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**IN SEARCH OF A WINNING FORMULA:
LESSONS ON DDR AND COMMUNITY
REINTEGRATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

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Literature Review
by MICHEL THILL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONSIDERATIONS

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) stands at a critical juncture. While plans for a more decentralized approach to demobilization and community reintegration are being forged between the Congolese government and its international partners, President Tshisekedi's recent, if still modest, consolidation of power may provide a rare opportunity to push these efforts forward. With this in mind, this paper reviews the existing DDR literature on the DRC in search for lessons. It aims, on the one hand, to infuse context and specificity into current discussions about DDR programming and the implementation of community reintegration and, on the other, to suggest potential ingredients of a winning formula for DDR in the DRC.

The DRC is the theater of perhaps the largest and longest-running DDR effort in the world. Described as a “never-ending story” (Boshoff 2007), the entangled activities of its many plans, programs, and projects are cyclical and highly contextual. They have been triggered by regional, national, and local peace agreements; influenced by electoral campaigns and elections; shaped by military operations; funded through bi- and multilateral partners; and pushed forward by international diplomacy.

At the same time, DDR cycles have fallen victim to the DRC's generalized militarized politics and a fundamental lack of trust between government, communities, and armed groups. Moreover, they have been bogged down by their very own politics; they all too often shy away from engaging at the political level; and they have produced a set of economic spoils some combatants may deem useless, with others free for the taking. Furthermore, DDR initiatives have been undermined by a lack of local knowledge, misguided assumptions, incoherence, and inconsistencies. Moreover, as it unfolds amid ongoing violent conflicts and socioeconomic scarcity, reintegration has become trapped by the logics of the security-development nexus. It faces the enormous task of turning former violent combatants into active and productive members of their community, thereby bridging security and development. Reintegration can therefore be seen as both the most important yet also weakest link of DDR.

The DRC's past three DDR cycles have few successes to boast about, particularly in the realm of reintegration. Yet, despite all the difficulties and shortcomings, some achievements have been made and ought to be acknowledged. Based on a nonsystematic review of DDR efforts in the DRC, this paper highlights six aspects worth considering in future DDR thinking and programming. In order to maximize the potential to achieve lasting results, DDR interventions in the DRC should:

Be rooted in a political process. DDR and reintegration in particular are deeply political in nature. President Tshisekedi's new plan known as *désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion communautaire* (DDRC) should therefore be part of, and rooted in, a consistent and coordinated high-level political process. The existing Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) is well-suited to rally all stakeholders around the table and mobilize necessary funds. President Tshisekedi's plans to set up a National Coordination for DDR in direct communication with the PSCF's national oversight mechanism, coupled with his recent, if modest, consolidation of political power, gives reason for optimism and provides a strong incentive for his partners to seize the moment.

Align with the military. A coordinated and coherent military strategy fully aligned with the DDR program is central to successful demobilization as well as to sustained reintegration. Rigorous and

principled implementation not only deters detractors and punishes spoilers but can in fact contribute to building trust between the Congolese government, armed groups, and communities by showing that agreements will be respected, spoilers reigned in, and vulnerable communities protected. In this context, the combination of the absence of a capable army and the planned withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission is worrisome, as it undermines trust, sustains security dilemmas, and leads to further ceasefires, deals, and agreements that lack teeth.

Avoid contributing to armed (re)mobilization. The DRC’s militarized politics have subverted past DDR efforts and will inevitably continue to complicate future plans. Nevertheless, DDRC can improve on past efforts by ensuring that its projects do not actively fuel local economies of de- and remobilization, nor feed into agendas of political strongmen. Besides addressing inadequate reinsertion packages and training that risk being turned into spoils for armed groups, making DDRC the only game in town could go a long way. This would require a clear, inclusive, and single vision of DDR and coherence and coordination across its programs and projects.

Invest in associative reintegration. While DDRC is best rooted in a strong internationally supported political framework, it also requires a community-driven and community-centered approach capable of building and sustaining trust during both demobilization and reintegration. Such an approach includes creative thinking about—followed by consequential investment into—flexible associative reintegration projects that give ex-combatants the freedom to choose their own paths to civilian life. It furthermore requires consulting and including communities in the process and fostering diverse relationships, networks, and associations as the bedrock of a new sense of belonging for both.

Address gaps in local knowledge. Insufficient knowledge within the DRC’s DDR programs about the intricacies and nuances of demobilization and reintegration, their social and psychological aspects, and the agency and perceptions of both combatants and communities has led to underperforming reintegration programs, frustration among ex-combatants, and donor expectations going unmet. Yet research on these intricacies and nuances remains much too scarce. Therefore, formulating evidence-based policy would require commissioning further studies on reintegration, return, home, and mobility.

Maintain sustained commitment. Ultimately, community reintegration in particular is by its very nature a slow-moving process whose progress is contingent on the larger local, national, regional, and, indeed, global context within which it unfolds. Sustained commitment and the enduring patience of all parties involved in driving and supporting DDR in the DRC are therefore essential.

Notice to the Reader

This report was submitted for publishing prior to President Tshisekedi’s announcement of a state of emergency and martial law that took effect in North Kivu and Ituri on 6 May 2021 and is to last for at least 30 days. This decidedly military approach to dealing with both provinces’ armed groups raises questions around the timing and implementation of the decentralized and community-driven DDRC, and the coordination between the latter and army operations. For now, there seems little choice but to hold out for civil government to return before launching any community reintegration programs.

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, nine months after taking office and a year after winning a contested—yet largely peaceful—presidential election, President Félix Tshisekedi initiated the DRC’s fourth disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) cycle. Entitled DDRC, its emphasis lies in *réinsertion communautaire* (community reintegration), an approach lobbied for by provincial authorities of North and South Kivu in particular.¹ Shortly after its announcement, the governors of both provinces set up an interprovincial commission to support this new attempt to convince combatants to lay down their arms and regain a place in civilian life.

The twenty-first century’s ever-changing landscape of violence is marked by an absence of political processes to end conflicts that grow in complexity, involving increasingly fragmented nonstate armed groups, transnational criminal networks, and extremism. As one international response to these challenges, DDR has adapted along the way and in line with global peace, security, and development agendas. A largely technical tool of national peace agreements in the late 1980s and 1990s, DDR has become a fundamental part of peacekeeping operations around the world and is by now a longstanding, if somewhat disparate, process in its own right. DDR plays out at local, national, or regional levels, unfolds in different forms and shapes, and is more often than not decoupled from wider political processes. Furthermore, since 9/11, DDR has been a quintessential example of the security-development nexus. Indeed, today, DDR is commonly understood as an open-ended process embedded in a “wider recovery and stability agenda” (World Bank, United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, and Social Science Research Council 2018, 4; UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center 2020). In this reading, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants into national security forces or society are to be the bridge that links security and development. DDR thereby is not only meant to reduce the potential for violence, but ideally also functions as a stepping-stone for former combatants on their way to becoming productive members of their communities.

That said, policy makers, practitioners, and academics agree that community reintegration of former combatants is both the weakest link of DDR and the most important for success. In evaluations and research, the poor record on reintegration indeed stands out. Some studies ask what exactly successful reintegration would look like and how it could be measured. How can former combatants reintegrate, into what, and why? Others complain that despite the progress on thinking about DDR, in practice its tools remain largely technical without engaging the political. Still others therefore argue for DDR to be integrated ever deeper into development and state-building interventions. Yet making DDR all about reintegration has made it increasingly difficult to define where DDR begins and where it ends. This is problematic, considering that scholars and practitioners alike agree that successful DDR, and reintegration in particular, requires policy and programming to be informed by contextually specific, precise, and locally driven knowledge (Geenen 2007; Lamb 2012; McMullin 2013; Muggah 2014; Muggah and O’Donnell 2015; Perazzone 2016; Richards 2016; Sharif 2018; Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018, 16; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

The DRC has witnessed perhaps the largest and longest-running DDR effort in the world. Described as a “never-ending story” (Boshoff 2007), its past three cycles have few successes to boast

¹ In the DRC, reintegration into society is commonly referred to as reinsertion, while reintegration tends to be reserved for integration into the army. This use diverts from international DDR terminology. The revised IDDRS (UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, n.d.), for instance, refers to reinsertion as “the assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization but prior to the longer-term process of reintegration.” The literature on DDR in the DRC tends to follow UN definitions and so does this review.

about, particularly in the realm of reintegration. Observers have claimed that the DRC’s “demobilisation programmes do not address fighters’ motivations, and outcomes are largely immaterial” (Marriage 2007, 281). Others lament that “reintegration programs seem to run into the same obstacles in every new context, resulting in badly implemented plans and at best suboptimal results” (Sharif 2018, 3). The Congolese government’s failure to appropriately process large numbers of voluntary combatant surrenders in 2019 led a recent analysis to refer to it as “one of the eastern Congo’s biggest missed opportunities in a long time” (Kivu Security Tracker 2021, 16). Nevertheless, despite delays and setbacks, DDR remains “a crucial part of peace-building, state-building, and stabilization efforts in the DRC” (Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020, 842).

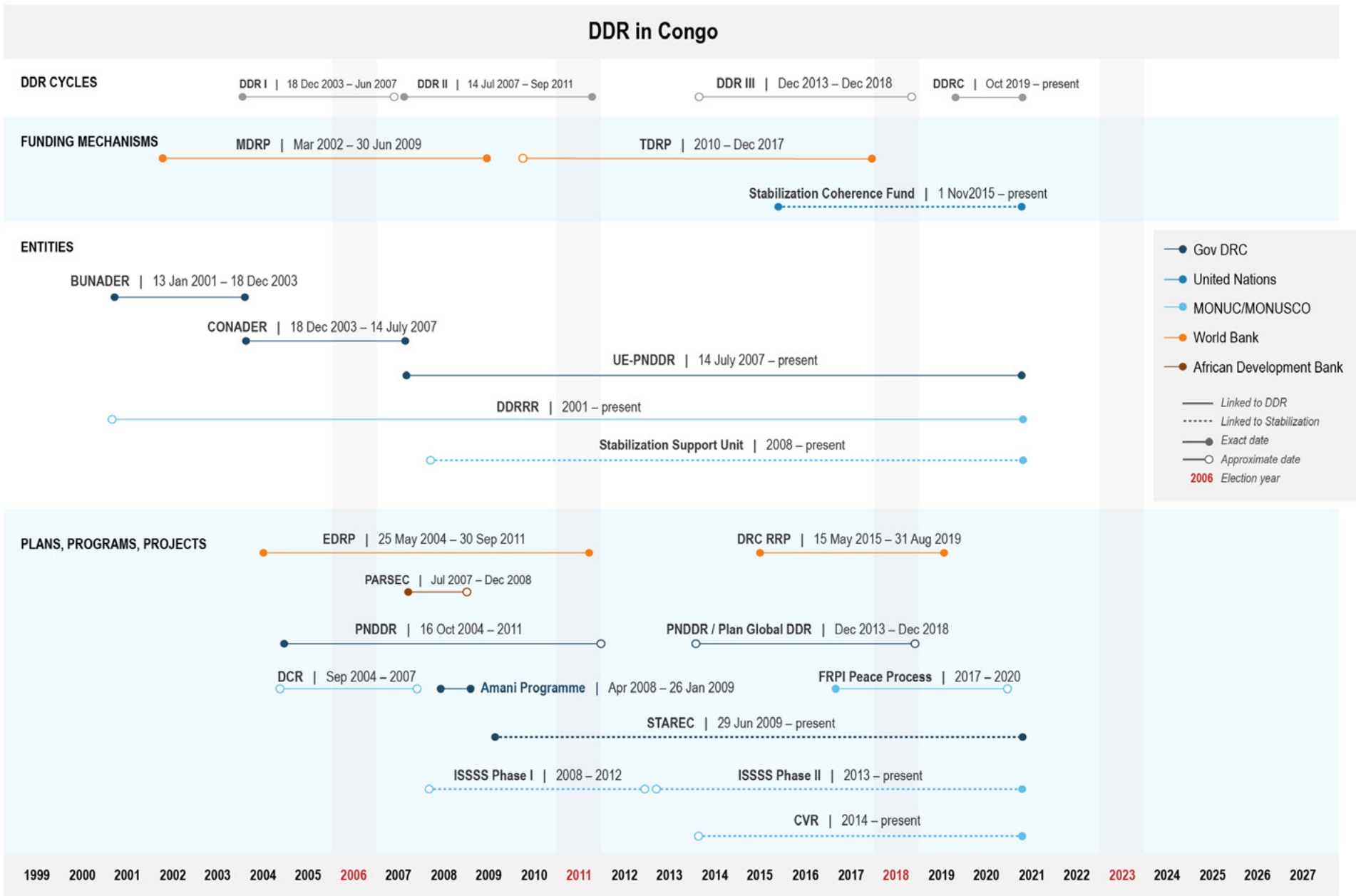
With the latest DDR plan on the horizon, it seems timely and worthwhile to explore how DDRC may improve upon its predecessors. This paper’s modest aim is to infuse context and specificity into current debates on DDR and reintegration in the DRC. Drawing on a nonsystematic review of the relevant literature on DDR and community reintegration in the DRC, the following sections will summarize the history, context, politics, and programmatic shortcomings before outlining key components of a potentially winning formula in the hope of informing and stimulating ongoing policy debates on DDR in the DRC.

2. DDR IN THE DRC: AN OVERVIEW (1999–2020)

Internationally supported DDR in the DRC has its origins in the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement that aimed to pave the way for disarming and repatriating foreign armed groups and their combatants and supporting the creation of a new and integrated national army. Over the last twenty-odd years, DDR has taken on various forms and shapes. Today, it may be described as a scattered web of plans, processes, programs, projects, and practices that involve a range of implementing organizations, monitoring agencies, state institutions, and donors situated at the local, national, regional, and international levels. Moreover, the DRC’s DDR processes are connected—sometimes more, sometimes less—to other peace, security, and development agendas such as peacekeeping missions, national security sector reform (SSR) programs, and stabilization strategies.

Finally, the DRC’s DDR activities are cyclical. They can be triggered by regional, national, or local peace agreements, influenced by electoral campaigns and elections, shaped by military operations, funded through bi- and multilateral partners, and pushed forward by international diplomacy like the 2013 Peace, Stability, and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) agreement. Although there is no consensus on their start and end, DDR in the DRC is commonly captured through a set of cycles: DDR I (2003–2007), DDR II (2007–2011), DDR III (2013–2018), and the recently announced DDRC (2019–present).

Before introducing each of these cycles, it is worth mentioning another way of categorizing DDR in the DRC, namely by its targets: Congolese adult combatants; foreign armed groups and foreign combatants; and child soldiers. While DDR dedicated to the first category subsumes by far the majority of funds and programs, the other two also play crucial roles. An early and barely researched DDR program in the DRC, for instance, was implemented by the Bureau National pour la Démobilisation et la Réinsertion (BUNADER, created in 2001) and seems to have largely focused on child soldiers, while awaiting the end of the Second Congo War before embarking on the disarmament of adult combatants (Bodineau 2011; International Labour Office 2003). Subsequently, a large regional DDR program funded by the World Bank’s Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP, 2002–2009) financed four specific projects for child soldiers. A 2007 evaluation of these projects puts the number of children demobilized at almost 22,000, of which more than 17,000 had been reunited with their families, but only 604 had actually finished the reintegration process (Development Alternatives Inc. 2007).



While child recruitment into armed groups and, in isolated cases, into the army and the police has diminished since the Congo Wars, the practice nevertheless continues to this day and remains a serious challenge for DDR (Mitra 2019; UN Security Council 2020a). The second process, also known as disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration, and resettlement (DDRRR), is funded by United Nations (UN) member states and the World Bank (up to 2017, when the last Rwanda DDR program closed) and managed by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). DDRRR activities started as early as 2001 and continue to this day, making it the longest-running DDR program in the DRC. According to a recent MONUSCO (2021) project concept note, DDRRR has repatriated over 32,000 foreign combatants and dependents (see also Boshoff 2010; International Crisis Group 2001; Kasongo and Sebahara 2006; Lamb et al. 2012; Marriage 2007; Muggah and O'Donnell 2015; Vogel 2014b; World Bank 2019).

Finally, the DDR process addressing Congolese adult combatants has worked along two main paths: either disarmament to join the national army or police, or disarmament and demobilization followed by reintegration into society, thereby contributing to socioeconomic recovery and development. The remainder of this paper predominantly focuses on the latter process.

2.1. DDR I (2003–2007) and DDR II (2007–2011)

The World Bank's MDRP, a regional response to the crisis of the First (1996–1997) and Second Congo War (1998–2003), financed DDR in the DRC through its Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project (EDRP). This ran from 2004 to September 2011, outlasting the MDRP itself, which was replaced with the Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP) in 2009. By 2011, the EDRP had spent US\$272 million on its activities—\$150 million from the World Bank, \$100 million from a multidonor trust fund, and \$22 million from the African Development Bank. This made it the best-funded DDR program in Africa. Yet the Congolese government had pledged only US\$2.5 million over the same period, revealing a key challenge all three cycles faced—namely, how far the country's powerholders and decision makers were actually committed to DDR (Conoir 2012; Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project 2004, 3; EDRP 2012, 59; Lamb 2012; Nzekani 2013; Perazzone 2016, 261).

In the DRC, in December 2003 and eight months after the Final Act to the Comprehensive and All-Inclusive Accord that ended the Second Congo War had been signed, the transitional power-sharing government created the Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion (CONADER). Taking over from BUNADER, the commission was tasked with monitoring, coordinating, and implementing DDR in the DRC. The Plan National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion (PNDDR) followed in 2004. The DRC's first DDR cycle quickly faced substantial challenges, including ongoing violent conflict in Ituri and the Kivus and the organization of the first free elections since independence. Scheduled for 2006, these took most of the transitional government's attention as well as that of its partners. Moreover, as discussed further below, CONADER did not perform according to donor expectations, nor to those of many demobilized ex-combatants. In July 2007, after a World Bank audit alleged a lack of capacity, inefficiency, the mismanagement of funds, and embezzlement, CONADER was forced to shut down, which can be seen as the end of DDR I (Clement 2009; Kölln 2011; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

DDR II began with the creation, in the same year, of CONADER's successor, the Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion (UE-PNDDR), and ran until September 2011. A 2012 EDRP completion report states that 209,605 ex-combatants went through the DRC's first two DDR cycles, including 31,738 children. Of these, 66,814 integrated into the army while 109,846 adults demobilized in order to return to civilian life (EDRP 2012, iii, footnote 1). While these

numbers are impressive, reintegration faced serious obstacles. An independent evaluation notes that, by the end of 2009, just over 100,000 combatants had been demobilized out of a target of 150,000, but only 52,000, or 58 percent of the target of 90,000, had been reintegrated (Kölln 2011, 15). According to an analysis by a retired Congolese colonel, 159,670 ex-combatants were demobilized between 2004 and 2010, of which only 77,780, or less than half, had reintegrated into society (Nzekani 2013, 4; see also Lamb 2012, 38). Perazzone (2016, 267) writes that one reason for this weakness may have been the EDRP's and CONADER's priority to "disband as many armed groups as possible before the 2006 elections took place. This proved detrimental to reintegration, which was given less planning and funding." Others point to the program's initially misguided premise that "fighters will demobilise voluntarily and that a few hundred dollars (or in the case of children, a family home) will make demobilisation economically viable" (Marriage 2007, 290). Yet, at the time, humanitarian agencies reportedly deemed DDR benefits too generous, exceeding what was needed and what their own projects offered to beneficiaries.² It is therefore worth keeping in mind that criticism, too, is contextual and relative.

Moreover, the program struggled to reach out to women combatants. A comprehensive gender strategy was only incorporated in 2008. The NGO tasked with implementing six special programs contacting women fighters reached a mere 876 of the initial planning figure of 10,000. By the end of the EDRP, only 4,524 women out of almost 110,000 ex-combatants had registered for demobilization. Of these, 2,396 chose reintegration into society, while the others preferred army integration. One clear reason for this lack of uptake was the initial requirement to hand in a weapon at registration. Many women members of armed groups do not carry weapons but provide other services, from portage to cooking to sex. Women combatants also felt they would face more resentment, stigma, and rejection if they returned to their communities. In this sense, DDR processes in the DRC reflect the gendered structural disadvantages of its society as a whole (EDRP 2012, 10; Independent Evaluation Group 2013, 5–6; Kölln 2011, 11; Rhea 2014).

Following the end of DDR II, demobilization and reintegration in the DRC was slowed by a series of crucial events. Contested elections in late 2011 made some donors reluctant to open their wallets. A military regimentation process questioned the parallel command structures that had emerged through previous army reintegration, upsetting a fair few political and military strongmen in the Kivus. In addition, a new rebellion, partly a result of the army reorganization, was eventually militarily defeated, making government and donors reassess their DDR approach (Stearns 2012; Vogel 2014c; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

2.2. DDR III (2013–2018) and DDRC (2019–Present)

In December 2013, a month after the signing of the Nairobi Agreement that officially ended the M23 rebellion, the Congolese government presented a new take on its DDR strategy, the Plan Global de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion, or DDR III. Revised in 2014 in close collaboration with MONUSCO, DDR III nevertheless struggled to take off due to a mix of factors: inept demobilization and reintegration efforts, renewed military operations against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), remobilized Burundian armed groups active on Congolese soil after Burundi's failed 2015 coup, and donors hesitant to commit funding to a government headed by a president who seemed reluctant to cede power in the then-upcoming 2016 elections. Eventually, the World Bank did contribute

² Communication with World Bank staff involved in the DRC's first three DDR cycles, April 11, 2021.

US\$21.5 million to DDR III under the DRC Reinsertion and Reintegration Project (DRC RRP), which ran from May 2015 to August 2019.

In a major change in rationale from its two predecessors, DDR III no longer offered military integration as an option for disarmed combatants. Addressing Congolese armed groups as opposed to rebel armies, the focus now lay on reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life. To do so, DDR III preferred a carrot and stick approach: Armed group combatants would be given a deadline by which to demobilize and reintegrate into civilian life or face the (questionable) full force of the Congolese army. The World Bank's final review of its DRC RRP points to numerous challenges (World Bank 2019, 2020). MONUSCO was to refurbish, cater for, and monitor the two active reception centers in Kamina and Kitona but stopped its work by July 2017—and in October withdrew its support to DDR III altogether.

MONUSCO's withdrawal was yet another sign of the worsening relations between the peacekeeping mission and the government during those years. In early 2015, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) unilaterally began operations against the FDLR, sidelining MONUSCO, which had criticized the participation of army commanders reportedly involved in human rights violations. In mid-2016, violent conflict that broke out around a customary succession in the Kasai region saw much government interference and, in March 2017, led to the killing of two UN Group of Expert members who sought to investigate the use of drugs and child soldiers among some of the fighting factions. Throughout this period, Kabila's scheming around the 2016 elections and the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations made a working relationship with MONUSCO—as well as many other international partners—increasingly difficult.

The government's haphazard efforts to address living conditions in the DDR III reception centers were perhaps the straw that broke the camel's back. They also played into the World Bank's decision to close its own program early, with activities effectively ceasing by December 2018. In this span, 4,346 ex-combatants, 89 of whom were women, had been demobilized. While the review states that 3,796, 80 of whom were women, had reintegrated, reintegration was measured by the distribution of kits and methodologically compromised surveys of ex-combatants' situations six months after training and six months after their return into the community. Moreover, if DRC RRP's figures were close to meeting its initial demobilization target of 4,700, the government's own plan had aimed for the reintegration of over 12,000 ex-combatants. More worryingly, the World Bank review notes that the proximity of the reception centers to military bases meant that “some residents were vulnerable to rights abuse and recruitment into militia or the DRC military itself” (World Bank 2020, 10). Worse, without giving any additional explanation, it states that besides those who reintegrated, “an additional 1,098 were either deceased; considered as foreign combatants; or joined the police or the military” (World Bank 2020, 9). Besides revealing that ex-combatants still found their way into the security forces despite DDR III rhetoric, this statement echoes the shocking investigation into the Kotakoli army camp in 2013 and 2014 where, prior to World Bank funding, at least one hundred ex-combatants and their dependents awaiting demobilization died of disease and hunger (Human Rights Watch 2014). In short, despite the short-lived MONUSCO and World Bank support, DDR III was seriously damaged by the Congolese government's disregard for demobilizing combatants—a fact that has made current demobilization campaigns considerably harder (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020; Clement 2009; Conoir 2012; Kasongo and Sebahara 2006; Kölln 2011; Lamb 2012; Perazzone 2016; Stearns, Verweijen, and Baaz 2013, 66–67; UN Office of Internal Oversight Services 2018; Vogel 2015; Vogel and Stearns 2018; Wilén 2013; Wondo 2014; World Bank 2015).

Besides some additional local initiatives, including the below-discussed Patriotic Resistance Front of Ituri (FRPI) peace process, a lull in DDR activities followed the somewhat traumatic experiences of DDR III. Moreover, President Kabila's political maneuvering to repeatedly postpone the 2016 elections

and the violent repression of manifestations across the country certainly did not help in creating an environment conducive to launching new DDR initiatives. With President Tshisekedi taking office in January 2019 after dubious yet peaceful elections, however, a page seems to have been turned. Nine months later, Tshisekedi announced his new approach to DDR, *désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion communautaire* (DDRC). According to a terms of reference paper, DDRC maintains DDR III's skepticism toward army integration. It departs from previous DDR cycles, however, by adapting a civil-led and decentralized framework that puts community reintegration at its heart. Besides the decidedly demilitarized and bottom-up nature of this approach, it stresses inclusivity and complementarity by “privileg[ing] all community reinsertion needs (the needs of ex-combatants, receiving communities, and the need to strengthen civil state authority and basic public services)” (DDRC, n.d., 1; author's translation). Two draft ordinances created in late 2020 under interim Chief of Staff Kolongele (succeeded by Guylain Nyembo in January 2021) plan to replace the UE-PNDDR with a National Coordination which reports directly to the presidency and supports the provincial commissions that are to be DDRC's operational driving forces (DDRC, n.d.; Government of the DRC 2020a, n.d.). While DDRC, then, contains much to be hopeful about, the coming months will show how far—and how fast—its plans can materialize. One particular challenge may lie in balancing its national vision with its decentralized approach, that is, in designing DDR projects that need to both align with a national program while responding to the varied local exigencies of any specific context?

2.3. Parallel and Aligned DDR Initiatives

In parallel or aligned with these four major DDR cycles, a variety of additional initiatives have been launched over the last twenty years as part either of peace processes with specific armed groups or of larger donor programs. These include Ituri's demobilization efforts from 2004 onward, including the Demobilization and Community Reinsertion (DCR) project (2004–2007) and the FRPI peace process (2017–present), as well as the 2008 Goma Conference and subsequent Amani program (2008–2009). Each of these will return in the following sections.

Another DDR initiative consists of the country's stabilization strategies in the form of the government's Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (STAREC), launched in 2009 and supported by the UN peacekeeping mission's International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS). DDR plays an important role in these. According to ISSSS statistics, during the ISSSS's first phase (2009–2012), for instance, 4,900 ex-combatants were demobilized and 2,600 passed through its reintegration programs (ISSSS for the DRC 2013, 9, 31). Moreover, through its fourth pillar, dedicated to “Return, Reintegration and Socio-Economic Recovery,” the ISSSS works to facilitate the return and sustainable reintegration of ex-combatants. As part of Tshisekedi's DDRC, however, STAREC may well be abolished and its responsibilities subsumed by the DDRC's National Coordination (Government of the DRC 2020b) in order to better integrate stabilization and demobilization activities. This would be in line with DDRC's ambition to establish a single, more coherent vision toward DDR and stability in the east.

The latest addition to this arsenal is MONUSCO's Community Violence Reduction (CVR) program, launched in support of the government's DDR III plan as “a bottom-up approach to address the challenges of increasing armed violence at the community level” (World Bank 2019, 4). Managed by the UN peacekeeping mission's Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (DDR/RR) Division, CVR projects “are aimed at mitigating the recruitment by armed and criminal groups of youth-at-risk, as well as creating increased community security and stability”

(MONUSCO 2016, 4). Between 2016 and 2018, sixty-three CVR projects were implemented at a cost of US\$6 million. None of them ran longer than one year (UN Office of Internal Oversight Services 2018, 1; Muggah and O'Donnell 2015).

2.4. DDR in a Poverty-Stricken Conflict Zone

Importantly, and as a final point, the general context in which these disparate DDR initiatives take place greatly complicates their mission. They are rolled out while fighting between the army, supported by the UN peacekeeping mission, and a myriad of armed groups very much continues. The latest armed group mapping counted 122 groups active in the provinces of Tanganyika, Ituri, and North and South Kivu (Kivu Security Tracker 2021). Eastern DRC thus certainly does not fit the oft-used, yet seriously misguided, postconflict label (Wilén 2013, 120; Carayannis and Pangburn 2020, 9).

Negotiating agreements and planning for disarmament and demobilization in diverse and complex conflict zones is a tall order by any means. To complicate matters, reintegration programs unfold in a dire socioeconomic situation that, in itself, constitutes a major grievance of many of the armed groups. According to the World Bank, in 2018, 72 percent of the population lived in extreme poverty or on less than US\$1.90 a day and 43 percent of children were malnourished. The DRC's economic growth slowed from 5.8 percent in 2018 to 4.4 percent in 2019 and is expected to recede by 2.2 percent due to the Covid-19 pandemic (World Bank 2021a). The DRC was ranked 175 out of 189 on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme 2020), while Transparency International (2020) puts the country at 170 out of 180 in its corruption perception index. The World Bank ranks it as 183 out of 190 in the ease of doing business (World Bank 2020). Indeed, the World Bank recently withdrew a first disbursement of US\$100 million to support the new president's free education program after an investigation alleged cases of fraud and corruption in the sector (Kavanagh 2021; World Bank 2021b).

Ex-combatants' willingness to demobilize and reintegrate is understandably "greatly influenced by the availability of alternative livelihoods and jobs" (Nzekani 2016, 6). The above figures, then, not only make for sobering reading but also raise the question at the heart of DDR: "reintegration into what?" (McMullin 2013, 1). Where are ex-combatants meant to go after they demobilize? What are they meant to do? And what can they look forward to? Perhaps unsurprisingly, in a quantitative study on reintegration across the Great Lakes, the DRC was singled out for its particularly fierce economic and social challenges. The study concluded that "the broader societal shift towards peace and development, which appears to have served as catalyst to ex-combatants' reintegration in the other GLR [Great Lakes region] countries, is visibly diminished in the contexts of continued local violence and insecurity in Eastern DRC" (Rhea 2014, 8).

The DRC's DDR cycles consist of several somewhat entangled strategies, processes, and funds. While its own national DDR plan ought to offer the guiding framework within which these processes unfold, in practice, a range of DDR programs, projects, and initiatives coexist without necessarily following the same set of rules and principles. Nor do they showcase impressive results in an active conflict zone marked by few opportunities for the population at large or for armed group combatants. Unfortunately, the political context within which DDR unfolds only adds to this grim picture.

3. THE POLITICS BEYOND DDR

Like any other intervention in a sector as sensitive as that of security, DDR is shaped, enabled, and constrained by the context in which it unfolds. This section looks at two contextual factors of immediate

relevance to demobilization and reintegration: the political value of armed groups, and trust and security dilemmas.

3.1. The Political Value of Armed Groups

A fundamental challenge to DDR is the political value armed groups enjoy in the DRC. Armed groups and a range of political and military elites within and outside of the country entertain volatile, yet crucially important, relations in the joint pursuit and maintenance of economic and political power at different times, at different levels, and within different arenas. In the past, armed groups functioned as trampolines to catapult their leaders into senior positions within the army, the government, or national politics. These configurations commonly benefited higher-ranking rebels, turning the rank and file into mere tools for their own career progression. Overall, rebellion was a gamble that more often than not paid off. After the defeat of M23 and DDR's turn away from army integration, the nature of armed mobilization changed without, however, diminishing the political value of armed groups. Quite to the contrary, in the absence of larger, foreign-backed rebellions, "lower-level and second-tier political actors, such as customary chiefs, medium-size businesses, and mid-level commanders have come to engage in a process aptly labelled the 'democratization of militarized politics'" (Vlassenroot and Verweijen 2017, 110).

While these more localized militarized politics play out around succession, land, and access to resources and markets, provincial and national politicians continue to interfere in armed mobilization and manipulate conflicts to further their own grander agendas. Election seasons, for example, tend to be prime moments in which wannabe politicians rely on armed groups to mobilize votes. Moreover, armed groups can help them gain political leverage. Known as the "pompier-pyromane" phenomenon (Verweijen 2017), politicians fuel armed conflict to then emerge as the only ones able to extinguish its flames. Since the demise of M23, these multilevel militarized politics have consolidated into a generalized, if somewhat counterintuitive, "stable instability" (Verweijen 2016; see also Stearns and Vogel 2015, 2017; Verweijen and Iguma Wakenge 2015; Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

The enduring political value of armed groups is not helped by the sustained lack of interest in the conflicts ravaging the eastern provinces of the country in the decision-making and opinion-shaping centers in Kinshasa—be this in Parliament or in the media. From Kinshasa's point of view, the stakes at play in the politics of the capital and at the national level dwarf those of the east. Moreover, the latter's low-intensity conflicts have long stopped being a serious threat to the capital and its ways of governing. Once former enemies and rivals had been neutralized or integrated into the political ranks after DDR I and DDR II, some government officials deemed it no longer politically expedient to invest time and effort into reintegration. Their goal was achieved and attention shifted elsewhere.

The Congolese government is not the only party that prioritizes the signing of a peace agreement over the laborious task of implementing its resolutions. International partners can also get carried away by breakthroughs in bringing about peace, only to lose sight of the work it takes to maintain. Compounding this disinterest is the lack of a political vision for ending these conflicts among these international partners as well as the UN peacekeeping mission. Moreover, a certain degree of complicity between donors and the Congolese political and business elite undermines real progress in matters of DDR. While an abundance of investigative reports and empirical research show the scale and devastating consequences of militarized patronage politics in the DRC, these rarely lead to more than paternalistic scolding, rebukes, or occasional, yet generally toothless, individual sanctions by bi- and multilateral donors. In the meantime, opaque mining deals for multinational conglomerates in the capitals of the

West proceed, foreign direct investment continues to flow, and offshore accounts carry on welcoming the money of the Congolese elites who keep the country's system of unaccountability and impunity afloat (Marriage 2007; Perazzone 2016; Vogel and Stearns 2018, 702).

In short, while the country's elites continue to benefit from armed groups, disinterest, inertia, and complicity make it difficult to hold the government accountable. That said, after two years of infighting between Kabila's and Tshisekedi's camps that only contributed to this neglect, the latter's recent consolidation of power may provide a new window of opportunity to draw renewed attention to the conflicts in the east and revive much-needed demobilization strategies (Boisselet 2020; Kivu Security Tracker 2021; Nzekani 2013; Vogel 2015; Vogel and Stearns 2018).

3.2. Trust and Security Dilemmas

A second major challenge faced by DDR in the DRC is a fundamental lack of trust between government, armed groups, and communities. The government and the army have reneged on their promises to armed groups in the past, particularly concerning demobilization and community reintegration. In 2013 and 2014, for example, as mentioned above, state neglect of ex-combatants awaiting demobilization in the Kotakoli army barracks led at least one hundred of them to die of malnutrition and disease (Human Rights Watch 2014). Conditions in reception centers remain dire to this day (Kivu Security Tracker 2019).

Moreover, some armed group leaders died in inexplicable circumstances after laying down their arms. Paul Sadala, alias Morgan, for instance, was shot in an altercation with the army after he and forty-two combatants of the Mai-Mai Morgan militia had surrendered to the army and were being transferred out of the bush. A UN Group of Experts midterm report found "a disproportionate use of force during Morgan's arrest, ill-treatment during his transfer, and negligence in treating his wounds." It continued that his death would likely not only stop "the surrender of the rest of his followers," but "may also obstruct the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in the rest of Ituri district by sending out a message that negotiations with FARDC cannot be trusted" (UN Security Council 2014, 20). As the Group of Experts noted, such incidents only deepen the distrust between armed groups and the Congolese government. The civilian suffering caused by past army operations, which often seemed barely coordinated with DDR initiatives, merely contributes to the grievances of desperate communities, which armed groups know how to manipulate to replenish their ranks. Furthermore, DDR cannot—and is not meant to—address legitimate grievances around perceived insecurity and a lack of opportunities that drove many combatants to pick up arms in the first place. As long as these grievances remain, some combatants will refuse to demobilize (Musamba 2019).

This profound lack of trust is exacerbated by the fact that the Congolese national army is not only incapable of providing general security, but also partly unwilling to do so. Even worse, the FARDC are known to engage in fluid alliances with a variety of armed groups. The army's incapacity, inaction, and dubious alliances lead to intricate security dilemmas between armed groups, government, and communities. Who will lay down arms first if each armed group rival fears revenge attacks against them and the communities they claim to protect? At the same time, once they disarm, who will be able to protect communities? And how can civilians be sure that returning ex-combatants do not act on past grudges?

Ultimately, as Marriage (2007, 287) notes, "various forms of security are competitive, and there is reason to be suspicious of other people's security agendas." Whose security is given priority is therefore not just a highly sensitive but also a deeply political question that requires a political answer. The fact that the UN peacekeeping mission, the obvious third party to help provide security to communities in the absence of an apolitical and capable army, is preparing to withdraw will ensure that lack of trust will

remain a major challenge for future DDR programs (Baaz and Verweijen 2013a; Perazzone 2016; Stearns, Verweijen, and Baaz 2013, 68; Vogel 2014b; Vogel and Musamba 2016, 5; Vogel and Stearns 2018, 696–97).

In brief, over the last twenty years, the country's politics have become deeply militarized, as armed groups have turned into valuable levers for customary chiefs, army generals, and political entrepreneurs to pursue their varied agendas. Partly as a consequence, distrust has poisoned relations between the government, its army, armed groups, and communities. In the absence of a competent army and a committed UN peacekeeping mission, the resulting security dilemmas will continue to slow down the work of demobilization and reintegration. Moreover, DDR comes with its own politics that risk undermining its objectives.

4. THE POLITICS OF DDR

Besides the fundamental contextual challenges which DDR programs face, the politics of the interventions themselves further complicate successful demobilization and reintegration. Four, in particular, deserve mention: favoring technical solutions to political problems; the spoils produced by DDR programs; a lack of (local) knowledge; and programmatic incoherence, inconsistency, and complicity.

4.1 Political Problems, Technical Solutions

DDR efforts naturally face technical challenges, which require careful attention and considered responses (Nzekani 2013; Perazzone 2016; Richards 2016). Ultimately, however, it is not the technical but the political that all too often remains unaddressed. Decision makers, practitioners, and scholars alike have repeatedly cautioned that “[o]ne cannot ‘programme’ a way out of a poor security situation, [a] lack of opportunities to make a living, and the fact that ex-combatants return together and may feel more connected to each other than to their old society” (De Vries and Wiegink 2011, 47). Yet, while the Congolese government showed little political engagement beyond the transition years (2003–2006), international partners increasingly limited their interventions to program implementation instead of continuing their previous political involvement. Reflecting the challenges of electoral cycles, ongoing violence, militarized politics, and mismanagement of funds raised above, the final MDRP report (2010, 3) noted that “the MDRP was technocratic in its approach and did not give enough consideration to the political dimensions of demobilization ... The EDRP encountered persistent political hurdles and blockages and, as a result, was very slow to get off the ground and ultimately had difficulty in achieving its objectives.” Despite this conclusion, not much changed in the following years (Marriage 2007; Perazzone 2016; Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020, 840; Vogel and Stearns 2018).

Misguided analyses including postconflict labels and “failed state” rhetoric amongst interveners compound the tendency to revert to technical solutions for political problems. All-too-simplistic assumptions about the centrality of the state monopoly on violence, for instance, convince donors to fund a variety of train-and-equip missions for the Congolese army that only fuel prevailing patronage politics and exacerbate its patchworked nature without boosting its overall operational efficacy (Stearns, Verweijen, and Baaz 2013; Thomas-Jensen and Gingerich 2010; Verweijen 2018). More generally, in a context in which public authority is gained and lost through a complex and inherently informal interplay of militarized patronage politics, political entrepreneurs all too accustomed with the art of extraversion (Bayart 2000) will capture large chunks of aid meant to reform the public administration, democratize security services, and reintegrate ex-combatants. Ultimately, the DRC's interconnected local, national, and regional power struggles “shap[e] how governance is delivered and

experienced, and thus conditio[n] the success of security interventions like DDR” (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020, 709).

To overcome the limitations of technical solutions, DDR programs will need to be part of, and rooted in, a consistent and coordinated high-level political process. While the PSCF offers such a process, up until recently, it has not been able to create a climate conducive to the success of security interventions such as DDR. With the new government’s revival of active regional and international diplomacy, however, DDR programs may face more favorable circumstances.

4.2. The Spoils of DDR

In a climate of dire socioeconomic scarcity, the financial flows that demobilization and reintegration programs are attached to have produced a wide range of spoils for armed group leaders, combatants, the army, and political elites alike. Civilians pretend to be former combatants to benefit from reinsertion kits, which themselves resurface on open markets. Demobilized combatants join reintegration programs only to receive a cash payment, with which they fill the coffers of their armed groups. The National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) reportedly followed freshly demobilized combatants and robbed them of the assistance they had received (Richards 2016). As already raised above, fraud, misappropriation, and the embezzlement of DDR funds and assets—concerns that go well beyond DDR programs—have been widespread.

Besides these financial and material spoils, there are rewards in positions and status. In return for the demobilization of armed groups, their leaders have been given high-ranking positions in the army or—during DDR I—in national politics. While army integration has fallen out of favor since at least DDR III, it remains—along with the recognition of self-declared ranks—a popular revendication of armed groups in their negotiations with the army and MONUSCO. Recent ceasefire agreements with armed groups have proved them right, as army integration seems to remain on the menu despite the detrimental effects it has had on the FARDC’s cohesion and operational effectiveness (Lamb et al. 2012; Marriage 2007; Perazzone 2016; Richards 2016; Sharif 2018; Stearns, Verweijen, and Baaz 2013, 65–66; Vogel 2013; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

The 2008 Goma Conference and subsequent Amani peace process perhaps capture best the perverse effects of the economics of DDR. In January 2008, a month after a bitter defeat of the Congolese army and its armed group allies against the CNDP, a conference on peace, security, and development for North and South Kivu was held in Goma. It concluded with a ceasefire agreement signed between the Congolese government and twenty-two armed groups who declared their willingness to demobilize and integrate into the army.

As the conference provided a relatively open and safe platform for communities, chiefs, and armed groups to voice their grievances, a few daring mavericks seized the opportunity to benefit from the event’s participation perks. Two representatives of the Raiya Mutomboki, for instance, signed the conference’s *acte d’engagement* without having the blessing of the armed group’s leadership. While their signatures thus carried no authority, their *per diems* nevertheless made it worth their while. Worse is the case of the Mai-Mai Shikito. A daring Congolese, Richard Mukulumanya, created the group specifically to benefit from the process. After the conference, however, it turned into a fully fledged armed group that claimed to fight against the Rwanda-backed CNDP while also preying on the communities it pretended to protect. After the CNDP’s demobilization and wholesale integration into the army in March 2009, Mukulumanya integrated into the FARDC himself as colonel, thus benefiting a second time from the Amani program (Stearns 2012, 32–38; Stearns, Verweijen, and Baaz 2013, 11–12; Vogel 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

It is no wonder, then, that many communities have come to perceive DDR programs as rewarding those who engage in armed conflict. Indeed, these programs may have “contributed to the development of a local economy of armed mobilization and a cycle of constant recycling of combatants for economic gain” (Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020, 844).

4.3. Missing Out on (Local) Knowledge

While the EDRP reportedly established a database of over 150,000 interviews conducted with combatants who entered the DDR process,³ little independent qualitative research on demobilization and reintegration was commissioned during the DRC’s first two DDR cycles. As the EDRP (2012, 13) final evaluation noted, “while the MIS [Management Information System] allowed EDRP to have comprehensive information on the program at the beneficiary level, few empirical studies were undertaken.” Indeed, only in late 2010, toward the end of DDR II, did the World Bank’s TDRP program commission studies, including on the success of integration, on vulnerable groups, and on receiving communities. Moreover, DDR efforts all too often did not sufficiently consult those who were most affected by armed mobilization, demobilization, and reintegration—be they civil society members, community leaders, customary chiefs, women’s and children’s rights groups, or successfully integrated former combatants (Perazzone 2016; Sharif 2018, 12).

This lack of research and consultation had two regrettable consequences. On the one hand, those who felt sidelined were more likely to feel unconcerned and thus did not take ownership of DDR programs. Community reintegration, however, can only ever work with the active participation of customary chiefs, rights groups, and grassroots organizations (Edmond, Mills, and McNamee 2009; Van Lierde et al. 2021). On the other hand, a lack of research and consultation led to decision makers and practitioners missing out on the diverse experiences and countless nuances of the various aspects of demobilization and reintegration. For any overall DDR strategy to capture all of these would likely be impossible. Nevertheless, painting diverse experiences with too broad a brush has consequences (De Vries and Wiegink 2011; Marriage 2007; Richards 2016).

As a consequence, a fair number of ex-combatants fell victim to a range of misguided assumptions. Initially, for instance, they were all too often understood as a homogenous group with similar experiences, interests, and hopes for the future (De Vries and Wiegink 2011; Özerdem and Podder 2011; Sharif 2018, 14). Moreover, their violent past was seen as a potential threat to society (World Bank 2002, 19). It is undoubtedly true that “living by the gun” (Debos 2011) comes with its own set of rules and values that do not always easily translate into civilian life (Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020: 834; Vogel and Stearns 2018). However, recent research, as well as the DRC’s few more successful cases of reintegration, have shown that past violent behavior does not determine future action (De Vries and Wiegink 2011, 38, 45; Kölln 2011, 6; Muggah and O’Donnell 2015, 6; Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018, 15–19).

Furthermore, to somewhat negate ex-combatants’ violent pasts, it was deemed crucially important to break up armed groups’ command and control as well as their violent networks by, among other efforts, making sure ex-combatants returned to their families (World Bank 2002, 19). What home meant to ex-combatants was not necessarily considered, nor that some may not have wanted to go home, as they felt embarrassed, unwelcome, or even at risk. The sidelining of these social and psychological dimensions of reintegration in favor of a much more limited economic and individualistic approach

³ Communication with World Bank staff involved in the DRC’s first three DDR cycles, April 12, 2021.

in the DRC's DDR cycles has been widely criticized. And, despite preferring the latter, DDR I and II struggled to respond to ex-combatants' career preferences or build on their existing skills (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020; Kölln 2011, 6; Musamba 2019; Nzekani 2013, 3; Perazzone 2016; Van Lierde et al. 2021, 77; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

In short, insufficient research and consultation prior to and during the implementation of DDR programs led to a lack of empirical and field-driven local knowledge about the intricacies and nuances of demobilization and reintegration, its social and psychological aspects, and the agency and perceptions of both combatants and communities. More research and consultation could help fine-tune future reintegration programs, thereby increasing their performance and reducing frustration among ex-combatants.

4.4. Lack of Coordination, Coherence, and Consistency

Besides not being sufficiently rooted in local knowledge, the DRC's DDR cycles have also been marked by incoherence, inconsistency, and complicity. Spread across multiple much larger programs and integrated into agendas that are not always easy to align, DDR's entangled nature makes its processes and initiatives prone to programmatic incoherence. It certainly does not help that reintegration is not always understood in the same way by its various programs, which leads not only to conceptual incoherence but also to different success indicators and priorities.

The sheer multitude of DDR projects offered by government and UN agencies, as well as NGOs, leads combatants to evaluate the various packages on offer to seek the one most to their liking. This "forum shopping" (Von Benda-Beckmann 1981) introduces counterproductive market logics into DDR programming. In an effort to meet their own targets, DDR implementers may end up competing rather than cooperating, while the various reintegration processes become but additional options in many ex-combatants' back-and-forth between life in arms and as civilians (Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020; World Bank 2019, 7–8; World Bank, UN Peacekeeping Operations, and Social Science Research Council 2018, 3).

Problems of coordination and coherence also emerge within the same program and can lead to missed opportunities. A review of local peacebuilding provides the following example. In Kigoma, in South Kivu's Uvira Territory, for example, an ISSSS-funded project worked to demobilize around seventy combatants. At the same time, another organization aligned with the ISSSS was looking for labor to rehabilitate a road in the area. Not knowing about the just-demobilized combatants, it ended up recruiting youth from Sange, leaving the latter with little to do (Van Lierde et al. 2021, 78). A recent evaluation of MONUSCO's DDR emphasized the importance of program coherence and coordination in order to "mitigate the risk of inefficient planning, unnecessary duplication of efforts and resources, and [a] fragmented approach to implementing programmatic activities" (UN Office of Internal Oversight Services 2019, 3; see also Boshoff 2010; Boshoff et al. 2010; Clement 2009; Lamb 2012, 37; Perazzone 2016, 263).

DDR programming is also affected by a sometimes dangerous degree of inconsistency. The most nefarious cases are joint FARDC-MONUSCO military operations such as the 2009 Kimia II and the 2010–2012 Amani Leo campaigns against the FDLR, which not only took an enormous civilian toll but also unleashed vicious cycles of insecurity and score-settling massacres, which in turn facilitated armed group mobilization. Indeed, the campaigns led to the revival of the Raiya Mutomboki as a franchise whose various branches wreaked havoc across both Kivu provinces for the years that followed. Such military campaigns unsurprisingly squash any remaining trust between the Congolese government and communities, create security dilemmas, and make demobilization and reintegration an almost

insurmountable challenge. Firmly aligning army operations with DDR programming is therefore essential (Stearns, Verweijen, and Baaz 2013, 19–20).

In sum, DDR interventions not only face steep challenges rooted in the DRC’s general militarized politics but are also bogged down by their very own politics. They all too often shy away from engaging at the political level. They produce a set of economic spoils difficult to resist and are not embedded within local knowledge. Finally, incoherence and inconsistencies in programming threaten to undermine and unravel the hard work required for successful DDR.

Taking a step back, DDR in the DRC emerges as both cyclical in nature and heavily influenced by the context in which it intervenes. While each cycle gains momentum once key contextual obstacles are (temporarily) dealt with, it is also shaped, and all too often undermined or subverted, by events well beyond its control. DDR I began in earnest after the signing of a major peace agreement bringing an end to the Second Congo War. DDR II followed the first free and peaceful elections in 2006 and the replacement of CONADER. The March 23 agreement and CNDP’s army integration were signed on the heels of a seemingly mutually beneficial pact with neighboring Rwanda that led to the Amani program. DDR III was facilitated by the signing of the PSCF, while its more militaristic approach and turn away from army integration was a result of the lessons of the CNDP and M23’s defeat on the battlefield. Finally, DDRC followed the country’s first peaceful, if questionable, change of power. All of them, however, were also significantly hampered by the DRC’s militarized politics, ongoing violent conflicts, misguided army campaigns, and an overwhelming lack of trust between government, communities, and ex-combatants. And yet, despite all the difficulties, some achievements have been made and deserve to be acknowledged.

5. INGREDIENTS OF A WINNING FORMULA?

Considering the enormously challenging circumstances, it is remarkable that during the first two cycles alone, 210,000 combatants passed through the DRC’s DDR process, 88,000 of whom joined the army while almost 110,000 adults and 31,000 children were demobilized and received reintegration packages (IEG 2013, 3). While we do not know how many of these were remobilized, it is clear that despite the shortcomings, some things did work. Looking at the case of Ituri, and then at community reintegration more specifically, this section aims to tease out a few specific and noteworthy components that contributed to modest accomplishments.

5.1. DDR Lessons from Ituri: DCR and FRPI

Ituri’s DDR programs ran somewhat in parallel to those in the Kivus. Ituri was the stage of one of the deadliest conflicts of the Second Congo War (1998–1999) that, manipulated by competing Ugandan and Rwandan interests and drawing on longstanding grievances around land and identity, pitched the pastoralist Hema community against the agriculturist Lendu. The conflict cost 55,000 lives, displaced over half a million civilians in little more than four years (1999–2003), and triggered the launch of the first European Union peacekeeping force, named Artemis, in the summer of 2003. In May 2004, the Lendu Nationalist and Integrationist Front (FNI) and FRPI armed groups; Hema Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) splinter armed groups (UPC-Kisembo; UPC-Lubanga; the Party for Unity and Safeguarding of the Integrity of Congo, or PUSIC; and the Armed Forces of the Congolese People, or FAPC); and the Congolese government signed an *acte d’engagement* in Kinshasa. This paved the way for the DRC’s first DDR program, the above-mentioned MONUSCO-led DCR program. Violent conflict nevertheless endured and, fueled by both old and new protagonists, has once again increased in recent years (Human Rights Watch 2003; International Crisis Group 2004, 2020; Sungura, van Soest, and Kitong 2019; Tamm 2013a,

2013b; Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). Despite the ongoing violence, this subsection will assess both the DCR and the FRPI peace process in order to seek out lessons for future DDR programming.

DCR

Despite having demobilized around 25,000 combatants between 2004 and 2007 and contributed to a short-lived pacification of the province, the DCR was not successful in paving the way to an enduring peace free of armed groups (Bouta 2005; Kasongo and Sebahara 2006, 2; Marriage 2007; Nzekani 2013; Vlassenroot, Mudinga, and Musamba 2020, 843). Hindsight, however, can overshadow the victories of the moment. Two components crucial to the DCR's intermittent success deserve mentioning.

First, the DCR was part of a much wider political process that eventually led to the signing of the *acte d'engagement*. This process was supported not just by the Congolese government but also by the influential international monitoring and coordination council, the Conseil International de Transition (CIAT), composed of the five permanent security council members, the European Union, and MONUSCO. The CIAT guaranteed high levels of engagement, consistent political messaging, and coherent programming of initiatives supportive of the Ituri peace process, and upheld pressure on the Congolese government. This framework allowed for a credible and open negotiation of the demands of Ituri's armed groups, of which some were rejected, others adapted, others agreed upon, and others left open. While these agreements eventually unraveled, the importance of creating a credible, high-level framework through which open and honest negotiations on future arrangements could be held lent the process credibility and accountability.

Secondly, the framework was not a mere paper tiger but had teeth strong enough to enforce commitments. The Congolese government eventually arrested recalcitrant armed group leaders, including Thomas Lubanga, whom it extradited to the International Criminal Court, while the FARDC, together with MONUSCO's Ituri brigade, repeatedly engaged defiant armed groups (International Crisis Group 2004).

In a nutshell, DCR was a central component of a comprehensive political process that was able to rally all significant parties around the same table. In these circumstances, DDR programs can be at their most effective. That said, while a coordinated strategy of carrot and stick methods may push combatants to demobilize, they cannot help with sustainable reintegration. Indeed, on that front, the DCR faltered. As the program focused on reinsertion, only a few combatants seemed to have reintegrated into civilian life—many as gold miners—while others returned to the bush or were remobilized in the ongoing fighting (Marriage 2007).

FRPI

A second case study from Ituri concerns the FRPI. Founded in 2002 from Lendu Ngiti self-defense groups in South Irumu, it remains the only armed group still active whose origin can be traced back to the Second Congo War. Its resistance to demobilization in 2004 was followed by partial integration into the army by late 2007. The remaining FRPI elements, however, regrouped around a new leader. A series of failed demobilization attempts and military campaigns ensued until, in 2017, a new peace process was launched to once again convince the FRPI to demobilize. The FRPI peace process led to the cantonment of more than 1,000 combatants in August 2019 and the signing of a peace agreement with the Congolese government in February 2020. The peace did not last very long. In September that year, fighting between the FRPI and the army broke out once again and subsequent attempts to revive the process have failed (Bouvy et al. 2021; Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, and Büscher 2018; Tamm 2013a).

Despite currently being in peril, the FRPI peace process showcases the power of bottom-up DDR. The dialogue was initiated by a Congolese NGO called Appui à la Communication Interculturelle

et Auto-Promotion Rurale (ACIAR), as part of an ISSSS-funded peacebuilding consortium to reduce intercommunal tensions through inclusive dialogue in South Irumu. Despite initial skepticism within the Hema and Lendu communities, the FARDC, and MONUSCO, the persistent dialogues initiated at the community level progressively gained momentum and eventually succeeded in convincing provincial and national decision makers to buy into the process.

A paper written by five authors involved in the process credits this success to the project's thorough and community-driven groundwork (Bouvy et al. 2021). It began with research and broad community consultations to not only root subsequent programming in local knowledge but also build trust, legitimacy, and accountability. Peace committees kept communities informed and engaged throughout the process. As the project made progress, MONUSCO's Stabilization Support Unit (SSU) and STAREC facilitated contact with higher-ranking authorities. By late 2017, a mere few months after the start of the project, support of all relevant stakeholders was secured and ACIAR was mandated to initiate negotiations with the FRPI. While uncertainties around the postponed elections and a new government taking office slowed down this progress, they did not prevent the peace agreement from eventually being signed.

The FRPI peace process showcases how determined investment in trust-building dialogue coupled with a coordinated commitment to bottom-up and locally led ways of working can lead to astonishingly quick political breakthroughs, thereby paving the way for DDR. Yet today, this process hangs in the balance. One somewhat tragic reason may be the new government's priorities. On the one hand, it favors a nationwide approach to DDR in the form of the DDRC and is therefore reluctant to agree to individual deals with armed groups for fear of setting dangerous precedents, particularly if, as in the agreement with the FRPI, they include army integration. On the other hand, it may not help that this peace process was negotiated by the past government, whose patrons and clients are seen with much suspicion. Finally, the peace process may not have given sufficient time to openly discuss expectations and hammer out in more detail how DDR was to proceed. This caused delays in its implementation, which in turn led to disappointment and frustration that slowly eroded the previously hard-won trust (Bouvy et al. 2021; Finnbakk 2019; see also Nzekani 2013, 5).

That said, the FRPI peace process is as much a case in point about the disconnected and political nature of DDR in the DRC. Its start in 2017 preceded Tshisekedi's presidency and then continued to unfold seemingly in parallel with his own DDRC plan. Moreover, while the president publicly backed the process during his Bunia visit in June 2019, that STAREC, an organization considered all too close to Kabila, played such a prominent role may well have made it a politically difficult subject. The new administration's plans to abolish STAREC certainly point in that direction.

To sum up, the strengths of Ituri's DCR and FRPI peace process would have complemented each other rather well. The former's strong, internationally supported framework and firm response against spoilers coupled with the latter's bottom-up approach to community trust building could be important ingredients in a winning formula for future DDR initiatives. That said, Ituri has had few if any successes in terms of reintegration. The next section will turn toward that most important link of DDR.

5.2. Associative Reintegration: Connections, Networks, and Relationships

While the DRC's first three DDR cycles do not hold many reintegration success stories, some of the evaluations and further research point to the strengths of what I refer to as associative reintegration, that is, a process focused on promoting connections among ex-combatants, and between them and community members, as much as fostering ideas of home, solidarity, and a sense of belonging.

Besides the reinsertion kits, a central component to reintegration programs during the DRC's DDR cycles was skills training. The EDRP offered training in agriculture, fishing, sewing, woodwork, bricklaying, and other revenue-generating activities. An independent evaluation estimated that 30,000 ex-combatants benefited from these activities (Independent Evaluation Group 2013, 6). Yet much research points toward the questionable adequacy of these individual-centered training programs in eastern DRC's social economy and their desirability amongst ex-combatants (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020; Perazzone 2016; Vogel and Musamba 2016). Indeed, the EDRP, for instance, provided little to no support for the most sought-after occupations, such as taxi services and artisanal mining. DDR III offered training in agriculture, auto mechanics, and carpentry, as well as in literacy, financial management, and entrepreneurship. However, a (methodologically questionable) survey of ex-combatants suggested that only 8.4 percent "were working in the sector of their professional orientation and 91.6% [were] working on unrelated jobs or were still unemployed" (World Bank 2020, 10).

Moreover, while a fair number of ex-combatants did find their way to some economic activity—be this in artisanal mining, taxi services, private security, or the thriving and partly illicit crossborder trade between Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the DRC (Lamb et al. 2012, 14–23)—it is unclear how many of these had passed through one of the DDR cycles or had self-reintegrated. Indeed, many ex-combatants demobilized and reintegrated without entering any official DDR program or demobilized via ad hoc initiatives conducted entirely autonomously by local networks (Kivu Security Tracker 2021; Van Lierde et al. 2021, 74–76). What is striking in stories of reintegrated ex-combatants is their ingenuity, creativity, and determination to seek out sustainable livelihoods with or without outside help. Some sold off their reinsertion kits to invest in their trades of choice. Others formed business partnerships with former brothers and sisters in arms to take out affordable loans and spread the risk. Still others reactivated past skills and returned to old professions (Lamb et al. 2012). No matter what they did, those who succeeded never did so on their own.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, what emerges from the literature as a key component to successful socioeconomic reintegration is socioeconomic associations. During its second cycle, reintegration programs, in large part funded by the African Development Bank's Post-conflict Socioeconomic Reintegration Support Project (PARSEC), helped create and support 821 socioeconomic associations. Others, like the Toleka bicycle taxi association in Equateur, were started on the initiative of ex-combatants themselves (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020). A TDRP-funded study underlined "the positive role of these associations in terms of building social capital as well as economic livelihoods, and therefore, facilitating reintegration on both economic and social fronts" (Conoir 2012, 18). In some economic associations, ex-combatants from across different ethnic communities and armed groups seemed to work side by side, overcoming past divides thanks to a common purpose. The DRC RRP's support of DDR III also put economic associations at the heart of its reintegration strategy. Ex-combatants were trained in small enterprise and financial management, and support was given to set up associations in agriculture—something DDRC also plans to prioritize (DDRC 2020; World Bank 2020, 11). Moreover, academic scholarship has pointed to the transformative capacities social and economic associations can have in the life of ex-combatants as well as the communities to which they return. Be it income-generating opportunities, a social support system, protection of rights, or a sense of belonging and recognition, these associations not only function as a "bridge into civilian life" (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020, 11), but also offer a feeling of home (De Vries and Wiegink 2011; Friðriksdóttir 2018; Kivu Security Tracker 2021; Kaplan and Nussio 2015; Muggah and O'Donnell 2015; Rhea 2014; Richards 2016; Sharif 2018, 13; Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018, 19; Van Lierde et al. 2021, 74–76).

In light of the value of economic associations as both promoters of income-generating activities and social support networks, reintegration programs may perhaps revisit their approaches.

What matters is to foster and sustain connections, networks, and associations that bring both the community and ex-combatants into vibrant collaborative relationships. Investing in microfinance and offering affordable banking services such as savings accounts may help support ex-combatants' and communities' own initiatives without constraining their choices or blocking their preferred pathways, thereby easing their successful socioeconomic reintegration.

What exactly home means to Congolese ex-combatants remains under researched. Recent studies have emphasized the high uncertainty of conflict-affected settings, the fluid power relations inherent to them, and the need to therefore be and remain mobile as people navigate between options and spaces, always at the ready to seize opportunities as they arise. Moreover, what ex-combatants integrate into may have changed as much as they themselves have changed. Reintegration programs therefore ought to accept that there will always remain a risk that, in the militarized economy of eastern DRC, demobilized yet disillusioned youth in particular will simply circulate from a newfound but ill-fitting space back into an armed group. This has led some to question if reintegration is indeed the best term to capture the process of returning ex-combatants, instead preferring homecoming or circular return. Regardless, additional research on these phenomena and their impact on DDR in the DRC is required in order to better understand how to support ex-combatants and communities in finding and building new associations and spaces of belonging (Carayannis and Pangburn 2020; De Vries and Wiegink 2011; Lamb et al. 2012, 14; Muggah and O'Donnell 2015; Rhea 2014; Sharif 2018; Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018, 19; Vlassenroot, Mudinga, Musamba 2020; Vogel and Musamba 2016).

To summarize, the DRC's DDR experiences hint toward some ingredients of a potentially winning formula. These include a community-centered approach to DDR at whose heart lies dialogue and trust building; a coherent agenda for political engagement at the highest level backed by international partners; determination to adapt a firm, yet politically aligned response against detractors; investing into associative reintegration that gives ex-combatants the means to make their own decisions and promotes diverse relationships, networks, and associations as the bedrock of a new sense of belonging; and, finally, commissioning further research on all these processes that shape the world of ex-combatants—from reintegration and return to home and mobility.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The ever-shifting context in which DDR unfolds in the DRC is both its principal enabler and main challenge. Today, it stands once more at a critical juncture. While new plans around demobilization and community reintegration are being forged between the Congolese government and its international partners, the president's recent consolidation of power may provide a long-awaited opportunity to push these efforts in the right direction.

As this paper aims to show, the DRC's DDR experiences hint at some ingredients of a potentially winning formula, from a community-driven approach to DDR via a coherent agenda for political engagement backed up by coercive means, to investing into associative reintegration. Finally, formulating evidence-based policy would require commissioning further research on reintegration, return, home, and mobility.

The strategies and programs that will sustain the DRC's emerging fourth DDR cycle give reason for hope in this regard. The UN's revised Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) stress DDR's potential in seeking political solutions. Its 2020 Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region prioritizes inclusive political processes and crossborder cooperation, with DDR figuring prominently in both. Finally, the World Bank's Global Plan for Reintegration Support (GPRS) emphasizes the importance of

research and knowledge management (UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center, n.d.; UN Security Council 2020b; World Bank, UN Peacekeeping Operations, and Social Science Research Council 2018).

However, a central dilemma remains: how to strike a balance between the risks of the conceptual and practical overstretching of DDR and the ever-growing need, in the fast-shifting context of ongoing violence, to connect and associate community reintegration with much larger security and development programs and agendas. In other words, how can we transform DDR's weakest yet most important link, which cannot by itself succeed, into its strongest component? This dilemma opens up additional and difficult questions that policy makers in the DRC and beyond will have to reflect on to make this cycle of DDR more of a success than the previous ones. To stimulate further debate and action-oriented research, three are listed below:

- Ongoing military operations remain a threat to DDR, as they tend to feed into the DRC's vicious cycles of violence. Is it credible, however, for the DRC's international partners to promote the national formulation of a coherent military policy in support of DDR commitments just as the UN peacekeeping mission is preparing its gradual withdrawal?
- Successful reintegration ultimately relies on a strong social foundation able to offer ex-combatants and communities alike a sense of purpose, belonging, and home. How can reintegration programs be innovated to more adequately support the building of bridges into civilian life in the face of the DRC's socioeconomic realities and needs, and without producing economic spoils for disingenuous strongmen?
- Finally, the DRC's militarized patronage politics may well be the elephant in the room. How can the country's international partners mobilize to address those aspects that sustain it but lie outside of the Congolese government's control, namely the world of international taxation and offshore finance?

Ultimately, as this paper showcases and as all three of the above questions exemplify, DDR processes and reintegration in particular cannot be disconnected from the larger local, national, regional, and, indeed, global context within which they unfold. Sustained commitment and enduring patience are therefore essential. Put simply, and to conclude, as the Congolese government, its partners, the UN, and the World Bank launch into the DRC's fourth DDR cycle, they should be ready to take a deep—and long—breath.

NONSYSTEMATIC BIBLIOGRAPHY ON DDR IN THE DRC

This bibliography is not systematic. Three databases—Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar—were consulted for key terms and their combinations (“reintegration,” “DDR,” “Congo”). Results were not systematically collected, nor methodically assessed for relevance and exploited. By far the majority of the below titles were collected through the snowball method. During the writing process, the list was complemented with additional literature not necessarily on DDR or reintegration but eminently relevant to it. The resulting nonsystematic bibliography features academic scholarship; grey and policy literature including independent evaluations, blogs, and journalism; and documents from government and multilateral institutions. It is organized according to these three categories.

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