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GENDER AND PEACEBUILDING: Analysis of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes of Women ex-combatants in West Africa

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Gender and Peacebuilding: Analysis of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes of Women ex-combatants in West Africa.

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Summary: The DDR process is a vital program in the phase of rebuilding lasting peace. In Africa, many states weakened by civil wars have experienced it. The result of these experiences is that many women and girls associated with armed groups are excluded because they are not eligible for the program. Unfortunately, the non-acquisition of a weapon during disarmament processes continues to be a criterion for excluding many potential beneficiaries. Thus, this article analyses the limits of such an approach, while emphasizing the notion of gender as a sustainable alternative for an efficient DDR process that respects diversity and the right to be different.

Introduction

In a context marked by a sociology of terror or massacre, the urgency for post-crisis' reconstruction is not limited essentially to the development of road or energy infrastructure, but to the protection of human dignity through health security policies, and then access to civil and political, socio-economic and cultural rights. To address the challenges of peace-making in many war-torn societies, the United Nations has established Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes. The effectiveness of these programmes is generally mixed due to the complexity of some societies and the non-involvement of political actors in the peace

building process, as well as that of girls and women ex-combatants. Factors that lead to the exclusion of certain actors in peace building processes are recurrent. Particularly, the non-inclusion of women and girls, ex-combatants in demobilisation processes stems from the fact that they do not possess weapons or have not always been in the frontline during wars. This reality weakens the existing criticized peace building process. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF has indexed the exclusion of several girls and women associated with armed groups from the demobilisation process (UNICEF: 2004). According to another study, 46% of girls were excluded from the DDR process because they did not have weapons (McKay, Mazurana: 2004).

Hence the need to adopt a gender approach, which proves to be an essential tool in the implementation of DDR processes. This observation raises the following question: how to integrate the notion of gender in the implementation of DDR processes?

In a twofold reflection, our aim will be to analyse the concept of gender as a participatory tool at the service of civil society actors with regard to Disarmament and Demobilisation and then to understand how this approach is essential in the Reintegration phase and in peace-building.



I- Gender approach: a key tool in the design and implementation of DDR programmes

According to (Hurtig and Pichevin, 1985), gender is a social concept that characterizes the attitudes and roles attributed to each of the two sexes. In fact, in the case of a DDR process, the notion of gender intervenes in the consideration of behavioural traits and social conventions regarding sex-based differences. The specific phases related to the DDR process are the transition from Disarmament to Demobilisation and finally to Reintegration.

- Gender approach and the disarmament process

In the context of post-crisis reconstruction processes, it is essential to include the gender perspective when designing the planning phase. This planning phase will include the identification of rebel groups, eligibility criteria for compensation and the roles of the parties involved in the peace process (IPRI: 2002). The objective of this phase is to readjust certain classical criteria to new realities. To this end, the criterion for acquiring a weapon to be eligible for the disarmament programme must not be adapted to women who have been associated with armed groups, or who have served as sex slaves without being directly involved in hostilities. According to the UN: "In Sierra Leone, Women have not been so lucky. Some were

excluded from the DDR programme because they did not have weapon to hand over - one of the criteria for participating in the programme. Others did not participate for fear of harassment and humiliation. In the end, women accounted for only 6.5 per cent of participants in the disarmament programme in that country, a rate that appears to be much lower than the rate of women who actually participated in the fight».

This gender approach requires the adaption of specific demobilisation programmes for women and child soldiers and the establishment of allowances for these groups and their families.

- Gender approach in the Demobilisation phase

The demobilisation phase is an intermediate phase between disarmament and reintegration. It entails recording disarmed soldiers, then interning them or keeping them in places often far from their homes in order to prepare them for a new socialisation. This will consist in giving civil status documents to some of them, providing health care to all beneficiaries and then training them in civic education, citizenship, rights and duties. The final stage will consist of identifying and registering projects to prepare for socio-economic reintegration. The gender approach consideration will be based on keeping or interning demobilised women in appropriate places, to guarantee their dignity, which is often violated during the war.

In Liberia, demobilised women combatants received a total transition security margin of US\$300, a one-month food ration from the World Food Programme, and transportation to their community of choice.

The second half of the allowance was paid in rehabilitation and reintegration which is the integration phase of the programme. Mismanagement of disarmament related risks will naturally have an impact on the demobilisation phase in terms of taking into account potential targets, since in Liberia, disarmament process has excluded some targets such as girls who have played different roles in rebel factions, child soldiers, and some adults who were unarmed. This

cause-and-effect relationship continues throughout the process. Separated from male ex-combatants, women or girl's ex-combatant received specific health care. They were introduced to the fundamentals of civil and political rights and the concepts of citizenship, civic engagement, the rights of women and children.

Demobilisation will also take the form of a pre-resocialisation phase, which aims to provide social integration tools and social codes to women and girls ex-combatant. A very important psychological aspect will be to identify psychological disorders of those women and girls, treat and allow them to gain self-confidence, to repair their image of executioners for the society to accept them.

The final phase of demobilisation will be to assist beneficiaries to design a project that will enable them to integrate economically. It will involve either designing a project to re-start studies, or vocational training, or designing Income-Generating Activities (IGAs). In Côte d'Ivoire: "UNICEF and its implementing partners such as the NGO Afrique Secours Assistance (ASA) have developed a Prevention, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme. The main objective is to reintegrate the beneficiaries into their families and communities and give them a second chance in life. Through this programme, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) has supported more than 4,000 children associated with armed groups." This economic integration is a fragile and an essential aspect because it determines the reintegration and avoids the resurgence of spirals of community violence.



II - Gender approach in the in the reintegration process

Some authors point to the lack of political will as the major cause of the failure of reintegration processes. Susan Mc Kay and Dyan Mazurana (McKay, Mazurana: 2004), believe that the ineffectiveness of DDR programmes for women ex-combatants is due to the lack of vision in defining post-crisis reconstruction priorities. This is reflected in the fact that most of the reconstruction funds are invested in the renovation and construction of road or energy infrastructure.

We denounce this institutional approach because the renovated infrastructures are essential but not the urgent need in a situation of post-crisis reconstruction.

The gender approach in the reintegration process will consist of creating a favourable economic environment through the provision of funds to support women and men ex-combatants in the definition and implementation of their economic reintegration projects. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Liberia) in collaboration with Liberian civil society organisations have advocated to the government for the adoption of the 30% quota for women in senior government positions as well as in leadership positions within political parties. This measure allows the representation and political participation of women, although it is relatively lower

compared to that of men. The idea of this quota is to fight against socio-political exclusion, which was one of the causes of the civil war.

The United Methodist Church Committee on Relief (UMCOR-Liberia) is a Methodist church that has supported in the restoration of inter-ethnic dialogue in Liberia, namely in the city of Gbason. This programme focuses on reconciliation and technical education for the youth, since they were often potential actors of violence. The purpose of this project was to re-educate demobilised people through sport. Sport serves as a means of education in the fight against violence. The long-term objective of this approach is to make a transition: the transition from the economy of war to the economy of peace. The actors of the war economy in the past are once again becoming active citizens, involved in sustainable social cohesion.

Gender approach: a pillar of peacebuilding

The Zanzibar Declaration in 1999 states the undeniable importance of women in the process of consolidating and cultivating peace. To promote a participatory approach in peace building processes, the UN adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 to stress the need to involve women in discussions, signing of peace agreements, conflict resolution methods such as mediation and negotiation.

The visibility and integration of women in decision-making and institutional bodies is an indicator of gender responsiveness as a variable of participatory democracy. To this end, in many countries where there was armed conflict, women's organisations are involved in the socio-economic development of their countries. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), civil society organisations such as the Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise (CAFCO) and the Fédération de Femmes pour la Paix et le Développement (FEPADE) are committed to the promotion of equality and the protection of women's rights. "CAFCO's mission is to put pressure for women's participation in peace building processes in the DRC, to integrate the gender dimension into decision-making processes, to advocate for an increased representation of women in decision-making bodies,

to raise awareness and mobilise women to participate in the electoral process".

Finally, the evaluation of a reconciliation process can be done at the community and family level. To this end, women's involvement in these reconciliation processes is essential since they represent the pillars on which families are built.



Conclusion

The hope for impactful social change in Africa lies partly in effective social movements. Practical beneficial change in the sub region is emerging from the efforts of social movements. However, there is a need to understudy social movements in Africa with their historical and contextual specificities. Although they have greater potential in terms of social transformation and have often led to short-term significant gains, the proletarian struggles will continue to have limited effects if they are not articulated to a long-term social transformation project, and the diversification of strategies and tactics. Social movement activism is not all about mobilising against an unjust system, but it is about transforming structures, practices, cultures and systems that promote poverty, inequality and injustice.

Keywords: Social movement, collective action, funding, Africa, social change, accountability.

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