint activities and processes – that does not mean that members of communities who are in different locations cannot support each other. Meanwhile, differences will naturally exist within each community, including in terms of the needs and interests of sub-groups such as women, men, young people, and children (girls and boys), and people with different abilities.

In fact, all reintegration processes are community-based since a major aspect of an individual's reintegration is to reconnect as a civilian with the community and to play a constructive role in social life.

# Beneficiaries of CBR support

**Figure 1. Community-Based Reintegration (CBR)**

| Community Located | Community Driven | Community Owned |
|---|---|---|
| Reintegration support taking place in communities with large numbers of ex-combatants | Community committees/platforms driving the preparation of reintegration assistance | The reintegration process becomes the responsibility of the community, and the community delivers on that responsibility |

The crux of CBR support, then, is to assist and empower communities to 'absorb' the women, men, girls, and boys exiting armed forces and groups – socially as well as economically. The communities to be supported are the broader civilian communities into which these people will reintegrate, and which will ultimately include them. CBR support enhances the ability of these communities to receive ex-combatants and/or facilitate their transition from being a (part/full-time) combatant to a well-accepted, social, and productive member of the community. In some contexts, providing support to and through the community can also mitigate the negative perception among community members that ex-combatants are being rewarded through reintegration benefits.

CBR support for communities therefore in turn makes it easier for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to live in safety and be well accepted in their community of choice, participate in community affairs, and have a viable livelihood. The community environment and relationships can also help to prevent (re-)recruitment of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and reduce the risk of recidivism.

CBR support activities do not include any individually targeted reintegration support and therefore do not entail any eligibility criteria nor associated verification and registration processes for individuals[9]. However, the activities can be – and usually are – combined with such individual support, either based on (explicit or implicit) entitlements for each eligible and registered participant in a reintegration programme or on the specific individual needs of conflict-affected persons.

## The reintegration process

**Figure 2. Community-Based Reintegration Process**
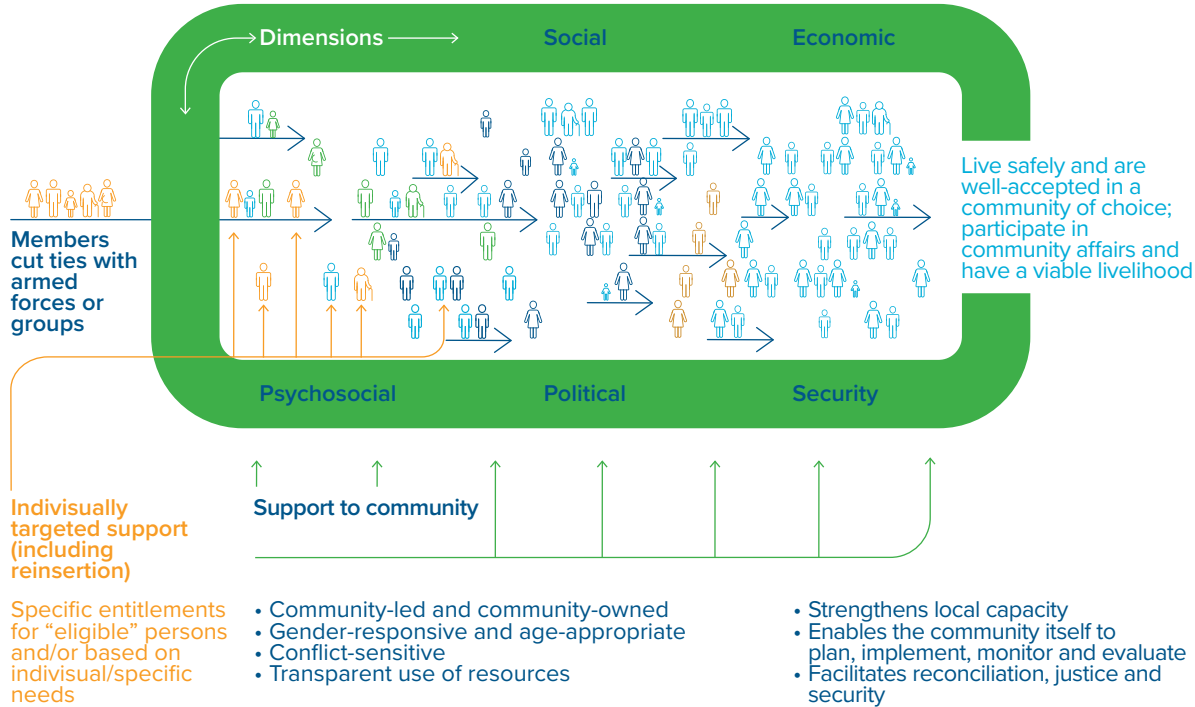


The above figure shows how individuals (re-)enter the community and integrate. As they move through the process over time (from left to right and from green to blue), their former association with armed forces or groups fades and disappears. They live in safety and are well-accepted in the community, participate in community affairs and have a viable livelihood. The various dimensions of the process (the green border) – social, economic, psychosocial, political and security – are non-linear and are supported/facilitated at the community level, including with support for the community itself. Individually targeted support is shown in purple, provided especially at the beginning of the process.

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9    There are criteria for CBR support activities– for example, CBR support is most effective when specific geographical areas are prioritized, with factors including the relative number of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (expected) in the area (see section G).

# CBR support activities

Activities that support CBR could support all aspects of the reintegration process – social, economic, and political. CBR support usually assists initiatives, systems, and processes at the community level and/or helps to address the priority needs of the community – as defined by the community. As far as possible, communities should be involved through inclusive and transparent gender- and conflict-sensitive processes.

The expenditure of resources at the community level can help to revive the private sector and increase the availability of economic opportunities, among other positive impacts, benefiting both ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and other community members. Where improvements are visible and shared among all or most community members, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are more likely to be more easily welcomed into the community.

CBR works both to establish livelihoods and, crucially, to (re)connect ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups with the community. Social networks and connections between different members and levels of society can bolster the resilience and coping mechanisms needed to navigate through reintegration processes, particularly in contexts where insecurity is high, and the economy is still depressed. The active inclusion of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups in communities also reduces the likelihood that they will re-mobilize or re-engage. As shown in Figure 1 above, during successful reintegration an individual's identity as a former member/associate of an armed force or group will gradually reduce, or even disappear, as their mind-set transforms. This is especially important for those who have been involved in violence and extremist activities.

CBR support activities can include:

- Support for events or processes that strengthen community coherence, social acceptance, and collaboration and trust among various groups.
- Measures to enhance security and justice.
- Investments in support of inclusive economic revitalization, which generates employment and other economic opportunities.
- The rehabilitation of critical infrastructure or enhanced service provision in areas to which ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups return, also increasing employment opportunities.

# Actors

Activities supporting CBR are ideally initiated and overseen by a reasonably inclusive group of community representatives. The learning processes involved in decision-making, management and oversight have the potential to help strengthen both community governance and local government, and to support and foster peacebuilding and social cohesion at these levels. Other community members (men, women, and young people), representing specific interests, could also be involved in the process.

Ideally, too, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups – men, women, and young people – should play an active role in these community processes. In doing so, they could acquire and/or enhance social and marketable skills and experience, and their involvement could help to build trust and 'normalise' their lives and behaviour. This trust and stability would further benefit the economic environment and create new opportunities.

However, the processes of community decision-making and management of resources entail a few significant risks. Social and power relations within the community and between groups might make decisions on certain initiatives and priorities difficult. Collaboration in management and oversight is often missing. These risks should be clearly assessed, and mitigation measures developed, at the outset.

Other actors potentially involved in supporting CBR include:

- Community–Based Organization (CBOs), CSOs and other local or national organizations and associations
- Entrepreneurs and other employers
- Government agencies at various levels
- Implementing agencies (under contract)
- Entities of the UN system
- International donor agencies.

| ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CBR SUPPORT | |
|---|---|
| | CBR support benefits ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups because they are members of their communities, not based on their status as ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. |
| | Activities are community-led and community-owned and therefore based on the community's priorities. |
| | Gender responsiveness, including protection and gender-transformative approaches,[10] is central to the design and implementation of all activities. |
| | Youth responsiveness, meaning that young ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (women and men) can influence the design and implementation of activities in a meaningful way. |
| | The allocation and management of resources are transparent at the local level. |
| | Activities contribute to broader local capacity development (including of local government and non-state organizations). |
| | Communities are informed and prepared ahead of the return/entry of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, enhancing their ability to receive them. |
| | Activities facilitate reconciliation and the re-establishment of relationships and enhance the sense of justice and security. |
| | Activities are child-sensitive and in the best interest of each child. |
| | The activities of local and external partners are conflict-sensitive in design and implementation and do no harm.[11] |
| | Communities are involved in the monitoring of activities and their impact. |

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10 "Gender-transformative approaches are programmes and interventions that create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and address power inequities between persons of different genders." Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, 2014.

11 "Conflict sensitivity increases the likelihood of sustaining peace … by limiting harm that may be inadvertently caused by UN activities and identifying areas where activities can contribute to peace, conflict sensitivity contributes to conflict prevention and conflict mitigation and may contribute to the reduction and resolution of ongoing violent conflict, and reduces the risk that contexts that have experienced violent conflict will relapse." UN Sustainable Development Group, 2022. "Do no harm" is a standard principle of DDR (IDDRS, 2019: Module 2.10 – UN Approach to DDR (p. 22)) and thus also of CBR and CBR support.

# PREPARING FOR REINTEGRATION SUPPORT

**R**eintegration support is often provided in a complex environment of instability, insecurity, limited economic opportunities, lack of access to basic services and high levels of poverty. In some cases, the conflict in the context of which reintegrating ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups were mobilized is still active. In all these settings, reintegration is often challenging in terms of social acceptance, as violent conflict has affected levels of confidence and mutual trust in the country and within communities. Prevailing economic conditions may make it difficult for all to (re-)establish livelihoods, find salaried employment, or start a business. Furthermore, the personal and social conditions that may have led or pushed ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to join the conflict and/or extremist groups usually still exist.

Moreover, reintegration does not always follow a strictly defined demobilization or disarmament process. Combatants may have left the military structure in a variety of ways, including through formal demobilization, spontaneous demobilization, individual or group defection or capture. In a given context there could therefore be both ex-combatants who have gone through a formal process and those that have 'demobilized' themselves. At the same time, of course, non-combatants are also often trying to reintegrate into communities following the termination of a violent conflict.

It is important to note that in some cases, links may still exist with active armed groups. Women, men, young people, girls, and boys who have formally exited armed groups may remain associated with the groups to which they belonged, creating a persistent risk of re-recruitment.

However, while the political and socio-economic settings and reintegration challenges are usually complex, efforts to support reintegration processes themselves do not necessarily need to be complicated or sophisticated. In some settings, even a relatively simple set of support activities could (begin to) have substantial impact(s). Reintegration support should be designed to be as simple as possible while remaining effective and efficient in providing what is required.

CBR initiatives can contribute to strengthening local governance structures, which in turn can be instrumental to the overall resolution of the conflict. They can also help create the conditions for addressing grievances, increasing the likelihood of a more successful, complete disbandment of armed groups (whether as part of an official DDR process or not).

## First steps

As soon as provision of organised support for reintegration is being considered, key local, national and possibly international stakeholders should convene and work together towards a broad consensus on the most appropriate type of support in the specific circumstances, the expected results or what in that particular context would be considered successful reintegration, basic challenges, principles and entry points.

Agreement on the best approach needs to be based on a good understanding of the specific situation and its dynamics, including key challenges and opportunities. This will require the collection and analysis of relevant information (see also **Collecting essential information**, below), as well as consultation with representatives of various stakeholders, interest groups and other experts. Several discussions should be held to address critical questions and generate ideas. It should be remembered that approaches which work or are required in one setting might not be useful or necessary in another.[12] Designing reintegration support is naturally more challenging if the (threat of) violence has not fully ended, as gathering information, and making assessments are more difficult.

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12   For example, while international experts should share their experience of other contexts, it is not wise to simply "copy and paste" activities and approaches from previous assignments in another country.

## DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRE DIFFERENT TYPES OF REINTEGRATION SUPPORT

General guidance for the design of reintegration programmes is provided in IDDRS Module 4.30. Such guidance is applicable to reintegration as part of DDR processes but can also be useful to situations where armed groups are designated as terrorist organizations. However, as the IDDRS acknowledges, each situation where ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups return to civilian life requires a specific approach and an appropriate balance between various programme components. For example:

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|---|---|
| | In cases where ex-combatants and persons formerly associated have (allegedly) committed crimes or even atrocities in their own home region, such as with many former fighters of the LRA in northern Uganda, or former members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in liberated areas, criminal and/or transitional justice processes play an important role, and local acceptance and reconciliation processes will require special attention. |
| | Reintegration support can be provided even where the term 'DDR' is not used by national governments – for example for the support for defecting al-Shabaab fighters in Somalia, or the work done by the Amnesty Commission in Uganda. |
| | Planning for any possible reintegration support in South Sudan has been seriously hampered by persisting conflicts, general insecurity, and a lack of significant economic opportunities. |
| | The numbers of those reintegrating may vary considerably. In Mozambique in the early 1990s, numbers were very high and concentrated in specific areas, while in 2019-20 until this time they were relatively low. Since the unit costs of reintegration support tend to be higher when lower numbers are spread over large areas, these two situations required different approaches even though they were within the same country. |

The most appropriate approach will take into account the combination of measures to support reintegration that are possible and most effective, and how interventions will address various needs and requirements (including those related to culture, age and gender).

Concretely, first steps should include:

- Establishing and discussing what men and women in the relevant communities are currently doing to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

  Most community members are usually aware of the challenges of the reintegration process for those reintegrating, as well as for the community. It is likely that most communities already use existing mechanisms to assist or facilitate reintegration, including conflict resolution mechanisms; rules and procedures for ownership and transfer of property; community work; community security; cleansing rituals; and welcoming ceremonies. It is also important to be aware of activities and plans in the private sector.

- Investigating how community dynamics might hinder reintegration, for example due to structural exclusion, mistrust, or longstanding grievances.[13]
- Establishing, in detail, what – if anything – has (or will have) been agreed regarding the provision of reintegration support under a possible peace agreement or other (negotiated) official settlement. This could include agreements made at the local or regional level enabling return and reintegration (such as the 30 local-level peace agreements facilitated by UNDP Iraq).
- Assessing resources and implementation capacity to ensure that the timeframe and available resources are sufficient to make a significant and timely contribution to reintegration processes.
- Ensuring that expectations of (support for) reintegration are realistic, especially in fragile situations after (long) wars, when the economy and governance capacity are usually in a poor state and security is limited, with ongoing violence and disruptions to society.

## Institutions involved in providing support

The institutions involved in providing reintegration support may also be different in each setting. Which of these institutions play a lead role depends on the situation and dynamic. A central government entity is normally in charge of political and strategic oversight and policy coordination, guiding coherence and consistency in all efforts to support reintegration processes and providing clear public information. In most settings, the government would also oversee the technical implementation and management of any operations, as well as the monitoring of reintegration support.

The selection of institutions involved in implementing support for CBR also depends on the specific situation, including the realistic options and capacities available. The selection process should be sensitive to the political (peace) process in the country or region. Potential impacts on conflict should be explored thoroughly (even if some form of peace agreement is already in place), including whether the planned incentives and patterns of collaboration among institutions will have a positive impact.

In most situations, the trust and legitimacy engendered in communities by CSOs and CBOs mean they are well placed in the development and implementation of CBR support. They tend to have significant experience in communities where reintegration processes unfold, as well as a deep understanding of community-specific reintegration challenges faced by those exiting armed forces and groups, including the underlying drivers of local tensions, mobilization, and possible violent extremism. They may also have access to the most marginalized community members and individuals with specific reintegration needs (such as young women and men, women, girls and boys, and people with disability). Indeed, organizations of women and young people should be closely involved throughout the process, from planning and sensitization through implementation and monitoring.

The role of CSOs and CBOs should therefore normally be more than that of a 'subcontracted implementing partner' – for example, they might assist national and local government entities to provide oversight for activities that support CBR – and they should be engaged early in the design of any CBR support.

The institutions leading CBR support need to have sufficient links with (higher levels of) government and international partners to:

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13   For example, UNDP conducted a study in Iraq on the reintegration of families perceived to have had ties to the ISIL, including the possible stigmatization they may face when attempting to return to their communities. The study also reviews a range of state- and local-level mechanisms for facilitating their reintegration. (UNDP, 2021).

- Ensure adherence to the agreed policies and principles
- Ensure operational coordination
- Ensure sufficient funding and be accountable for its use
- Mobilize operational capacity (if required)
- Learn from the experience of external development agencies.



**Supporting CSOs engaged in CBR: Peace by Africa**

Peace by Africa (the Africa Wide Civil Society Network on Inclusive Reintegration and Community Based Peace Building Strategies) operates in the Lake Chad Basin and Great Lakes regions to support CSOs working on reintegration support.

Peace by Africa helps to build the technical capacities of CSOs in various facets of CBR, including reconciliation; mental health and psychosocial support; disengagement and prevention of (re-) radicalization; strategic partnerships; and dialogue with relevant government actors. It facilitates peer-to-peer learning based on the field experience of CSOs in the network that are helping to address reintegration challenges in communities.

The network supports advocacy by civil society with national governments and the international community on the added value of inclusive and comprehensive approaches to reintegration support. It also helps to integrate civil society expertise and knowledge on reintegration, informal transitional justice practices and approaches to the prevention of violent extremism into the formal security, criminal justice, and rule of law sector.

## Individual and/or community-based support?

One of the challenges in designing and implementing reintegration programmes is to address the specific needs of women, men, girls, and boys leaving armed forces and groups without turning them into a (real or perceived) privileged group. The ways in which reintegration support is provided need to avoid creating resentment within wider communities or society and straining a community's limited resources. This will have an impact on the choice of individual and/or CBR support.

Reintegration programmes often include an element of targeted individual reintegration support, which provides ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups with a certain entitlement to concrete assistance, based on verifiable eligibility criteria. In countries where ex-combatants are held in high esteem (such as in post-independence Eritrea in the 1990s), such targeted support would have been more acceptable to the broader community (and less likely to cause resentment) than where their reputation is much lower (as more recently in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo). Where the line between who has and who has not been a combatant is harder to draw, justifying targeted individual support is also more problematic.

Individually targeted support may be most appropriate where:

- It can 'buy time' for general reintegration conditions to improve and for other (broader) support measures to become available.
- Not addressing the needs of ex-combatants in a timely manner may mean they cause trouble' and become a threat to community (and wider) security.
- It is cheaper and easier to deliver than community-based support or the broader economic revitalization of the areas in which ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (would) live, such as where small numbers of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are reintegrating over a very large geographical area.

CBR may be most appropriate where:

- Ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are only one of the groups requiring assistance after a violent conflict. Conflict-affected populations, including returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) may in fact be much larger than that of ex-combatants, and support programmes for other groups may be as great a priority.
- Ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are likely to be seen as guilty of causing violence and committing crimes regardless of their actual criminal responsibility (depending on whether they were foot soldiers or commanders, engaged voluntarily or were forced, or whether it is even feasible to collect battlefield evidence or not in any given context). Particularly where community members have been direct victims of violence, targeted assistance may appear unfair if not accompanied by support for the survivors of violence. If only ex-combatants are (seen as being) assisted, this may create discontent and undermine reconciliation and social reintegration efforts.
- In some cases, it is not practical or even possible for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to be identified and verified, since their specific status is not always clear and recognized. Some ex-combatants might have spontaneously returned to their communities of origin or choice, making any official verification potentially counterproductive or even dangerous. Some women and children in particular may fail to benefit if reintegration support is provided to individuals based on their role as combatants in armed groups during the conflict. Equally, combatants who were "part-timers" (who shifted between their role in an armed group and their regular livelihood) also risk losing out if support is provided on an individual basis.
- No clear and formal demobilization process is in place. CBR can support general processes of reintegration without the need for complex, sensitive and time-consuming decisions on eligibility and entitlements in situations where lines can be difficult to draw or are even arbitrary.
- It is a challenge for programmes to pass on entitlements to the widows/widowers or children of combatants in cases where the combatant has died.
- There has been mass surrender. CBR can take some of the pressure off registration systems and established physical facilities and (begin to) absorb those surrendering.

In addition, there are significant disadvantages to targeted assistance compared to CBR. Targeted individual support can encourage individuals to join an armed group and commanders to allow their units to grow despite a forthcoming demobilization in order to benefit from individual reintegration support. CBR does not provide these perverse incentives. It is also more difficult for the leaders of (former) armed groups to 'tax' CBR support than individually targeted economic assistance. In most cases, too, targeted individual assistance reaches families through male ex-combatants that has an adverse impact on its actual use and

is thus not always be in the best interest of the family. Ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups may also face a period during which they are waiting for their entitlement to individual assistance. Finally, when ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are clearly identifiable – as they might be if they are visibly part of a targeted assistance programme – there is a risk of stigmatization or reprisals from the community, which could particularly affect women and girls due to traditional gender norms in the community of return.

In contrast, CBR means that, from the moment they (discover they) are demobilized, people may focus on the actual reintegration process and their own responsibilities rather than on gaining access to assistance. This also means that expectations are easier to manage.

Given these disadvantages and the potential of community-based approaches, an informed discussion and decision-making process should take place to assess which reintegration support options best fit the specific context of each support programme being designed. It should be noted that while CBR support is not based on individual entitlements or needs, but rather bolsters the ability of communities to 'absorb' ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, it can still contain elements of targeting. For example, CBR support can focus resource allocation and other assistance in areas that are (foreseen to be) welcoming relatively large numbers of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, or facilitate access by ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to relevant services, development projects and economic opportunities through an information, counselling and referral services (ICRS) (more information is provided below).

## Collecting essential information

External support for CBR requires a good understanding of the conflict and local community dynamics, including gender roles and power relations. The conflict and mobilization could have religious, ethnic, and socio-economic drivers, potentially including urban-rural components. These can make rebuilding trust particularly challenging (for example in areas with minorities).

All CBR support therefore needs to be preceded by a thorough analysis of the various factors (potentially) influencing reintegration, including a combined conflict- and gender-analysis. In most cases, it should also include a stakeholder mapping and community perception survey that investigates the perceptions of different groups within the community (women, men, girls, boys), and potentially also different groups among ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. Other methods and sources might include participative dialogues, focus groups and consultations with community organizations. Information on ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups could be acquired during registration of potential participants in a programme (although this could raise expectations that individual support is forthcoming), special surveys and other assessments of individuals, as appropriate. Data will need to be collected on the profiles and ambitions of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and community members, reintegration opportunities and constraints.

Although CBR does not include targeted individual assistance, it is nevertheless crucial to understand the ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups who are reintegrating. Important information[14] includes:

- Relevant demographic and socio-economic data, such as gender, age, family composition, economic dependencies, location, literacy, education and skills.
- Whether these profiles differ significantly from that of other members of the community into which they are reintegrating.
- Specific needs (e.g. medical, psychological, or related to reproductive health, disabilities, or drug use/addiction).
- Motivations for joining the armed group/forces and whether these have changed.
- Length of time under arms and/or away from their home region.
- Ongoing economic activities during the period under arms/away from their home region.
- Whether any were part-time combatants (e.g. as was/is quite common in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, and Sudan).
- The role(s) they played during their involvement in the armed conflict.
- How gender norms shaped attitudes towards social and psychological well-being, employment, and livelihoods.
- How their sexual orientation and/or gender identity might affect their reintegration process.
- Whether SGBV occurred between or within armed groups and/or against members of the community in which they resided or reintegration will occur.
- Whether they were radicalized and if so how that continues to affect them.
- Current ambitions and resources, including access to land (for men and women). For example, in Colombia, some ex-combatants see the return to civilian life as the opportunity to start a family, which would imply additional significant changes in their lives, needs and relationship with communities.
- Specific needs of female ex-combatants and women formerly associated with armed forces and groups, including women with children.
- Specific needs of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups (some may have significant family responsibilities).
- Specific needs of men and boys, including in relation to whether and how masculinities have shifted (e.g. have they become more violent; have they been militarized; how do they view their role as fathers and partners?).
- Whether reintegration is a matter of returning to a 'previous life', and feelings about the situation if there is little to return to, and/or whether returnees were so young when they left that they now have to start their life more or less afresh.
- The risk of re-recruitment.
- Whether networks exist among (former) combatants (e.g. ethnic, patronage, criminal) that might have a positive or negative impact on reintegration. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there have often been blurred lines between loyalties before and after the demobilization of armed groups and their involvement in illegal (economic) activities, while former Renamo fighters in Mozambique maintained close networks long after their demobilization in 1994.
- The legal status of the ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. Who might receive amnesty for crimes committed, and for what crimes, and who might be prosecuted? Even in countries which supposedly have an amnesty for certain ex-combatants, validity and eligibility could be unclear, as in Somalia.

14   In situations where a violent conflict is still active, some of this information might be sensitive. The collection of information would need to be tailored and managed accordingly.

Important information about **communities** includes:

- How communities and their members (men, women, boys, and girls) have been affected by the violent conflict.
- Community views and perceptions of, and attitudes towards, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, including women and girls.
- Community suggestions for supporting individual reintegration trajectories.
- How society/the community is structured along gender lines, and how this differs from gendered structures in the armed group or forces.
- Existing community governance structures and leadership and how effective they are.
- Critical processes or sectors that have been affected by the conflict and the potential impact on the ability of communities to welcome and 'absorb' ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.
- Whether serious crimes have been committed in/against the community by ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.
- Whether the community has a culture of forgiveness and/or welcoming rituals.
- Whether SGBV occurred within the community during the conflict and/or is occurring in daily community life.
- Whether the community shows age group solidarity.
- Whether returnees face stigma.
- Perceptions of returnees with children born out of wedlock.
- Whether any significant health issues or health risks are associated with the return of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to the community.

**Economic trends and humanitarian and development initiatives** may well be relevant for the reintegration of women, men, girls, and boys exiting armed forces or groups. Important information includes:

- Whether there is any support for economic opportunities for the broader population.
- Whether there is support for strengthening relevant services for those reintegrating.
- Whether ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are eligible for assistance for returning refugees and IDPs.
- If other relevant initiatives exist, what creative and realistic methods can be used for collaboration between programmes and initiatives and for breaking out of institutional silos.

A broad scoping exercise will be required to identify **relevant opportunities and challenges for economic reintegration**, including to identify:

- What is happening with the (former) 'war economy'. For some ex-combatants it might be tempting – or inevitable – to continue to engage in economic activities in which they were involved while they were still in arms (as in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone). Such activities include the illicit mining of minerals, trading timber, wildlife poaching and drug cultivation or smuggling. The authorities will probably try to reduce this engagement and control and regulate these activities.
- What local markets are expected to grow in the near and medium future, considering demographic factors and climate change (among other factors).
- The most relevant job opportunities for men and women of various ages among ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.
- Specific gendered barriers for economic reintegration opportunities.

- (Legal) economic activities that have realistic potential for small entrepreneurs
- Significant differences between urban and rural environments relevant to ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

This process is key to preparing CBR support: a lack of mapping and assessments of opportunities, needs and ambitions has led to the failure of reintegration programming in the past. However, in practice it is common that the actors involved are under significant time pressure. It will be necessary to find an appropriate balance between the need for detailed, reliable, and location-specific information and the urgent need to design and implement support.

## Risk awareness and mitigation

Risks need to be considered throughout programme design and implementation, requiring the continuous monitoring of the dynamics of the environment and the roles of actors and other stakeholders. A systematic risk analysis early in the process might be needed. Some potential risks are outlined below and elsewhere in this guidance.

If a violent conflict has not ended, resources which have been made available to support the reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups may "leak" to one or more of the fighting parties and become part of the war economy. Some ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups may not have entirely left the command structure and/or renounced their loyalties and could easily be remobilized (as, for example, during the various cycles of violence and demobilization efforts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo). The prospect of receiving reintegration support may even provide an incentive for individuals to take up arms or for armed groups to recruit members. Ongoing violence may also destroy economic initiatives supporting reintegration and increase personal security risks for those involved in delivering assistance. Therefore, while reintegration support has the potential in itself to facilitate a positive political process, it requires at least basic levels of political commitment and security. It may sometimes be preferable to start support in areas where these conditions exist and to use community-based approaches (see above, **Individual and/or community-based support?**).

However, external interventions involve risks even in post-conflict environments. They may have negative impacts on the political process and/or negative social effects, with potential issues ranging from perceived inequalities in who benefits from programmes to the unethical conduct of staff delivering the assistance. Delays in the delivery of external assistance, along with high expectations, can also have a destabilizing effect. A perceived or real appropriation of support by local elites (and their families) could incite ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to violently react to perceived injustice. Both intended and unintended impacts of the programme (from design to implementation) will need to be carefully monitored in line with the principle of "do no harm".

From a conflict-sensitive perspective, it is also important to consider that reintegration support can arrive later than foreseen and that actual levels of support may be lower than expected – for example due to slow political processes, logistical constraints and/or the unavailability of or delays in financing. This could have a negative impact on the confidence and trust of relevant parties in the peace process, particularly with regard to any possible disarmament commitments. The following questions will thus need to be addressed as soon as negotiations and planning for reintegration support start:

- Whether the level and type of reintegration support foreseen is realistic and can actually be delivered as promised. Premature public statements or inflated commitments made at the outset or during the registration and interview process can backfire.
- How (waiting for) reintegration support will affect the existing coping mechanisms of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and their communities.
- How government agencies (at various levels), UN entities and other relevant stakeholders will manage expectations, including by mitigating the effects of possible misinformation concerning reintegration support.

# CBR SUPPORT

# CBR policy

**S**ustainable CBR can be supported through specific initiatives such as programmes or projects in selected geographic areas. Ideally these initiatives will be guided by some form of CBR policy spelling out the standards, principles, and basic modalities of the CBR support to be provided and reflecting specific needs, objectives, challenges, and opportunities. The policy could be developed at the national level or that of a state or province and support from external (international) partners could be requested to draw on relevant experience elsewhere. In places with significant cross-border activities and movements, CBR policies should be harmonized between the relevant countries and/or regions to avoid imbalances in provision/support that might lead to unintended population movements.

However, a policy is not strictly required, and, in its absence, local or regional initiatives supporting communities to welcome and absorb ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups can still make significant contributions to reintegration. Indeed, while such policies provide useful guidance, they should not restrict the ability of communities to collaborate and set local priorities and/or use innovative approaches.
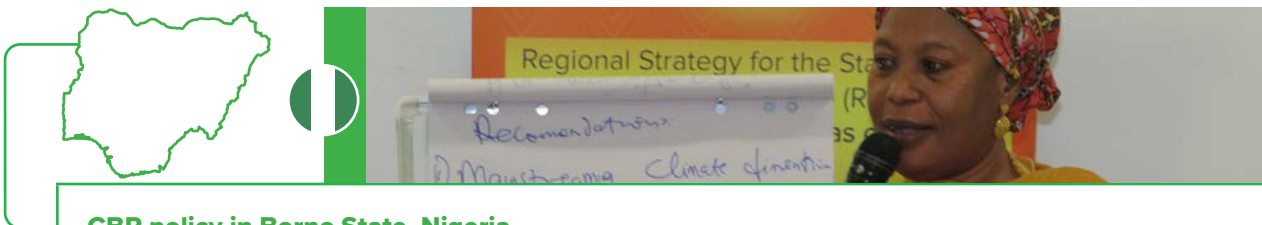


### CBR policy in Borno State, Nigeria

Borno State has developed its own policy on Community-based Reconciliation and Reintegration (CBRR). It ensures appropriate linkages between Federal, centre-based rehabilitation efforts and State-led rehabilitation, reconciliation and reintegration support that takes place at the camp and community level. The policy provides guidance and defines approaches to ensure:

- individual rehabilitation and follow-up at the community level;
- social, psychosocial, and economic reintegration components;
- relevant interventions to prepare communities to receive those returning to foster reconciliation and justice.

Communities have the lead role in the process of reconciliation and reintegration, with consistent, dynamic, and innovative community engagement and dialogue in the planning, implementation, and decision-making processes. The key mechanism for community involvement is the establishment of CBRR Committees.

Overall coordination and oversight are provided by the Ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement. Activities under the policy are implemented by local government, CSOs, academia and private sector entities. Implementation by international organizations can only take place where local capacity is not available, and any such projects must have a capacity development component and a clear exit strategy.

Source: State Government of Borno, Nigeria, 2021

Broader policies and development initiatives can also contribute to CBR, including through:

- Improvements in the effectiveness and transparency of governance at the local and community levels.
- Improvements in human security, including legal protection. These might involve special efforts to bring criminals to justice and to ensure freedom of movement, or community-oriented policing that helps ensure the participation of communities in addressing basic security needs.
- Broad efforts in support of economic sectors with development potential and likely to provide employment opportunities, as well as efforts to control illegal business (such as the drugs trade, poaching and smuggling or certain logging and mining practices).
- More effective policies on social development, poverty eradication, displacement, transitional justice, legal protection and SGBV.

## Support for community decision-making and ownership

Most CBR support revolves around decision-making processes at the local and community levels. The actual facilitation of reintegration processes will depend on communities and their members even where CBR receives external support. The communities themselves will need to identify the most important reintegration challenges, how they can be addressed and community priorities, taking into account community culture, constraints, opportunities, and needs. In addition, political reintegration by ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups can include their participation in community decision-making (as elected officials or otherwise).

Systems to manage CBR support need to be as democratic, transparent, accountable, efficient, and effective as possible in local circumstances. Once agreements have been made on (external) support for reintegration, the basic principles of such support and which locations to prioritize, sustainable CBR requires that most operational decision-making is dealt with at the local government and community levels. External support for CBR should therefore also contribute to expanding and strengthening local community decision-making processes and local governance structures more broadly. This will ensure the sustainability of initiatives and pave the way for a cessation of external support.

As a matter of principle, new initiatives should not always lead to the establishment of new institutions. Indeed, existing local structures, mechanisms and capacities should ideally be used for CBR support – including because these can gain experience, capacity, and ownership in the process. Some community-level institutions and activities may in fact already be playing an important role in the reception and reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and other returnees. For example, they might have a conflict-management role, providing mediation and helping to improve social cohesion, trust, and a sense of justice – both among community members and between communities and state authorities. They might be mechanisms for inclusive community-level dialogue about local grievances and concerns related to the conflict. They might also be involved in practical implementation, such as the facilitation of a fair distribution of humanitarian aid.

It is therefore key to establish, in each situation, the extent to which existing mechanisms are appropriate and able to manage further reintegration support. In some contexts, local government will satisfy most requirements and the main concern becomes one of adequate accountability and oversight. In others, community decision-making and oversight may be provided by local community committees. All formal and informal structures and their roles in community life should be considered when taking this decision. If it is necessary to establish a new mechanism to manage CBR support, external partners should have an

open mind about the most effective and appropriate form it could take, given the overall setting, capacities, and the purpose of the mechanism. UNDP has positive experiences with 'local peace and development committees' (see box, below) – these can also be called community development committees, social cohesion committees/platforms, peace observatories (Mali) or community action response teams (Nigeria). The rationale for a new mechanism will need to be based on the reasons why external assistance is required in the first place, as well as on how external partners can empower communities and their members to take on the activities that effectively support reintegration processes.

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**Local peace and development committees**

Local peace and development committees are usually established by communities and supported by external actors to shape and make decisions about interventions affecting the community, including activities in support of CBR. They also usually play a role in resolving conflicts within the community. These committees are often one of the main mechanisms for achieving inclusive, fair, and context-specific return, reconciliation, and reintegration processes. For example, they might facilitate the opening of roads, improve access to justice and documentation or help combat SGBV. If the work of the committee is effective, it will increase community ownership and broader buy-in for reintegration support.

Against this background of improving social cohesion and supporting transitional justice and accountability, these committees could also play a decision-making role for CBR support. They could, for example, identify and select groups of people who would participate in community projects and prioritize the infrastructure that requires rehabilitation. The committees could also develop recommendations for, and coordinate activities with, other communities, state/provincial and national authorities and international organizations offering support.

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Any new institution or structure established to manage CBR support will ideally have a balanced and representative membership. Community consultations should be held to generate a list of potential members and the selection process should be as transparent as possible and well documented, with final endorsement of the membership received from a higher level. Attention should be paid to the fact that CBR support processes risk reinforcing existing power structures and gender patterns within the community. Any new mechanism will need to aim to prevent biases, including nepotism. Men, women, young and elderly people, and those from different religious and/or ethnic backgrounds will all need to have – and retain – fair representation within decision-making and monitoring structures. Established community leaders, including religious and traditional leaders, will usually be included as they are trusted to make decisions for the community, but the inclusion of groups that are traditionally not (fully) represented should also be encouraged.

The direct engagement of government representatives in such a mechanism will depend on the context. For example, they might be invited to participate on an ad hoc basis, if and when useful and appropriate. It might also be fitting to seek participation by former combatants, either from official forces or (disbanded) armed groups.



### Community involvement in Sudan

In Sudan, the UNDP-supported Community Security and Stabilization Programme (C2SP) established Community Management Committees (CMC) to manage and monitor the project in each community covered by the programme. The CMCs also linked project activities to local government, which provided technical expertise for the design and implementation of livelihood/infrastructure projects and played a role in the management of disputes and conflicts.

The CMCs had both permanent and ad hoc members, the former of whom included representatives from different sectors of the community, with a minimum of 30% of women members alongside traditional leaders, young people, locality commissioners and displaced persons. Ad hoc members could include representatives from implementing partners (NGOs), relevant line ministries (e.g. Agriculture, Social Development, Animal Resources and Water Cooperation) and the private sector. The CMCs were established specifically by the programme since the existing "popular committees" were considered overly linked to national politics and were entirely male dominated.

Community ownership is a complex concept, and its level and validity are hard to assess. However, community ownership of reintegration support is likely to grow as activities increase and balanced decision-making is enhanced. It will be reflected in the perspective taken on decision-making and progress made in reintegration, and lead to a greater role for the community in reintegration processes (rather than individual support for ECPFA or external support more broadly).

The engagement or endorsement of community leaders can be important to the development of community ownership but does not guarantee it. Despite the increased focus on CBR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is widely felt that decisions are still taken from the centre. Experience in Nigeria shows that

the reintegration process requires patience, cooperation, and dedicated investments by all community stakeholders to achieve success. Meanwhile, the active engagement of local NGOs in implementing CBR interventions in Somalia is seen as contributing to local ownership.

Practical ways to support community decision-making and ownership include:

- Assessing and supporting existing local structures, mechanisms, networks and capacities which facilitate CBR processes.
- Strengthening, or helping to establish and develop, local peace and development committees, preferably based on mechanisms recognized by the government and/or used by other organizations.
- Supporting insider mediation networks.
- Establishing CBR working groups – informal groups of community members (men and women of different ages) trained to support ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and the sustainability of CBR initiatives (as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo).
- Establishing community reintegration and reconciliation coordination committees to improve communication and collaboration between disparate reintegration mechanisms within communities. In Nigeria, such committees involved state security officials, local government representatives, religious leaders, members of civil society groups, community leaders and other community representatives (both men and women).
- Capacity-building interventions for state actors, local organizations, and community structures to support current activities and, in future, their transfer to communities (as in Somalia).
- Establishing grassroots communities of practice in specific locations to hold regular meetings to share knowledge and build alliances with key justice, military, policing, and political figures in the community (as in Somalia).
- Holding open community meetings to identify or specify the different and various needs of communities.
- Holding separate dialogues with groups of women and girls to understand both their specific needs and their capacities and skills.
- Facilitating youth-focused dialogues to provide young women and men with the opportunity to air grievances and to identify the specific needs of children and demobilized youth (as in Nigeria).
- Promoting, protecting, and expanding civic space (undertaken by external agencies, such as UN entities).

## Support for community acceptance

The acceptance of returnees by their community of choice is essential for sustained reintegration. A reluctance to accept the returnees can have multiple causes associated with the history of the conflict, current power politics, personal anger, security concerns or fear. Community members might have suffered directly from violence during the conflict, with men and women often having different experiences. Communities may also have concerns about socialized violence among ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, which could lead to anti-social behaviour in the community, interpersonal violence (including domestic violence and SGBV) or self-harm (use of drugs or alcohol or suicide). Overcoming stigma against ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups by the community, as well as the risk of reprisals, will take time.

All CBR support efforts need to pay attention to social healing and to re-establishing trust between returnees and the community, including between family members or neighbours. This is a process that takes time and persistent effort and requires a special, context-specific set of skills. For example, communities may be complex – with different ethnic groups; different groups playing different roles during the conflict; multiple groups returning – and they are usually facing many other challenges simultaneously. In some cases, too, government authorities will need to regain the trust of communities.

**Former combatants in Northern Ireland**

The ACT (Action for Community Transformation) Initiative in Northern Ireland (UK) aims to restore communities affected by conflict, with Area Action Groups engaging in activities to promote conflict transformation.[15] ACT provides opportunities for former combatants to develop collaborative partnerships with voluntary, community or statutory agencies. ACT members complete an initial training delivered in a safe environment over a 12-week period. This starts with the individual through self-reflection and self-development processes and ends with the positive contributions they can make to their communities and society at large. ACT members then liaise with the wider community to build relationships with statutory agencies, community stakeholders and others, identifying issues which require a community development approach.

Communities preparing themselves for the return of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups is a key element of CBR. However, this aspect is often overlooked and as a result CBR activities may be responsive rather than proactive. It appears that the most effective way to do this is under the community's own initiative (with possibly some limited support) rather than waiting for slower donor-led processes. For example, ahead of the return, local authorities might start organising meetings with specific population groups – women, men, the elderly, youth, local leaders, and customary chiefs, and including victims of conflict-related violence – to discuss the issues and enable members of each group to express themselves.

In most circumstances, reintegration processes and community acceptance benefit from broader efforts to enhance community dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict transformation (see also **Support for justice and reconciliation**, below). In some situations, it may be appropriate to create direct links with the national or regional peace process. At the same time, providing information via popular media and having open discussions about conflict, peace and the backgrounds, experiences, needs, and capacities of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and their children can help prepare communities to welcome returning individuals, and stimulate political ownership of CBR initiatives. Local and national CSOs, including religious organizations, would normally have an important role in such efforts.

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15    Conflict transformation is the process of moving from conflict-habituated to peace systems.

### Trust building in Somalia

To strengthen trust and facilitate CBR, the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) was involved in supporting the traditional Quraca Nabadda process in Somalia. This is a uniquely Somali trust-building approach that addresses individual and collective trauma and explores individual and community healing.

The intervention took the form of 12-week community reconciliation education workshops, during which a diverse set of community members (including men and women, young people and (male) clan elders) were trained to respond to the social reconciliation needs of communities and disengaged combatants alike. The workshops included trauma healing, conflict transformation, restorative justice, and peacebuilding, helping community members to rebuild trust and confidence and deal with the trauma resulting from decades of conflict and violent extremist events. The curriculum was delivered by community facilitators and coordinators who had been selected through a process which included district authorities and District Peace Committees.

Practical ways to support community acceptance include:

- Community sensitization and awareness sessions about the concerns, beliefs, attitudes, practices and opportunities of the women, men, girls, and boys exiting armed groups, as well as the government's policies and plans (including the official rehabilitation process).
- Broad community dialogue to create awareness among community members of their rights and their role in reintegration processes for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, strengthen their understanding of the need to co-exist peacefully, regardless of past and present grievances, religious and cultural differences and promote themes of trust, unity, forgiveness, and community responsibility.
- A mentor system: Respected community members with authority and influence in the community (such as clan elders, religious leaders, youth, and women leaders) can act as guarantors, informal guardians (especially for children) or mentors who can be approached for assistance by ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups facing reintegration challenges. They could offer protection, practical assistance (for example by providing a recommendation for an educational or job opportunity) and help with navigating some of the difficult issues around acceptance.
- Public ceremonies with local leaders (young people, women, and men), clan elders, and local government representatives, with the potential involvement of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (as speakers) and potentially survivors of past violence.
- Community mobilization events that facilitate contact and interaction between community members and ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, such as sports, exhibitions, cultural shows, and storytelling.
- Public activities led by ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, such as clean-up campaigns or the volunteering of skills (e.g. electrics, plumbing and painting) learned as part of reintegration.

- Family support sessions (visits) for families hesitant to accept ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups back as members. These could be facilitated by traditional/religious leaders and investigate and try to address the reasons for this reluctance.
- Community-level sensitization and awareness-raising focusing on children, including the specific challenges of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups and the rights of children.
- Attention to integrating gender transformative opportunities including in messaging, visual identity of campaigns, male and female peer-education teams, leveraging opportunities to empower women and promote non-violent, healthy masculinities and femininities.

Generally speaking, organizations with mixed membership are more likely to contribute sustainably to social reintegration than those which only have ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups members, but the latter might nevertheless benefit from support.

## Support for justice and reconciliation

For communities to accept returnees, a certain level of forgiveness on the part of community members might be required – but justice will also need to be done. As the UN Secretary-General noted in 2011:

> **"Creating links between locally based justice processes and truth commissions on the one hand, and community-based reintegration strategies on the other, may foster acceptance of returning ex-combatants among reintegration communities."[16]**

Links to justice and reconciliation processes are particularly important in settings where many former combatants will not be wholeheartedly welcomed back due to their role in the conflict. Community perceptions of returning ex-combatants can vary quite significantly – they may be seen as returning heroes, as deviants, or as perpetrators of past violence against their own communities. Justice and reconciliation processes may involve not only ex-combatants but also their family members, who may have been associated with the violence committed.

Key CBR approaches could therefore include activities supporting transitional justice processes, social justice, the protection of human rights, reconciliation, conflict transformation, promoting social inclusion and political participation. Ex-combatants and their communities could also be provided with information on rights, responsibilities, and obligations. Practical ways to support justice and reconciliation include:

- As far as possible, reconciliation perspective in all CBR initiatives.
- Facilitating and promoting interaction between groups with different experiences during the conflict, including storytelling about war experiences and cultural and sport activities.
- Creating clarity as soon as possible about crimes that will be amnestied and crimes that will be prosecuted.
- Strengthening traditional justice mechanisms, such as traditional courts (*Baraza*) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Baraza* are trusted, communal, extrajudicial, and non-punitive mechanisms. Services are free and decisions are carried out by community members. Some people who had been involved in armed groups had to go before the *Baraza* on their return and then publicly ask for forgiveness from their communities so that they could be welcomed back into the community.
- Active outreach to victims (as in Somalia), involving where possible tracing victims and ascertaining whether they would be willing to forgive ex-combatants who had committed criminal acts against them.

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16   United Nations General Assembly, 2011, p. 16.

## Support for the security of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups

While most reintegration support is aimed at the socio-economic aspects of reintegration, basic security is often the priority for those returning and trying to reintegrate and for members of the receiving community. However, reintegration also often takes place in areas where the state is not able to provide adequate security or ensure the rule of law. In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, strong links may still exist between armed groups and the communities from which they originate. Fear of reprisals on return to a community can greatly affect the choice of reintegration location and the reintegration process itself. Communities can play an active role in protecting and improving the security of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and the wider community, particularly in the absence of security provision by the state. It is important to be aware that the security needs of women and girls are often considered more private and tend to be less visible, and that particular analysis and efforts are therefore needed to ensure these are addressed.

While support for strengthening a community's informal security arrangements and community-oriented policing can facilitate CBR, it is essential to ensure robust oversight. Human rights might not be respected by those who are supposed to enhance security, but who may well act according to significant biases. Too many examples exist around the world of local defence groups developing their own agenda and committing serious abuses.

Practical ways to improve security include:

- Providing some level of protection while justice processes are ongoing. This could include establishing or strengthening informal and formal protection structures within the community for those who have returned. If disputes/conflicts cannot be resolved at this level, there should be provisions to settle them at higher judicial/security levels.
- Some level of special security protection for vulnerable ex-combatants, for example through special aid posts or sensitized police patrols, or by providing ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups with the telephone numbers of security personnel so they can call if they are harassed or threatened.
- Local authorities developing local security and safety plans, with the involvement of community stakeholders, to protect both returnees and members of the receiving community.
- Visits by independent individuals (leaders) to locate and counsel communities and families which may be reluctant to accept a specific ex-combatant back in their midst (as was done for some young ex-combatants in Somalia).
- Creating SGBV prevention programmes, which integrate work to address the socialization of violence, violent and militarized expressions of masculinities, harmful gender norms and cultural practices, and support or promote positive, non-violent forms of masculinities, including engaging men as fathers.
- Exploring alternative care options if returning to the area of origin is deemed unsafe, including facilitating settlement in another area (such as an urban setting, which can often prove safer than rural areas since a degree of anonymity is easier to achieve).
- General civilian protection measures, such as the creation of safe spaces and protection against exploitation.

## Broad support for communities and livelihoods

Specific investments can improve the capacity of communities to receive ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and thus support CBR, with immediate gains in terms of reviving the economy and private-sector activities. Such investments can create or facilitate livelihood opportunities while strengthening social processes and collaboration. Such investments will prioritize support to areas in which large numbers of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are (foreseen to be) reintegrating. It will be essential to use a transparent participatory process – and potentially community action planning or similar tools – to decide on the priorities and practicalities of investments, which will also help to strengthen community skills and governance capacity.

Once again, specific contexts matter. Where conflict has caused significant destruction and/or where agricultural land is scarce, it will be particularly challenging for communities to receive returning ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. The return of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups often coincides with drastic changes in the economy, including policy efforts to dismantle (parts of) war economies, which distort markets and benefit relatively small groups (for example through the illegal uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources). New market opportunities may be developing and incentive structures changing. Different investments will be appropriate in different contexts (see, for example, differences in needs and impacts in urban compared to rural environments).

Examples of investments with a CBR perspective include the creation or repair of public facilities or services that will directly benefit the well-being of most community members, such as hospitals, dispensaries, health services, classrooms, training centres, administrative offices, market structures, warehouses, police posts, courthouses, feeder roads, small bridges, water wells, dams, drainage, and other economic or social infrastructure, environmental rehabilitation, demining, reforestation, renewable energy sources, information infrastructure repair.  Using labour-intensive approaches will generally further increase positive impacts on reintegration processes by expanding (temporary) access to employment and enabling on-the-job learning.

Investments can also support broader economic development by addressing bottlenecks in the revival or development of the main productive sector(s) in which communities are involved, such as the production and processing of primary agricultural crops. Such interventions could include support for credit schemes; the development or introduction of new technologies; training and extension services; value-chain development; and the creation of cooperatives or other collaborative structures.

Some investments may aim to create immediate short-term employment so community members, including ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, can earn money to spend immediately, while others focus on building sustainable livelihoods and self-employment opportunities. Certain activities could have specific beneficiaries, such as those to help young people in particular create livelihood opportunities.

Practical ways to facilitate CBR and associated investments include:

- Funding schemes for public investments prioritized by communities and local government.
- Back-to-school activities for children of school age, including the construction or rehabilitation of school buildings, and the establishment of accelerated learning centres for those above school age. In Nigeria, these are believed to have reduced school dropouts and prevented the recruitment of underage boys by insurgents.
- Strengthening systems of property ownership, including the return of land, buildings, and other property to rightful owners where these have been appropriated during the conflict.

## Support for children and young people

Some of the experience in CBR support has been gained through supporting the reintegration of children.[17] While reintegration for adult ECPFA has historically focused on individual assistance, the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) has been viewed for some time as a community process. Building a protective environment is essential for children, and the responsibility for doing so is shared by many. The Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers notes that:

> **"While reintegration services should always give CAAFAG access to individualized support through case management and care plans, longer-term reintegration must be embedded within work that supports the broader protective environment for children. As such, the norm is to support and enable inclusive, CBR programming, where the child is seen and served in the context of the community into which he or she will return or settle; and assistance to the child is enmeshed into assistance for the community as a whole".[18]**

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17   See IDDRS, 2019, Module 5.20 on Children and DDR, and Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2021.
18   Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, 2021, p.6.

The recognition that reintegration may take place during ongoing violent conflict also draws on experiences with CAAFAG. As children should be released whenever possible, irrespective of the status of a conflict or any possible peace negotiations, communities always need to be prepared to receive CAAFAG. Similarly, the recruitment of young people should always be actively prevented, irrespective of the phase of the conflict.

CAAFAG and young people formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (those aged between 15 and 24 years old[19]) face many of the same challenges as adults upon their return – but their lives, security and socio-economic situations are usually even more vulnerable. The needs and community roles of individual ex-combatants are usually significantly determined by their age and gender. A combatant who is recruited into an armed group as a child and leaves as a young adult is likely to have different needs than one who joins an armed group as a middle-aged adult and demobilizes a few years later, as he or she will have missed out on vital opportunities for education, socialization and acquiring crucial life-skills. Stigma and social acceptance are also generally even greater issues for children and young people than for adults. The safety and protection from sexual abuse of girls, some of whom might be young mothers, is especially critical.

From the community perspective each child should feel safe and allowed to live as normal a life as possible. Applying national and international child protection policies and practices will normally make a significant contribution. As with the aspects of CBR support already mentioned above, other children and youth affected by the armed conflict will also benefit from initiatives to create a safer environment, conducive to social and other inclusion, for returning children. Such an environment will also help to prevent (re-) recruitment into armed groups, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

The rehabilitation of infrastructure will particularly benefit the young, including schools, training facilities, health centres and sport facilities. Education and (vocational) training are essential to the reintegration of most children and young people: remedial schooling (and notably literacy training) can be vital to helping them catch up to peers. Such investments in the general education system will, again, also benefit the entire community, particularly children and young people who have been out of school for significant periods of time.

Meanwhile, children and young people can themselves play important positive roles in community processes such as social and cultural events, collaboration, and trust-building. For CBR support to significantly improve reintegration for CAAFAG and young people, they need to be directly involved and parents and community leaders need to be actively engaged. As far as possible, children and youth should actively participate in consultations, idea generation and decision-making. Support could also be provided to youth NGOs and/or their involvement in CBR, particularly where young people are actively engaged in running CBR support activities.

Elements of CBR support particularly relevant for the reintegration of children and youth include:

- Efforts to strengthen the livelihoods and resilience of families.
- The encouragement and facilitation of the active engagement of CAAFAG and young people in community activities.
- Protecting and strengthening community-based child-protection networks.
- Initiatives to re-establish a sense of self and identity among the CAAFAG and young people.

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19   While 'youth' is a fluid concept which varies across geographic and cultural contexts, this is the agreed UN definition and is used in the IDDRS (5.20).

- The creation of child/youth-friendly safe spaces, such as youth clubs or centres, where all children and young people in the community can interact and begin to recover from their experiences.
- Strengthening reproductive health services for girls and young mothers.
- Facilitating youth-focused dialogues to provide children and young people with the opportunity to air grievances and articulate their specific needs (as in Nigeria).
- Family tracing and reunification.
- General employment assistance for young people, such as referrals or job fairs.

In most cases, CBR for CAAFAG will need to be combined with needs-based assistance tailored to their experiences during conflict and their current situation. This could include specific health care services, psychosocial support, support for dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, general life skills and mentoring. Where a CAFAAG is returning with their family, some of this support may need to be provided to all family members.

## Integrating gender in CBR

A significant concern about individual reintegration support is that it tends to be biased towards providing such support for men. There are many ways in which women who are ex-combatants or otherwise associated with armed structures fail to benefit from such support, particularly where it is based on defined eligibilities and entitlements. For example, women who have been associated with armed groups may choose, for their own safety and to avoid stigma, to settle outside their community of origin (in another location or an urban environment) or, if they return home, to do so without going through a formal demobilization/registration process. They may therefore not receive reintegration assistance if that is allocated individually, purely based on their role in the armed force or group as documented at registration.

In contrast, gender-responsive CBR recognizes and responds to the gender-related needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, men, and boys in order to reduce trauma and vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience. It requires a gender analysis that will inform an ongoing integration of a gender perspective, including to define when gender-specific or gender-transformative activities are appropriate.[20]

The specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls are often considered private and are frequently associated with stigma and shame, as exemplified by attitudes towards those who have survived SGBV[21]. It is also well known that female ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups can face serious reintegration challenges when they discover that they are expected by their community to (re)assume their traditional roles, even if they had relatively non-traditional gender roles as a member/associate of an armed force or group. Women and girls among ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups often face more resistance to their return from community members, and a lack of genuine acceptance, especially if they return with children. Addressing the challenges faced by women and girls need to be prioritized in CBR, through activities open to all women in the community experiencing the same issues.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that gender is also relevant to the experiences of men and boys, and that they must be engaged if violent behaviour is to be addressed and transformed. Some armed

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20  Gender-specific activities target either men or women according to gendered needs and within the context of existing (gendered) roles and responsibilities. Gender-transformative activities seek to change gendered distributions of power and resources with the aim of achieving gender equity.

21  Women and girls are disproportionately affected by SGBV.

groups nurture climates favouring toxic masculinity, which may well affect the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys on their return to civilian life in communities. Boys and men may also be survivors or witnesses of SGBV and require appropriate support (including to overcome specific stigma attached to being a male survivor).

Gender-responsive CBR also needs to ensure that priority community issues are identified by both women and men, and that both men and women benefit from activities and initiatives. Equally, non-gender responsive CBR can reinforce existing gender structures within the community (and among returning ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups), with implications for negative gender norms, inequality and SGBV among other issues. To prevent this, support for CBR needs to ensure that it is gender-transformative and actively incorporates gender considerations into all aspects of programming – including through the engagement of boys and (young) men.

Practical ways to support gender responsive CBR include:

- Leveraging opportunities to address gender inequalities in a transformative way, supporting positive transformations in gender relations and work towards gender equality, reaffirming women's civil, political economic, social, and cultural rights.
- Assisting women-led CBOs and CSOs to provide reintegration support, including for the specific and complex psychosocial, economic, and ideological challenges faced by women and girls.
- Supporting the promotion of positive masculinities: for example, enabling men and boys to reflect on what it means to be a man and encouraging them to redefine masculinity as emotionally expressive, inclusive, empathetic, and compassionate.
- Public discussions and other community activities to help overcome the stigmatization of various groups formerly associated with armed structures (men, women, girls, boys, young people etc.).
- Meetings among women to discuss issues such as forced and early marriage, the role of women in the security sector, the role of women and mothers in protecting children from violence and, potentially, the roles of men in these issues.
- Community-based peer education, outreach, and gender-transformative activities on parenting and fatherhood, masculinities, violence (including SGBV prevention) and women's rights (as in Sudan).
- Literacy and numeracy programmes, nutrition advice and other skill building for all women in the community, including women formerly associated with armed forces and groups (as in Sudan).
- Recovery services for all survivors of SGBV (women, men, boys, and girls).
- Support for psychosocial and behaviour change programmes for armed forces and groups who may have been involved in the use of sexual violence in conflict, aiming to transform toxic masculinity and the perceptions and values associated with it.

## Support for psychosocial issues

Addressing mental health issues is an important contribution to the ability of communities to welcome and host returning ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. Many people might have trauma as a result of violent conflict, but particularly ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and direct victims of violence in the community. Violence experienced in the past could result in self-directed violence (e.g. suicide or substance abuse), interpersonal

violence (e.g. SGBV, child abuse and murder) or violence against the community. Men's psychological scars from their time in/with an armed group can increase domestic violence and violence against women. As a result, violent confrontations occur in settings where reintegration is taking place. In addition, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups may be marginalized and stigmatized by the receiving community. These issues can all seriously affect the potential to re-establish relationships within the community.

However, these challenges have often been neglected in the design of reintegration support. Effective responses can be individual, broader or community wide. For example, trauma-healing activities could be held through dialogue forums, beginning at the family level, and then expanding. These forums can promote the exchange of ideas about trauma recovery or grievances, bringing returnees and the community together in a positive, safe space. Psychosocial approaches can also include sports, recreational and leisure activities that help distract people from their troubles and (re)connect with family and other community members.

Practical ways to address psychosocial issues include:

- Building the capacity of community members and ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to share their experiences with each other, counsel each other, and console others for any hurt, stress, or trauma endured during the armed conflict.
- Providing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) training for community leaders and other volunteers so that they can offer psychological first aid to other community members.
- Community-based psychosocial activities, including de-stigmatization campaigns and providing information on, and raising awareness of, the impacts of trauma and conflict on the nervous system.
- Peer counselling and the establishment of a referral chain to enable access to specialized care where needed.
- Special measures addressing substance abuse.

# COMBINING CBR WITH OTHER APPROACHES IN SUPPORT OF REINTEGRATION

CBR interventions can be combined, where contextually appropriate, with several other reintegration support approaches, including:

- Entitlement-based dual or multiple targeting.
- Needs-based support.
- Support for ex-combatant-led initiatives.

## Entitlement-based dual or multiple targeting

One way of linking an entitlement-based system of targeting assistance for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups with community development (and thus the promotion of community acceptance) is through a system of dual or multiple targeting.[22] For example, vocational training would be provided both to ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups entitled to receive such benefit as well as to individuals who have not been associated with armed forces or groups but who have similar vulnerabilities (such as young people without a viable livelihood or people who have recently resettled). The programme would thus provide similar entitlements to a group of people in the community with specific needs, helping to avoid issues arising when ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are perceived to be receiving disproportionate support. The ratio of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to other targeted community members is often 50-50 but does not need to be: the optimal proportions are still being debated and depend in part on the circumstances, including available resources.

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**Timing entitlement-based dual or multiple targeting**

The IDDRS makes a distinction between reinsertion and reintegration support, essentially because of institutional mandates and responsibilities within the UN system and associated financing mechanisms. Where it is provided, reinsertion is in practice the first element of reintegration support and is provided immediately after demobilization. It can play a critical role in helping ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups to return to a community, meet some expenses (such as for food, medical needs, and accommodation[23]) and start (or revive) a livelihood. The UN system and its partners should therefore ideally plan reinsertion and reintegration support in an integrated manner (as "One UN"), with reintegration assistance building on the systems and experience of delivering reinsertion support. If reintegration support has an individually targeted element, it is generally provided early on in the form of reinsertion and/or where appropriate and possible, targeting additional groups as well as ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

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22  The arguments for and against individual targeting and CBR are outlined above (see **Individual and/or community-based support?**).
23  It is also argued that in some circumstances, arriving with presents may help with community acceptance, and these might be bought with this assistance.

# Needs-based support

Additional reintegration support can be provided, based on specific needs of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, to complement CBR. The needs-based assistance would then be provided through channels accessible also to others with similar needs. For example, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups tend to be more affected than average by illiteracy, financial illiteracy, chronic diseases, physical disabilities, social-emotional problems and trauma. Some are also seriously affected by drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. And some may also require documentation and legal services. Broader assistance to address these needs would thus more than proportionally help ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.

The needs identified could be addressed through specific legal, educational, counselling or health services. Needs-based support can also be combined with a community-based approach, for example where community organizations provide services for people with disabilities. Gender analysis is instrumental in identifying the specific needs of women and girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, such as the needs resulting from (the threat of) SGBV.

Children formerly associated with armed forces and groups also face challenges resulting from growing up in a militarized environment. They may suffer from extensive forms of exploitation and abuse having been used not only in combat, but as scouts, cooks, porters, guards, messengers, spies, etc. Many, especially girls, are also victims of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation. Without addressing their specific needs, reintegration cannot be achieved.

Former members of armed forces and groups may also have acquired long-term physical, sensory, psychosocial, or intellectual disabilities while serving. They suffer from environmental, information and communication, attitudinal and institutional barriers that make their reintegration even more challenging when compared to other former members. Needs-based reintegration support in this case should depends on the rehabilitation of specialized national institutions and services as well as harnessing the capacity of community organizations to provide the specific services that ex-combatants with disabilities need.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender, age and disability can lead to accumulation of stigmas and heightened risks of abuse and social exclusion as well as financial vulnerability for the individuals concerned. This calls for increasing capacities and coping mechanisms of individuals, households and communities through all-encompassing CBR approaches.

For the same reasons as discussed with regard to individual targeting, the specific needs of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups may indeed be best addressed alongside those of other civilians facing similar challenges. For example, helping those affected by violence will benefit both ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups and other community members. In Aceh, Indonesia, needs-based support proved an effective way to ensure that both vulnerable women in the community and women associated with armed forces and groups who had self-demobilized had access to valuable social, economic, and psychosocial support. Thus, the assistance would be needs-based and not provided because he or she is ex-combatant.

Addressing these specific needs is not only a question of humanitarian assistance: it will contribute to personal development and bolster the capacity of individuals to participate in their community and wider society. And needs-based support can also boost the post-war rehabilitation of relevant national institutions and services. In Angola, for example, the implementation of the national DDR programme made significant contributions to the rehabilitation of national services for persons with physical disabilities.

# Support for initiatives led by ex-combatants

It may also be worth supporting initiatives which are led by ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, if they themselves have identified and planned activities that will benefit their communities and are realistic in terms of the skillsets and resources required. Such activities could provide ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups with a sense of ownership of reintegration achievements at the community level. If well planned and executed, they can also help ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups build relationships with other community members and enhance reconciliation.

However, it is very important that such initiatives are developed and implemented in consultation and dialogue with the community and its leaders. Community and state/local authority support is crucial, as is a proper balance of stakeholders providing oversight.

In addition, if the initiative is an ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups peer support network, its actual role in reintegration will need to be assessed before external support is provided. For example, while veterans' associations can significantly help to stabilize the lives of ex-combatants, they do not always facilitate genuine socio-economic reintegration and the transition towards civilian life. Some associations of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are predominantly inward-looking and can instead increase the alienation of members from the community and wider society.

# IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING CBR SUPPORT

# Initiating CBR support

In each specific situation (programme), decisions have to be taken about which organization has or deserves the mandate to lead the initiative, as well as about possible strategic and implementing partners. A range of local organizations can be involved in designing and implementing initiatives supporting CBR, including community groups, CSOs, national NGOs, local and national government entities, international development agencies, donors, and intermediary funders.

It is also essential that most relevant actors be engaged in early discussions and that the activities to be supported fit the priorities of the communities concerned. CBOs can therefore not only play a key part in implementing CBR support, but also play a critical role in voicing/transmitting the needs and priorities of communities. The objective is to balance efficiency and effectiveness with community engagement to ensure the relevance, quality, and timely delivery of CBR support.

Geographical areas are prioritized for specific CBR support initiatives according to several factors, including:

- The number of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (expected) in the area
- The impacts of war and violence on the area
- The current and anticipated security situation in the area, including as it relates to the return of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups
- The attitude of communities towards ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups
- Where relevant, attention should be paired to ensuring balance in support to areas formerly/ currently controlled by different parties to the conflict.

Decisions on the selection of the geographical areas and the consequent allocation of support should be taken through a broad participatory and transparent process.

CBR support is often initiated through direct engagement by the main actors in the prioritized locations with other key local stakeholders, including religious, traditional, and other community leaders, local government, non-government organizations and the private sector. They are consulted on the objectives and goals of the project and representatives from various groups are agreed upon. Inception meetings and capacity building and training or strategic planning workshops may be carried out with the representatives and a taskforce and/or specific committees established if necessary.

Key operational principles include:

- Communities (including leaders from different interest groups) are represented in operational decision-making in a transparent and balanced way.
- The capacities of CBOs and CSOs are used and enhanced as far as possible.
- Even where relevant (local and central) government authorities are not directly involved (and ideally leading the operations), they are at least kept fully updated on the operations.
- All stakeholders regularly discuss the 'big picture' of an enabling and safe environment for reintegration processes.

It is important not to jump into 'classic project mode'. Supporting CBR requires innovation, creativity, and flexibility. Much will depend on the specific situation, challenges, and opportunities. It is essential to take

local culture – including, for example, the ways in which conflicts are managed – into account. Stakeholders need to be and remain open to ideas from communities.

CBR support does not necessarily need to take the form of an all-comprehensive programme. It may, rather, address certain key constraints in the reintegration process while linking with broader government policies or programmes or with other initiatives under different labels, such as stabilization, community violence reduction, prevention of violent extremism, peacebuilding, or community security.

As noted above, risk awareness and adaptation are important throughout programme design and implementation. This requires continuous awareness of the dynamics of the environment and the roles of the various actors and stakeholders.

## Community processes and evolving ownership

Community decision-making and management are central to CBR support. Decisions are not only made to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups but also for the more general well-being of the community. All the contributions communities make need to be acknowledged, whether they are investments in time, labour, social capital and/or finances. CBR support should also help strengthen the community's governance capacity, social cohesion and the sustainability of the overall recovery and peacebuilding processes (thereby also minimizing potential dependency on external donor support). The systems used to manage reintegration support should be as realistic and inclusive as possible and should not be monopolized or annexed by an elite or other specific group in the community.

## Role of external agencies

External entities, such as the UN and donors, have a delicate role to play in supporting and funding CBR support activities while ensuring that these lead to genuine CBR. They need to contribute to the process that leads to community-led and community-owned activities and results – and, ideally, that reduces dependency on external actors and funding over time. To do so, the UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace[24] recommend the introduction of small-scale, predictable, flexible, and risk-tolerant funding modalities, as well as user-friendly grant application templates and selection and reporting criteria. In addition:

- External entities and their staff need to be actively engaged in the broader recovery and peacebuilding processes and well informed about local situations and dynamics.
- Delivery on commitments of support needs to be made rapidly to avoid the destabilizing effect of delays coupled with high expectations.
- External support should help or facilitate CSOs and CBOs to play a positive role in reintegration processes. External agencies should be aware that their engagement may actually undermine these local organizations.
- Funding agencies should be able to account fully for the resources used in support of CBR, using effective and efficient systems of reporting.
- External agencies need to ensure that their support for CBR does not lead to (a perception of) dependency on external support for all reintegration efforts.

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24   UN Peacebuilding Support Office, 2020.

# Linking CBR with other reintegration support

The reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups usually takes place in contexts where many others have been displaced and are trying to reintegrate back into communities. Indeed, in some instances, the number of returning refugees and IDPs in need of support is much larger than that of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. From the perspective of communities into which people are (re)integrating, there is often little justification to channel support to these different groups through separate mechanisms. It is generally felt that efforts to enhance CBR for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups should be closely linked to reintegration support for other displaced populations. Donors and operational agencies (both government and UN) need to find ways to overcome unnecessary - and sometimes counterproductive - separations of mandates and funding streams.



### Broad reintegration assistance in northern Uganda

The Government of Uganda Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), launched in 2007, dealt with reintegration support for ex-combatants as part of the broader recovery of the region and reintegration support for all those who had been displaced by the long conflict in the north of the country. This was in recognition of the facts that members of armed groups were far outnumbered by those displaced and that the concept of "combatant" was ambiguous in this context.

The country's Amnesty Commission provided initial support to those who applied for – and received – amnesty under the Amnesty Act of 2000. This group encompassed far more than combatants as it included all those who had supported the LRA in various ways. Many of the combatants and other members of the LRA had been abducted or otherwise forcefully recruited, some had been part of the LRA for a long time and others only briefly.

Under the third phase of the PRDP (2015-2021), the Government and its development partners continued to favour broad reintegration support:

Support for reintegration will focus on refugees, ex-combatants, abductees and other people or groups still displaced or affected by past conflict. This will enable them to play a more active part in society and to focus on income generating activities. It will require holistic psychosocial support services, construction of houses and other interventions aimed at these marginalized groups. An inclusive approach will be taken which also works with members of their communities to promote reconciliation. Transitional justice will be a key component of this thematic area as many new conflicts are rooted in unfinished issues from the war. (Republic of Uganda, 2015, p. 22).

Sources: Republic of Uganda, 2007 and 2015.

## Public Information and Strategic Communication in Support of the CBR approach

Managing expectations is crucial to preventing frustration and dependency. From the outset of any programme/activity, effective public information strategies and systems are therefore essential to provide clarity about what reintegration support can be expected (and for which funding is available). Such management of expectations and associated communications are even more important where the emphasis is on CBR and individual entitlements for ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups are limited. Those in charge of managing and overseeing reintegration programmes also need to be able to recognize and counter the spread of misinformation by individuals and groups. Ultimately, ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups should see themselves as responsible for their own reintegration, rather than waiting for a programme to provide them with a 'good life'.

## Information, counselling and referral services

In some settings, CBR support could be provided alongside of ICRS for former members of armed forces and groups. Functioning as a case management system, such services aim to facilitate access to social services (including health and educational service), community projects and economic opportunities. In fact, an ICRS becomes more effective when closely connected to communities and their decision-making mechanisms.

ICRS assistance should be a facilitating mechanism and not based on an entitlement but rather focus addressing specific needs, such as being informed about 'how things work' in the community and local government (e.g. bureaucratically, legally, health-related, or education-related) and what services (including psychosocial support and protection) and opportunities might be available for them. An ICRS will be particularly helpful for economic reintegration in situations where no – or limited – entitlement-based economic assistance is being provided through broader stabilization, recovery, and peacebuilding programmes. In the longer term, an ICRS could form the basis of a social services directory or (local) support system benefitting the broader population.

## Monitoring CBR support

As initiatives aim to support CBR through assistance to communities and their socio-economic and governance processes, the links between interventions and actual reintegration are indirect and complex. Moreover, the activities themselves are not necessarily linked or coordinated with each other. While setting up an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is important, therefore, it is generally challenging, particularly in terms of monitoring impact. Where demobilized combatants predominantly receive individual support, M&E systems are somewhat easier to establish and manage – but in practice, even these often do not work satisfactorily.

With the broader CBR perspective in a dynamic environment one would need to assess the community, its social processes, and capacities, preferably in real time. Community-based monitoring approaches with real-time feedback loops could be used to ensure that programmes can adapt and make corrections effectively and in a timely way. Appropriate M&E systems need to track actual and complex reintegration processes of individuals within their families and communities, so indicators need to be at the level of outcomes and impact.

Links with the work of CSOs and CBOs could be explored, particularly in terms of identifying specific or structural reintegration issues or threats, data collection and baseline surveys. However, their specific role would need to be carefully assessed in light of their other activities for capacity purposes. An ICRS, where it exists, can play a useful role in the M&E process.

It is also important to track processes that are closely associated with reintegration, such as possible (re-) recruitment, the protection of human rights and trends in the occurrence of violent conflict.

# IN CONCLUSION

**T**he reintegration of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups can be supported in different ways and at different levels, usually simultaneously. The most appropriate combination of support depends on the specific circumstances, challenges, and opportunities in the context, including the political and socio-economic situation and the resources available. Support can be provided within or in conjunction with an official DDR programme or prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) strategy, or outside it.

The role of communities in reintegration processes is key. CBR support assists and empowers communities to 'absorb' ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups – both socially and economically. It aims to ensure that returnees live in safety; are accepted into a community of their choice; participate in community affairs; and develop a viable livelihood and participate in community affairs. There are usually significant links between CBR support and local-level stabilization, recovery, and peacebuilding efforts.

The provision of CBR support requires an awareness of the complexity and specificity of each setting and of the (planned or ongoing) reintegration processes. The general factors influencing reintegration and the need to 'do no harm' in terms of both the reintegration processes and broader community well-being are crucial starting points. It is also important to recognize that different individuals take different routes to reintegration, so using a variety of measures may improve reintegration outcomes.

Essential elements and aspects of CBR approaches are:

- CBR support benefits ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups because they are members of their communities, not based on their status as ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups.
- Activities are community-led and community-owned and therefore based on the community's priorities.
- Gender responsiveness, including protection and gender-transformative approaches, is central to the design and implementation of all activities.
- Youth responsiveness means that young ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups (women and men) can influence the design and implementation of activities in a meaningful way.
- The allocation and management of resources are transparent at the local level.
- Activities contribute to broader local capacity development (including of local government and non-state organizations).
- Communities are informed and prepared ahead of the return/entry of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups, enhancing their ability to receive them.
- Activities facilitate reconciliation and the re-establishment of relationships and enhance the sense of justice and security.
- Activities are child-sensitive and in the best interest of each child.
- The activities of local and external partners are conflict-sensitive in design and implementation and do no harm.
- Community leaders and participants are involved in the monitoring of activities and their impact.

CBR support can be provided in a broad variety of ways, including:

- Directly improving human security, for example through community-oriented policing and legal protection.
- Improving the effectiveness and transparency of governance, including decision making, at the community and local government levels.
- Supporting events or processes that strengthen community coherence, social acceptance and collaboration and trust between groups.
- Supporting transitional justice processes, social justice, human rights protections, reconciliation, conflict transformation, social inclusion, and political participation.
- Investing in support of economic revitalization of communities to generate employment and other economic opportunities. This could include the rehabilitation of infrastructure or enhanced service provision.
- Rehabilitating infrastructure to the particular benefit of children and young people, including schools, vocational training facilities, health centres and sport facilities and community centres.
- Supporting positive transformations in gender relations and work towards gender equality, reaffirming women's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

In most instances, a focus on CBR makes broader contributions to recovery, peacebuilding, and development processes. It brings life to normalcy, it can support human development and help to address grievances and other drivers of conflict, contributing to the 'bottom-up' resolution of conflicts. Likely, because it impacts ex-combatants, persons at risk of recruitment and vulnerable community members of all ages, it has the potential to prevent radicalization and re-recruitment and thus weaken the basis for the rise of violent extremism and terrorism.

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