CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Gender-Responsive Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Stabilisation Support in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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WPS Women, Peace & Security Helpdesk

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Executive Summary

Overview

This report aims to inform future international support to community-based disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and stabilisation support in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that supports the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda and incorporates gender equality. It comprises two parts. Firstly, the report reviews lessons learned from support to the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (I4S) provided through the Stabilisation Coherence Fund (SCF), which includes a pillar on WPS. Secondly, the report draws out lessons learned relating to gender-responsive DDR and stabilisation from programmes implemented in other contexts which can potentially help to inform the approach in DRC.

Key findings and lessons from the review of the SCF

The inclusion of WPS as a pillar of the I4S has marked a strong strategic departure for the SCF. Many SCF-supported projects included specific objectives related to combatting sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and WPS, and a number of projects reported progress and results in relation to these priorities (see Box below). Nonetheless, overall, the efficacy of support to WPS—and the ability to capture results and outcomes at the fund-level—has been limited. Many of the challenges are connected to wider challenges with the SCF.

Treating WPS as a cross-cutting theme to be mainstreamed during implementation has diluted the focus on WPS in practice. The SCF has struggled to define the concrete results that it aims to achieve at the fund-level in general, and specifically in relation to WPS, and to put in place a functioning results framework with clear WPS targets. Furthermore, tracking of financial allocations to WPS needs to be strengthened to ensure support to WPS and gender strategic results.

The target of 30% female representation in dialogue meetings was usually met, although women's representation in local governance and security decision-making processes and activities was typically lower and seen as challenging.

Several projects developed the capacity of *Congolese women's organisations to engage on peace, stabilisation and DDR issues*.

Nearly all of the projects *captured and reported gender disaggregated data* within narrative reports in relation to beneficiaries and participants in meetings.

In the context of support to return, reintegration and recovery, several projects have supported women's and girls' social and economic empowerment at the local level.

Several of the projects that worked on land governance and the resolution of land disputes included a focus on increasing women's land tenure security and access to land.

Several projects that have included combatting SGBV as a focus area documented localised results.

Box 1. SCF results related to WPS

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In practice, it has often been challenging to secure women's meaningful participation and influence in democratic dialogue, provincial and local planning processes where stabilisation priorities are determined and reviewed. The SCF's approach of requiring 30% participation of women in project activities has helped to bring women's perspectives to the table in dialogue processes. However, it has not been sufficient to ensure women's perspectives influence decision-making processes and that gender power relations are taken into account. A stronger approach could include: ensuring gender expertise is provided to provincial and local planning processes; process design to create space for women and discussion of gender and conflict dynamics; political engagement with provincial and local authorities to meet a quota of female representatives; and specific support to women's groups to contribute meaningfully to the process. Recommendations for more gender-responsive support through the SCF or a new fund include:

A. A budget for gender and WPS should be ring-fenced and tracked, for example through a dedicated funding window, to ensure sufficient resources are allocated to gender equality and that resources are deployed strategically.

B. The fund manager should have a mandate and institutional set-up that enables political engagement on WPS. This requires sufficiently senior-level capacity to engage with national and provincial authorities to support WPS priorities, and should be supported with in-house gender and conflict analysis that makes the links between gender, conflict and peace dynamics, as well as specific gender and DDR/CS technical expertise.

C. Specific results related to WPS and gender equality should be defined in the programme results framework, and translated into project-level results. This depends upon having in place a relevant, sound and functioning programme results framework, which the SCF has historically struggled to put in place.

D. The fund should strengthen its partnerships and coordination with UN agencies and other actors working on WPS and gender equality in DRC, such as UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and international and Congolese NGOs working on gender equality and WPS.

E. The fund should provide clear guidance when issuing calls for proposals as to how WPS and gender should be integrated at the project level and should specify WPS and gender equality results, so that this is considered in the initial design and selection of projects.

F. The gender expertise and credentials of the implementing organisation(s) and project team should be among the criteria for evaluating calls for proposals. This should be designed to encourage support for Congolese civil society organisations and women's organisations and to build their gender and WPS expertise where this is needed.

Lessons from community-based DDR in other contexts

Traditional approaches to DDR that focus on individual support to ex-combatants have tended to exclude women from participating for a variety of reasons – despite efforts to design approaches that take into consideration the different needs, perspectives and experiences of former combatants, supporters and their dependents. Community-based approaches to DDR open up the opportunity to reach a wider range of beneficiaries, including women community members, and to support women's potential positive role in reintegration, reconciliation and peacebuilding. However, this opportunity has often been missed, despite efforts to mainstream gender. Based upon lessons from other contexts, as well as from previous DDR initiatives in DRC, the following recommendations are made gender-responsive support to the P-DDRCS:

G.   Ensure that support to the P-DDRCS is provided in a decentralised, context-based manner, which places inclusive democratic dialogue and participatory conflict analysis at the centre of the approach. This provides a broader platform within which community members, including women, can potentially have a voice. Gender expertise should be provided during the provincial and local conflict analysis, dialogue and planning process where priority DDR/stabilisation strategies/plans/objectives are defined and reviewed. These processes need to be designed deliberately to overcome the structural and political barriers to women's participation; they should also create space for analysis of gender dynamics.

H.   Support services that are non-discriminatory and that strengthen community capacity to absorb former combatants, rather than supporting individual entitlement schemes, which have been problematic for multiple reasons – including that they tend to disadvantage women. Avoid labelling and targeting certain categories of people as 'at risk' as this can inadvertently fuel negative stereotypes and stigma; instead support men and women's ability to contribute positively to their communities, including as agents of change.

I.   Ensure the social and psycho-social dimensions of reintegration are prioritised and use this as an entry point to integrate SGBV prevention and response, and work with former combatants and community members to address harmful gender norms.

J.   To reach and persuade women to participate in DDR—both as former combatants and members of the community—target information campaigns at them specifically. Women should be centrally involved in their design, and care should be taken in the language and messaging, particularly considering how they may be understood differently by men and women.

Introduction

Context

Conflict in eastern DRC has persisted for 25 years, having a destabilising effect on the central Africa and Great Lakes region. The protracted conflict has been characterised by deep fragmentation. Around 120 armed groups operate across eastern Congo, including North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Tangyanika.[1] These conflicts have important regional dynamics, involving armed forces and rebel groups from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi and cross-border refugee movements. They are also rooted in the governance challenges of the Congolese state, which has ruled through patronage and allowed state agents, including the Congolese armed forces (FARDC), to exploit the mineral-rich region for private gain. Rampant abuses of power have fuelled mistrust by local communities.[2]

At the same time, conflicts are profoundly shaped by local, inter- and intra-communal dynamics, in a context with diverse, customary practices. Local tensions revolve around identity and ethnically based discrimination, local abuses of power and political rivalries, control over land and natural resources (particularly mining sites), and family and kinship relations, among other issues.[3] The targeting of civilians and severe human rights violations by the FARDC and armed groups are commonplace. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is widespread, including sexual violence against women and girls, as well as men and boys.

Unequal gender power relations underpin these conflict drivers at many levels. The Congolese state has been characterised as patrimonial (or neo-patrimonial), where power operates both through and outside the realm of state institutions, and access to power is shaped by factors such as identity, wealth, education and personal connections. This system of governance and power relation tends to limit women's participation, access to power and resources, while also excluding many men, and fuelling political instability. At a more local level, diverse customary systems – in which family and kinship relations play a central role in group identity, control over land, resources and decision-making – limit women's agency, power and access to resources[4] and at the same time shape local conflict dynamics.

Purpose of the research

In April 2022, the Government of DRC (GoDRC) approved a new national strategy on DDR, community-based reintegration and stabilization (DDRCS). At the same time, the Stabilisation Coherence Fund (SCF), a multi-donor trust

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[1] Kivu Security Tracker (2021). The Landscape of Armed Groups in Eastern Congo. https://kivusecurity.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/reports/39/2021%20KST%20report%20EN.pdf

[2] Léon Irenge (2017). Conflict Analysis in South Kivu and Tangyanika Provinces. Tuendelee Pamoja II Project. Search for Common Ground.

[3] Léon Irenge (2017).

[4] Most areas of eastern DRC have patrilineal kinships systems where lineage and inheritance are passed through the male line. While both patrilineal and matrilineal kinship systems can be patriarchal, patrilineal systems are thought to reduce women's power and autonomy because women move to the husband's clan after marriage where they have less support from their kin group. Kinship structure has been shown to affect a range of social outcomes for women and children, and it has also been argued that it plays a role in organised violence. Lowes, S. (2018). Matrilineal kinship and spousal cooperation: evidence from the matrilineal belt. **Hudson, V. &** Mafess, H. (2007) In plain sight: the neglected link between bride price and violent culture. International Security 42.1 (2017): 7-40.

fund set up to support the implementation of the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (I4S) for eastern DRC is currently under review. In this context, international partners are considering key strategic questions about how to support DDR and stabilisation in the future, including how international support can best shape an approach to DDR and stabilisation that advances the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and integrates gender equality.

The overall aim of this research is to capture lessons from DDR and stabilisation initiatives in DRC and other conflict-affected contexts that can help to shape future international support to the DDR and stabilisation that is gender-responsive and integrates WPS priorities. The research has two main objectives:

1. To review how the stabilisation support provided through the SCF has supported WPS priorities and taken into consideration gender dynamics in order to identify gaps, building blocks and lessons future DDR and stabilisation support in DRC.

2. To analyse existing evidence and draw out lessons on gender-responsive DDR and stabilisation from other conflict contexts that can inform DDR and stabilisation support in DRC.

Methodology

Part one of the report, which reviews lessons from the SCF, is based upon a desk review of publicly available documentation relating to the SCF, including strategic and programmatic documents, project documents, annual progress reports, fund and project evaluations. This has been supplemented with 14 key informant interviews with stakeholders involved in the SCF and SCF-supported projects (See Annex 2 for a list of stakeholders interviewed).

Part two of the report which draws out lessons from other contexts is based upon a desk-based literature review.

Background on internationally supported DDR and stabilisation in DRC

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Stabilisation have been cornerstones of international support to peace and security in the DRC for nearly two decades. Historically, both DDR and stabilisation programmes have coincided with forceful military intervention as part of the strategy to secure the east. DDR has been an element of what has been described as a 'stick-then-carrot' approach, where military operations have aimed to neutralise the hard-core elements of armed groups that resist participation in DDR, while DDR packages provide an incentive to lay down arms.[5] Likewise, early stabilisation support was complementary to the military strategy to 'clear and hold' areas of armed groups, so that, in theory, the state could step in and fill the security vacuum.

The International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy

The UN Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) has led the delivery of the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (I4S) since 2008. The first phase (2008–2012) aimed to consolidate security gains, restore state authority, and provide a peace dividend that would reduce incentives driving armed mobilisation. During phase one of the I4S, US$ 364 million in projects were delivered by the UN and NGOs, with a heavy focus on rehabilitating roads and state infrastructure, training administrative and police officials, and delivering economic recovery programmes. However, the centrally-driven approach to statebuilding did not achieve the intended results.[6] The I4S was radically revised in 2013; the new approach sought to build capacity and mutual accountability between state and society to address locally specific causes of conflicts, such as issues related to identity and land, and to place the participation of conflict-affected communities at the heart of the approach.

The revised I4S is organised around five pillars, one of which was originally dedicated to combatting SGBV and subsequently revised and broadened to focus on WPS. The pillars of the I4S and evolution of the gender strategy are discussed in more depth in the next section of this report.

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[5] Muggah, R. & O'Donnell, C. 2015 Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 4(1): 30, pp. 1–12,

[6] De Vries, H. (2016). The Ebb and Flow of Stabilisation in the Congo. Rift Valley Institute. De Vries, H (2015). Going around in circles: The challenges of peacekeeping and stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Haag: Clingendael. Solhjell, R and Rosland, R 2017 Stabilisation in the Congo: Opportunities and Challenges. Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 6(1): 2, pp. 1–13, DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.478

National DDR programmes

Three previous national DDR programmes, implemented with support from the international community, have been fraught with problems.[7] Many of the difficulties had their root in political rather than technical problems. There was no political road map in place to end the conflicts in the east; military operations continued in parallel damaging trust that is needed for DDR to occur;[8] and the centrally-directed DDR process has been swayed to serve the political, military and economic interests of players within the Congolese state, often with little concern for the well-being of demobilising combatants or the communities into which they were to be reintegrated. It has been argued that the process inadvertently contributed to the growing fragmentation of armed groups and fed cycles of remobilisation.[9] The practice of integrating the armed group leadership into the security forces gave rise to a proliferation of new commanders; while monetary reinsertion packages and the requirement to hand in weapons created incentives to 'arm to disarm.'

While there were some achievements of past DDR/RR efforts, most notably the support provided to voluntarily repatriate FDLR and their families to Rwanda, there were numerous challenges. During the most recent phase (DDR III), combatants and their family members were cantoned in camps in poor conditions leading to riots and deaths due to starvation; the FARDC escalated its military operations in the east whilst the programme was underway, so that the programme deviated from its original purpose and became a catch-all for defecting fighters;[10] corruption and misuse of DDR funds was endemic;[11] armed groups were incorporated into the FARDC, regardless of their human rights record and without accompanying security sector reform and then in some cases redeployed to their previous areas of operation.

Past DDR processes in DRC have yielded a number of lessons, some of which echo lessons from second and third generation DDR efforts carried out in active conflict situations globally.[12] These include:

- Centrally-driven 'one-size-fits-all' approaches are not suitable in DRC; there needs to be a radical shift to localised and context-based programming.[13]

- Individual entitlement programmes do not work in active crisis situations.[14] Among the challenges are that individually based benefits can be perceived as a reward to fighters; cause tensions related to who is included/excluded; disadvantage women; and have been designed without sufficient consideration of socio-economic realities and former combatants needs.[15]

- In a fragmented context, political coherence and operational coordination is essential; it also cannot be assumed that the government is a neutral player. [16]

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[7] DDR I from 2004-2009 (based on the 1999 Lusaka and 2002 Sun City Accords); DDR II from 2009-2012. The UN led a parallel DDR + Repatriation and Resettlement (DDRRR) programme to return former FDLR to Rwanda during the same time period. DDR III (2013-19) was initially focused on demobilising M23 but shifted to include various other armed groups in eastern DRC.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Solhjell R., & Rosland, M. 2017. Stabilisation in the Congo: Opportunities and Challenges. Stability: IJSD, 6(1), 2.

[10] World Bank and UNDPO (2019). Summary Report: Review of DDR/DDRRR/CVR Processes in DRC: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward.

[11] Congo Research Group (2022). It Takes (More Than) Two to Tango: Armed politics, combatant agency and the half-life of DDR programmes in the Congo, https://www.gicnetwork.be/it-takes-more-than-two-to-tango/

[12] Avis, W. 2021. Lessons learned from community-based approaches to DDR. K4D Helpdesk Report.

[13] World Bank and UNDPO (2019). Summary Report: Review of DDR/DDRRR/CVR Processes in DRC: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Congo Research Group (2022).

[16] World Bank and UNDPO (2019).

- The psycho-social dimensions of armed mobilisation need to be addressed, not only economic issues, in order to address the socialisation of combatants into military life, as well as issues such as mental health and stigma faced by former combatants and their dependents.[17]

The P-DDRCS

In July 2021, the GoDRC established a new institution under the President with a wider mandate for DDR, community-based reintegration and stabilisation programme (P-DDRCS). This brings institutional responsibility for DDR and stabilisation together under one roof, replacing the former government institutions responsible for stabilisation (STAREC) and DDR (PNDDR). A national strategy on DDRCS was approved in April 2022.

The new approach aims to learn lessons from the past. It is intended to be more decentralised and focused at the community level. Provincial governors and local authorities are expected to play a greater role in planning and coordination through a decentralised operational structure. The aim is also to engage combatants and community members at the local level, including with women and youth. In addition, integration of ex-combatants into FARDC will be highly restricted and there is a commitment to no impunity for human rights abuses.

However, there does not appear to be a consensus about how the national DDRCS strategy will be operationalised. The strategy itself is ambiguous on crucial issues: while it clearly states that it will be community-based and that decision-making will be decentralised, many elements of top-down planning and traditional DDR have been preserved. Interviews highlighted that there are diverging views between the government and international community about how it should be operationalised in practice. The intent behind the P-DDRCS is to have a single nationally led programme that merges DDR and stabilisation. However, a number of interviewees raised concerns that if this nationally led programme were to replace international support through the I4S, this could substantially weaken the decentralised, community-based approach.

Furthermore, DDR remains highly contested and politicised topic. The government is not a neutral party; the risk that international support to a government-led strategy would be manipulated to serve certain elite interests and would not unfold as intended is high. MONUSCO also is not perceived to be neutral—the extent of the damage to trust with Congolese people has been highlighted in recent anti-MONUSCO protests. These political realities could constrain efforts to implement the national DDRCS strategy as intended and to meaningfully promote women's participation and a gender-responsive approach.

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[17] Congo Research Group (2022).

Review of gender dimensions of stabilisation support through the SCF

Evolution of the I4S/SCF gender strategy

The SCF was set up in 2016 to coordinate international support to the revised I4S, with delivery led by the Stabilisation Support Unit (SSU) in MONUSCO. The SCF's strategic approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and gender has been guided foremost by the I4S. The SCF supports results linked with the five pillars of the I4S (See Box 2), one of which – Pillar 5 – is dedicated to a gender equality-related objective. Pillar 5 was initially focused on combatting SGBV, but was subsequently reformulated to encompass support to women's participation in all aspects peacebuilding and stabilisation.

PILLAR 1: DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE – Supports participatory and inclusive dialogue, involving community actors (including women and young people), national and provincial governments, to formulate a collective vision and concrete solutions to transform violent conflicts.
PILLAR 2: SECURITY – Aims to reduce threats to life, property, and freedom of movement, by strengthening trust and accountability between security actors and the population, and through enhanced protection (including in the context of combating SGBV).
PILLAR 3: RESTORING STATE AUTHORITY – Aims to increase recognition of the state as the main provider of services, through rule of law and access to justice, support to decentralisation, land management, and management of mining sites.
PILLAR 4: RETURN, REINTEGRATION, AND RECOVERY – Aims to facilitate the (re)integration of internally displaced people, refugees, returnees, ex-combatants and at-risk youth, and reduce competition over resources.
PILLAR 5: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY – Aims to support women to influence and participate in all stages of stabilisation and peacebuilding processes and to be recognised as actors of social change.

Box 2. SCF strategic result areas linked with the five pillars of the I4S[18]

During Phase 1 of the I4S (2008–2012) a range of activities were carried out with a budget of $62 million focused on the "immediate repercussions of sexual violence and the strengthening of the capacity of public institutions in GoDRC to prevent and respond to cases of sexual violence". The 2012 evaluation of the pillar found that while the activities may have helped strengthen the prevention of SGBV, the tangible results and impact on stabilisation were unclear, due to strategic, coordination and monitoring and evaluation challenges.[19] The focus on SGBV was carried forward to Phase 2 of the I4S. However, during this phase, Pillar 5 sought to place more attention on the prevention of SGBV, the linkages between SGBV and conflict, as well as to better link activities with the stabilisation approach.

In 2017, following an internal review, Pillar 5 was broadened and renamed 'Women, Peace and Security.' This was based upon the acknowledgement that while SGBV was still relevant, the I4S needed to shift its focus from treating women as

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[18] The Pillars were revised in 2017. This reflects the revised Pillars.
[19] Research Network: Joint Evaluation of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2011. Cited in ISSSS (2017-2022), Pillar 5, Women, Peace and Security.

primarily victims of conflict, towards recognising their agency in peacebuilding and social change. The new approach sought to more explicitly recognise the links between gender inequalities and ongoing conflict dynamics, and to support women's participation, influence and empowerment. The concept note guiding Pillar 5 (2017–2022) makes clear that WPS is intended to be a cross-cutting issue, such that gender should be integrated across all of the other pillars, with an emphasis on women's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.[20]

Operationalisation of the SCF gender strategy

In 2014, 13 conflict analyses were commissioned and carried out by implementing partners, covering different geographic areas in eastern DRC. The conflict analyses informed the development of Provincial Stabilisation Strategies (PSS) and Priority Action Plans (PAP) in each of the three provinces in eastern DRC, which were validated by the provincial and national authorities in 2015. In 2016, the SCF was launched. The SCF issued calls for proposals and provided funding to a number of area-based projects focused on priority conflict zones led by consortia comprised of UN agencies, international and Congolese NGOs. While in theory the projects responded to the PSS/PAPs, in practice, over a year elapsed between the validation of the PSS/PAPs in 2015 and the dispersal of project funds to implementing partners in 2017. These projects largely defined their objectives and results in response to the I4S Pillars. In many cases, the implementing organisations carried out participatory conflict assessments and facilitated local, multi-stakeholder dialogue processes which identified priorities for support through the project-funded activities.

Since 2020, the priority stabilisation objectives (PSOs) have been reviewed annually through a participatory workshop involving implementing partners, civil society, youth and women's groups, provincial authorities, MONUSCO and UN agencies. This review is intended to take into consideration the PSS/PAPs as well as the results of democratic dialogues and community consultations undertaken through SCF-supported projects. They are then subsequently approved by the Provincial Board of Directors (CAP), comprising the provincial governor and MONUSCO/SSU representatives. The PSOs formulated in 2020 and 2021 were largely gender blind—across the three provinces only one objective in Ituri appears to respond to gender-specific concerns. Here, the priority is that "Ex-FRPI and women and children associated with armed groups are demobilised and reintegrated into their communities" which responds to the issue that in the process of reintegrating the FRPI militia following the 2020 peace agreement between the GoDRC and the FRPI, "particular attention should be paid to the reintegration of women and children associated with the FRPI".[21]

The SSU has not had in place a standard approach or methodology for conflict analysis and assessment processes which have been carried out by implementing partners, including on how gender should be incorporated. According to interviews with SSU staff, the consideration of gender in conflict analysis and assessment processes has been uneven. Long-standing staff indicated that the approach has evolved over time, and that gender has gradually been incorporated, but that the quality of this analysis could be improved. SSU staff also indicated that the process of agreeing PSS/PAPs/PSOs and determining the priorities to be included in calls for proposals is the product of political negotiation, involving provincial and national authorities (previously STAREC). WPS has not generally been seen as a priority, although it has always been included as a 'standard element' in calls for proposals.

Pillar 5 was operationalised in two main ways at the project level:

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[20] ISSSS Concept Note for Pillar 5 – Women, Peace and Security (2017-2022).

[21] Priority Stabilisation Objectives and the process for reviewing them are outlined the in SCF Consolidated Annual Narrative Reports for 2020 and 2021.

1. WPS was one of the strategic objectives/results areas of many projects: The inclusion of WPS as a pillar of the I4S meant that many of the SCF projects incorporated WPS (or sometimes the previous formulation focusing on preventing SGBV) as one of the main strategic objectives.

2. Gender mainstreaming: SCF sought to support partners to mainstream gender as a cross-cutting issue relevant to all of the pillars, projects and activities. The SSU's approach included the following:[22]

   - Requiring that all SCF-supported projects develop a gender strategy;
   - Requiring that at least 15% of the budget for all project activities be dedicated to gender equality;
   - Setting the target of 30% female participation in activities and as project beneficiaries.
   - Encouraging implementing partners to have in place in-house gender expertise.
   - Requiring project partners capture and report on gender equality in monitoring and evaluation and reporting frameworks, including gender disaggregated data and narrative reporting on gender equality outcomes.
   - Providing implementing partners with technical support in relation to the above, through the SSU's gender advisor.

Achievements/results of SCF support to WPS and gender priorities

The task team carried out a desk review of SCF-supported projects from 2017 onward, for which project documentation was publicly available,[23] from a gender perspective. See Annex 1 for summary of this analysis.

There is limited information available upon which to base an assessment of the results or outcomes of SCF support from a gender perspective. Historically, the approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) at the fund level has been weak and SSU has not had in place a framework to aggregate fund-level results and outcomes.[24] The Stabilisation Monitoring System was set up to respond to this and has tracked a set of quantitative outputs and indicators for each pillar since 2021—but projects have not historically been aligned to this framework. Fund-level evaluations have focused mainly at the strategic and operational levels, rather than on the outcomes or impact of SCF support, and the gender perspective has been limited.[25] Although MEL has clearly occurred at project level in many cases—there were end of project evaluations covering 8 of the projects[26]—it is quite challenging to get a coherent picture of fund-level results and outcomes. The objectives and results related to WPS and gender equality have, in many cases, not been sufficiently concrete and specific. As a result, the quality of reporting and evaluation in relation to the WPS pillar has been especially weak. Capturing of gender as a cross-cutting issue has often been limited to reporting numbers of male and female beneficiaries and participants in meetings.

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[22] Interviews with SSU staff.

[23] The team reviewed the fund-level reports, project documents and project narrative reports that are publicly available on the MPTF web portal for the SCF, https://mptf.undp.org/fund/cds00. In a few cases, interviewees supplied additional project documents, assessments and evaluations and these were included in the review.

[24] Onana, R. et al., 2022. External Evaluation of the Coherence Fund for Stabilisation.

[25] The team reviewed two fund-level evaluations: one carried out in 2018 and a draft evaluation being undertaken in 2022.

[26] External evaluations had been carried out for the following projects and were reviewed: Pamoja Kwa Amani South Irumu, Pamoja Kwa Amani na Maendeleo; Pamoja Kwa Djugu; Together for Beni; Consolidation of North Kalehe Integrated Stabilization Project; Armani ni Njiya ya Maendeleo Phase II in Mambasa; Njia za Makubaliano; Tujenge Pamoja Kwa Ajili ya Amani. Where the final project evaluations were not available, the main sources of information on results were the Consolidated SCF Annual Narrative Reports (most recent available for 2021), Project final narrative reports (only available for some projects), and Project Annual Reports (most recent available for 2020).

Overall, nine of 18 field-based projects included a specific objective aligned with Pillar 5 (SGBV or WPS). Based upon a desk review of the project documents, our assessment was that several of the projects were **gender-responsive** in their design, where this is defined as programming that deliberately challenges inequitable gender norms by opening up space to question and engage with inequitable gender structures, norms and power relations. Most of the projects were, at a minimum, **gender-sensitive** in their design, meaning that they were aware of the effects of gender dynamics on programme outcomes and sought to work within or around existing inequalities to achieve these results, but did not necessarily alter their activities in order to challenge unequal gender norms or power relations.

This review has been able to draw out a number of results from the project-level external evaluations as well as narrative reports:

- Many of the projects *succeeded in bringing women's perspectives to the table* in dialogue and decision-making processes that have traditionally seen as the domain of elite male political and armed group leaders. The target of 30% female representation in dialogue meetings was usually met. Interviewees highlighted that women's role often was more of consultation than of influence. But nonetheless, they saw this as an important start in the DRC context, which is strongly patriarchal. Several projects were successful in promoting women's leadership and active role within community peace structures and local peace initiatives. Women's representation was more challenging in local governance and security decision-making structures; the representation of women in formal local governance structures was often low (less than 10%). Despite this, there were some examples where advocacy and support to women's leadership undertaken through SCF-support projects had been linked with the appointment of women in local leadership positions.[27]

- Several projects developed the capacity of *Congolese women's organisations to engage on peace, stabilisation and DDR issues*. While Congolese women's organisations have experience with development and humanitarian assistance, they were less well-versed in peace and security issues, and some projects helped to build their expertise and confidence to engage in advocacy and to connect their work to local peacebuilding and DDR processes.

- Nearly all of the projects *captured and reported gender disaggregated data* within narrative reports in relation to beneficiaries and participants in meetings. A number of projects also undertook baseline and/or end line surveys that presented gender disaggregated data.

- In the context of support to return, reintegration and recovery, several projects have supported women's and girls' social and economic empowerment, for instance by forming cooperatives and strengthening women's position within them, increasing women's access to credit, supporting literacy centres, and facilitating the reintegration of girls into schools.

- Several of the projects that worked on land governance and the resolution of land disputes included a focus on increasing women's land tenure security and access to land. For instance, Pamoja Kwa Amani project in South Irumu reported that advocacy carried out by UN Habitat led to the signing of an act of commitment by

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[27] The final evaluation of the Tujenge Pamoja kwa Ajili ya Amani project finds that the improvement of women's participation in public structures in the project area has been observed and this is attributed to sensitisation carried out through the project. It also finds that the fact that the project insisted on women being represented in many of the structures it supports had helped to boost women's confidence. The project's final narrative report states the project supported local women activists to fight for more positions in local decision making and as a result, over 56 women were nominated to be "cheffes d'avenues" in Kamanyola. It also states that the project has led to the emergence of a group of more than 60 women leaders supported by the project who occupy decision-making positions today and who are involved in issues of governance, security and peace.

customary chiefs to grant land rights to 50 women per entity.[28] Several projects also report that women-headed households have benefited from the mediation of land disputes.

- Several projects that have included combatting SGBV as a focus area documented results relating to behavioural change and changing harmful gender norms that underpin SGBV. Some projects also facilitated survivors' access to justice as well as access to care and psycho-social support. However, these results were localised. Several evaluations questioned the sustainability of interventions given the time and level of investment made through the projects, given the structural and systemic nature of the challenges involved.

Lessons learned from the SCF for gender responsive stabilisation in DRC:

Overall, the effective implementation of Pillar 5 has been held back by challenges with operationalising the I4S in general. The 2018 external evaluation of phase 2,[29] coupled with an internal review process identified a number of high-level concerns. These were not specific to WPS, but impacted the efficacy of support in this area. SSU developed a new programmatic and operational framework (2020–2024) intended to remedy the issues identified. Some of the overarching lessons are discussed below, with attention to how they are relevant to the WPS pillar.

1.   **Democratic dialogue should be the centrepiece of stabilisation support and a primary entry point for WPS.** A key lesson from Phase 2 of the I4S is that democratic dialogue (Pillar 1) should be at the heart of the community stabilisation process. Democratic dialogue should be the core process for defining stabilisation objectives/priorities, which in turn, should be implemented through the other pillars. This is relevant to pillar 5, because **democratic dialogue should be at the centre of the strategy to bring women's perspectives to the table**. However, the dialogue and planning processes that have been carried out have not consistently been designed to address gender power dynamics and overcome barriers to women's meaningful participation and influence. The focus has often been on meeting the target of 30% female participation in meetings; however, this is not sufficient. A range of strategies have been used to ensure women's perspectives and gender dynamics are considered in dialogue and planning processes, including: providing targeted support to women's groups to engage in advocacy; engaging with political leaders and establishing quotas/selection criteria; organising multiple consultation forums that bring together different stakeholder groups (e.g. women-to-women across communities, inter-generational within the community) to discuss gender, conflict and peace issues and supporting women from the community/women's groups to play a leadership role in dialogue process (e.g. as mediators, facilitators).

2.   **Conflict analysis and local conflict assessment processes need to be strengthened to ensure their relevance at both political and field level, and to incorporate gender issues.** An overall lesson from Phase 2 of the I4S is that SSU's approach to conflict analysis needs to be strengthened to improve the quality and relevance to actions in the field, as well as to inform political engagement. SSU has in recent years contracted out its conflict analysis function to University of Ghent, and the gender perspective has been weak. At the local and project level, the approach to conflict assessment has been largely determined by implementing partners. The SCF has not had clear guidance or oversight over when and how local conflict analysis/assessment should be carried out, including how a gender perspective should be part of this. **Conflict analysis and local conflict assessment processes should incorporate women's perspectives and bring to the surface the links between conflict drivers and gender dynamics.** Identifying these issues at the analysis/assessment stage is a prerequisite for developing contextually relevant responses, at both political and field level. To be relevant, not only the content, but also

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[28] Final Project Narrative Report for the Pamoja Kwa Amani project.
[29] Collin, C. & Mushizi, C.M. (2018). Evaluation du Fonds de Cohérence pour la Stabilisation.

the process needs to be considered – for instance how to engage partners to build a common approach to the context, and how to consult or include community members, including women, in defining problems and solutions.

3.   **Political engagement, advocacy and diplomacy to overcome political blockages to stabilisation, including those related to WPS, has been limited.** Political engagement needs to be prepared to engage in advocacy and diplomacy to challenge the position of government officials where necessary, as well as to bring stakeholders together in dialogue that creates space to question and discuss contentious issues. WPS is political in nature – engagement with political leadership may be necessary to create space for women's meaningful participation. For instance, this might involve advocacy to secure commitment to a quota for women's representation in local governance structures; or an effort to connect grassroots peace efforts, where women are often centrally involved, with top-level negotiations and peace and security-related decision-making, which has been dominated by male political and military leaders.[30]

4.   **Overall, treating WPS as a cross-cutting issue to be mainstreamed has diluted the focus.** The effectiveness of mainstreaming as a strategy has been significantly undermined by broader weaknesses with operationalising the SCF, including lack of clarity regarding specific priority objectives and results, the absence of a functioning programme results framework and MEL system, and challenges relating to operational coordination among SCF-supported implementing partners both within and between projects.

5.   **The SCF has struggled to define concrete and specific objectives and results for what it aims to achieve at fund-level in relation to WPS/gender.** The SCF's ability to define the specific results and outcomes it aims to achieve at fund level has historically been weak across the board. However, this has been especially challenging for WPS/gender as a cross-cutting issue. The revised concept notes (2017–2022) for Pillars 1–5 broadly provide a strategic departure for this. However, this has not been translated into clear results *at the output level* in the I4S Programme Framework (2020–2024). It also has not been translated into concrete and specific WPS and gender equality results at the project level. At project level, objectives have often been broad, vague and unrealistic given the resources and timeframe available across all of the pillars, and often no specific results/outputs have been defined in relation to the WPS pillar. This reflects the broader weaknesses in the SCF's ability to put in place a functioning programme results framework , insufficient gender and conflict expertise within SSU, and uneven gender expertise across implementing partners/consortia. For WPS to be meaningfully integrated, and to provide a basis for MEL, specific priority objectives/results that are linked to the other pillars and to the conflict and peace dynamics need to be defined at the fund level and translated into project-level results. For example, "Increased capacity of women's organisations to coordinate and make recommendations in democratic dialogue forums",r "Increased number of local land disputes resolved to protect women's land tenure rights" or "Increased representation of women in village/territorial decision-making structures". In the absence of a functioning results framework, many projects have focused on capturing numbers of female participants or beneficiaries to meet the 30% target, rather capturing progress towards specific results that support gender equality, peace and stability.

6.   **Including WPS and gender as a specific objective at the project level has improved the gender responsiveness of projects to some degree, but the ability to capitalise on synergies with the other pillars has often been weak.** Many of the projects were gender responsive and this has generally been stronger in those projects that included WPS/SGBV as a strategic objective. However, activities related to pillar 5 have often been implemented as a separate track led by one partner, without necessarily capitalising on the synergies between the different pillars. This reflects a more general challenge with many SCF-supported projects that have struggled with operational coordination among different implementing partners that have led different pillars, especially in the context of large consortia.[31] Experience varied

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[30] Cano, M., 2015. Gender Audit of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region. International Alert.

[31] For instance, the final evaluation of the Tujenge Pamoja kwa Ajili ya Amani project in South Kivu found that the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the project was affected by serious challenges with the management and oversight of the consortium and weak synergies between interventions across the different pillars.

across the projects; there were cases where these links had been made effectively that illustrate the potential of a more integrated approach (See Box 3).

According to the final project evaluation of the Pamoja Kwa Amani project in South Irumu, COOPI, the partner that led activities on SGBV was also a gender focal point for the consortium and helped to integrate gender into the activities of other consortium members, including through a gender working group that was set up during the course of the project. The project was also able to respond to a wave of rapes by militia in a coordinated way that took advantage of the relationships of different consortium partners. COOPI organised training for FRPI officers on SGBV. In addition, COOPI worked with ACIAR, the consortium partner leading the FRPI peace and DDR process, to make contact with FRPI officers and conduct advocacy at their level. In addition, contacts with MONUSCO enabled strengthened patrols in the area. These efforts reportedly reduced the sexual violence committed by the militia in the project area.

Box 3. Operational coordination and integration of gender/SGBV in South Irumu

A better system is needed to track financial allocations to WPS in order to enable strategic support to gender equality results. SSU does not appear to have had a system in place to track financial allocations by pillar, making it difficult to determine the share of resources allocated to WPS/gender. The guidance on gender budgeting was that 15% of the budget should be allocated to gender equality per activity, but this did not necessarily translate into strategic support for specific gender equality results. Instead, this was sometimes equated with a budget for bringing women to activities.

A longer timeframe for projects might enable a more sustainable approach to WPS and gender equality work, which takes time. In many cases, implementing partners do not appear to have had the resources and time to sustain initial momentum on gender/WPS (as well as other pillars) – recommendations have been formulated but left hanging, action plans developed but unimplemented, training carried out but not followed up with support to recipients to use what they have learned.

Lessons from gender-responsive DDR and stabilisation programming in other contexts

Women as beneficiaries: female ex-combatants, supporters, dependents and community members

Although men make up the majority of members of armed forces and groups, women have been present in most non-state armed groups in a variety of combat and non-combat roles. Despite this, DDR has tended historically to overlook women's and girls' presence in armed forces and groups as well as the multiple roles they play in supporting armed conflict and political violence. Multiple factors have often led to the exclusion of female fighters, supporters and members of combatants' households from traditional DDR processes:

- There is a tendency to see and to assist women mainly as victims of conflict, while women's agency – not only in peacebuilding, but also in supporting and perpetrating violence – is rendered invisible.[32] Conversely, men – especially young men – tend to be seen as perpetrators, spoilers and potential troublemakers, especially if they are idle and unemployed. The rationale behind DDR processes is that by providing targeted support to (ex-)combatants, it is possible to defuse the potential threat they pose to peace and security and to prevent recidivism. When women are included in DDR they are usually regarded as a 'vulnerable' category (alongside children) in need of special assistance, but de-prioritised in relation to the main security aims of DDR.

- The definition of combatants and eligibility requirements for DDR programmes have often had the effect of excluding women. For instance, many DDR programmes have made possession of a weapon a condition for participation, excluding female combatants who took part in combat but were unarmed, such as those in intelligence, medical and logistical support roles. Recognising these shortcomings, the international DDR standards (IDDRS) has sought to broaden the definition of potential beneficiaries to consider the needs of men and women combatants, supporters and dependents, and to establish female eligibility criteria that reflect this.[33]

- Gender power relations during peace negotiations, during the early planning for DDR and within armed groups shape how women are included. Leaders of armed forces and groups have, in some instances, not recognised women as official combatants. For instance, the insurgency movement in Aceh (Gerakan Aceh Medeka – GAM) did not include its female battalion as registered combatants, making them ineligible for

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[32] Wenche Iren Hauge (2020) Gender dimensions of DDR – beyond victimization and dehumanization: tracking the thematic, International Feminist Journal of Politics, 22:2, 206-226.

[33] UN (2014), Operational Guide to the Integrated DDR Standards, https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Operational-Guide-to-the-IDDRS-2014.pdf

reintegration packages.[34] In contrast, in Colombia, women's participation in the peace negotiations and subsequent monitoring and implementation of the agreement—both as formal delegates to the talks and through special forums/commissions on gender including civil society— helped to secure gender commitments in the DDR process, and led to a gender-sensitive national reintegration strategy.[35]

- Even in contexts where female ex-combatants, supporters and dependents have been formally included, often the DDR process has not been well adapted to women's particular needs, deterring their participation.[36] The common practice of assembling combatants at cantonment sites where they receive transitional assistance and wait to be discharged may deter women from participating for a variety of reasons. They may be more likely to feel an urgent need to return home due to domestic and caretaking responsibilities. They may also be more likely to want to distance themselves from armed groups, especially where they have been forced to join, where they faced heightened social stigma, or have security concerns and fear of exposure or re-exposure to SGBV. Women may not access or register to participate due to the perception that the support provided is not relevant to women's needs or because of limited access to information owing to not having been targeted in outreach campaigns.[37]

Community-based DDR[38] opens up opportunities to reach a much wider range of beneficiaries and stakeholders within communities – beyond members of armed groups and their dependents. This opens the door to support female community members and women's organisations in initiatives that would contribute to conflict transformation, peacebuilding, reconciliation and reintegration.

However, in practice, the experience with many community-based DDR programmes to date is that a gender perspective has been weak, despite efforts to mainstream it.[39] Much like traditional DDR, early community-based DDR processes (sometimes called 'second generation DDR') were often designed to target current and former armed group members, spoilers and others considered to be 'at risk'—and therefore mostly men. Usually, this has had a heavy focus on economic packages and employment, intended to keep these 'at-risk' groups occupied and to provide economic alternatives or incentives to deter violence. The focus on 'at-risk' groups has proven problematic; this has sometimes fuelled negative stereotypes and stigma against demographic groups deemed to be more prone to becoming violent or delinquent (e.g. young men from certain ethnic or religious groups), inadvertently compounding their marginalisation and undermining reintegration.[40] Furthermore, by focusing on neutralising spoilers, these approaches have often missed out on opportunities to support positive peace drivers, actors and capabilities within communities, including both women's and men's potential positive role in social change.

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[34] Wenche Iren Hauge (2020).

[35] UN Department of Peace Operations, (2020). Gender responsive DDR: Promoting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr_wps-promoting-the-wps-agenda.pdf

[36] Wenche Iren Hauge (2020) Gender dimensions of DDR – beyond victimization and dehumanization: tracking the thematic, International Feminist Journal of Politics, 22:2, 206-226.

[37] UN (2014). Tarnaala, E. 2016.

[38] The term community-based DDR is used here to describe programmes that aim to address armed violence through engagement with both armed groups and members of the wider community. Terminology for these approaches vary across organisations and contexts, e.g. Community Violence Reduction (CVR), Armed Violence Reduction (AVR), Community Based Reintegration and Security (CBRS), community-based reintegration.

[39] Avis, W. 2021. Lessons learned from community based approaches to DDR. K4D Helpdesk Report.

[40] For a review of how treatment of young men as an 'at risk' category has fueled stereotypes, sometimes in racial/ethnic terms, inadvertently compounding their marginalisation, see the Simpson, G. 2018. The Missing Peace. Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA and PBSO.

More recent efforts (sometimes called 'third generation DDR') have often been characterised by a more holistic effort to address the social factors that drive recruitment into armed groups, as well as those that support resilience and reintegration. Gender dimensions of these approaches and lessons are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

Lessons learned relating to the inclusion of female beneficiaries:

1. **The participation of women and gender experts in peace negotiations and in the early planning for DDR can help ensure that female beneficiaries are included and that a gender issues are considered.**[41] Women's representation in structures to plan and manage DDR programmes at national and sub-national levels, can also help to facilitate this. However, 'track one' negotiations and DDR planning structures are usually dominated by the largely male leadership of armed forces and groups. Setting up parallel platforms or forums that include women activists and civil society representatives, to monitor and engage in advocacy related to a peace process; and linking track one negotiations with local dialogue and peace processes where women can often play a more prominent role, and can potentially strengthen women's influence.

2. **Women's role in DDR should not be confined to special projects for FAAFG—women's participation and agency as both FAAFG and community members is central.** Special care should be taken to avoid treating FAAFG as victims or as a vulnerable category. Rather, experience shows that men and women former combatants can become positive agents for change, including as agents supporting peace and gender equality (See Box 4 for example from Mindanao).

3. **To reach and persuade women to participate in DDR—both as former combatants and members of the community—information campaigns should target them specifically.**[42] Women community members and female former combatants should be involved in designing and distributing information. It is important that information about DDR reflect women's and men's particular motivations for joining and supporting armed groups, as well as the support services that are available to address their particular needs (e.g. support groups for women, sexual and reproductive health services).

In 2014 the government of the Philippines and the largest insurgent group in the Muslim-majority region of Mindanao, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), signed a peace agreement that deepens the political autonomy of the region. The MILF leadership initially did not envision including its all-female supplemental force, the Bangsamoro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade (BIWAB) in the 'normalisation' track (similar to DDR in other contexts). Leveraging the WPS agenda, the UN engaged with the MILF leadership to gain acceptance of their formal inclusion, while also working with the former BIWAB to support their advocacy. The approach has emphasised the potential for the BIWAB to play a leadership role within the transition process, viewing them as a key entry point to support women's inclusion in the new governance and administrative structures. This led to a programme, partly financed by the Peace Building Fund (PBF),[43] to support the former BIWAB members as agents peace and gender equality in their communities in specific roles, including as community-level mediators and peace advocates, GBV monitors linked with village-level peace monitoring teams, para-social workers working with local social welfare offices, and facilitators of Women Friendly Spaces (safe spaces that

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[41] This is supported by case study evidence. See Tarnaala, E. (2016). Women in armed groups and fighting forces: Lessons learned from gender-sensitive DDR programmes. NOREF.

[42] O'Niell, J. (2015). Engaging Women in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: Insights for Colombia, Inclusive Security.

[43] UNFPA has played a lead role in advocating for and supporting the BIWAB to be included in the normalisation process and to play a positive role in peacebuilding. The PBF-funded project is jointly implemented by UNFPA, UN Women and IOM and is entitled "Promoting conflict prevention, social cohesion and community resilience in BARMM in the time of COVID-19," https://mptf.undp.org/project/00125194. UNFPA is also providing reintegration support to the former BIWAB in the context of other projects.

Box 4. DDR and WPS in Mindanao

Gender and economic, social and psycho-social reintegration

Reintegration is often highlighted as the most important, yet most neglected phase of traditional DDR programmes. Historically, reintegration has often been criticised for being poorly planned, under-resourced and disconnected from other development and recovery support.[44] Once transitional/reinsertion support has been provided, communities have often been left to absorb former fighters on their own. Much of this 'burden' falls to women, due to their care-giving and social roles.

Across multiple contexts, women have played a crucial role in reintegrating ex-combatants. This usually takes place outside any formal DDR programme. For example, in a 2004 study of the DDR process in Sierra Leone, 55% of the mostly male ex-combatants surveyed indicated that women in the community had helped them reintegrate; higher than for traditional leaders (20%) and international aid workers (32%). Respondents said women—including some working through women's groups—provided "guidance, shared meagre resources, and, perhaps most important, facilitated their skills training and education by providing childcare, clothes, and food". Some women had also taken in former child soldiers.[45]

For both male and female former combatants, leaving armed groups means losing a sense of belonging and their social support network. In focusing on dismantling armed groups, DDR often misses the central importance of these support structures, and the potential to 'transform' them into a constructive force for peace—rather than necessarily breaking them up. A study of the reintegration of female ex-combatants in Guatemala found that peer support has been important to reintegration: "The individual focus of most DDR processes aims to break command and control structures, but maintaining collective structures can help ex-combatants to rely on each other for support, safety, and psychological well-being."[46]

Research has shown that peer support is important for both male and female former combatants, but in different ways. In some contexts, former female fighters have organised to become agents of social change due to their particular experiences in armed groups. Across multiple contexts (e.g. Nepal, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Angola), some women have joined armed groups out of a desire for social change and have experienced greater equality within armed groups—but then have been expected to conform to patriarchal norms after conflict ends.[47] Especially where women have successfully formed peer support networks (usually through associations of former combatants), former female combatants have in some instances organised to become powerful advocates for gender equality and peace within new post-conflict structures. For instance, in Mozambique, the women's branch of the veterans' organisation began to lobby for equal rights for female ex-combatants, and eventually linked with other women's organisations and advocacy for women's rights; in

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[44] Muggah, R. & O'Donnell, C. 2015.

[45] Mazurana, D. & Carlson, K., 2004. From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone. https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/8_from_combat_to_community_women_and_girls_of_sierra_leone.pdf

[46] Weber, S. 2021. From gender-blind to gender-transformative reintegration: women's experiences with social reintegration in Guatemala, International Feminist Journal of Politics, 23:3, 396-417.

[47] Tarnaala, E., 2016. Weber, S. 2021. Colekessian, A. 2009. "Reintegrating gender: a gendered analysis of the Nepali rehabilitation process." Gender, Peace and Security Series Working Paper. New York: UN INSTRAW.

Angola, the women's wing of the MPLA fought for women's legal status and economic rights—including successfully lobbying for a constitutional provision on gender equality—and also set up legal aid centres.[48]

Both male and female ex-combatants often face stigma and rejection from family members and communities – but this can be especially acute for women. Across multiple contexts, former female combatants encounter high levels of stigma because by joining armed groups they have transgressed acceptable gender norms; they may be considered impure, aggressive, masculine, or overly sexual due to their roles in armed groups and in some cases, exposure to SGBV.[49] Women's groups have played an important role in building bridges between former combatants and civilians. Where social support is lacking, female ex-combatants have often opted not to return to home due to fear of stigma, as well as lack of support from family, childcare and educational opportunities for their children. Combatants may remain in exile or prefer to relocate to urban centres. Socially isolated and financially insecure, they may be prone to re-mobilise, resort to prostitution, or to become targets for sex trafficking and abuse.[50]

Economic packages and support provided through DDR programmes have often put women at a significant disadvantage. Women in a range of contexts report that cash payments are taken away by male former commanders or are controlled by male family members and not used to benefit dependents.[51] The types of 'reinsertion packages' provided often have not taken into consideration men and women's different needs and preferences and the role of the family in successful reintegration. In Afghanistan, wives of combatants emphasised the importance of designing packages that benefit entire families and increase their investment in the combatant's continued participation in reintegration programs, such as educational vouchers for children and gas for cooking stoves.[52]

Reintegration support has also often failed to take into consideration structural factors that disadvantage women, such as gender discrimination in land, employment and property regulation. In some cases, programmes have had a deliberate bias towards generating employment in traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as in construction and public works, because of the idea that this will keep 'at-risk' young men out of trouble. Support for services such as education, child care and sexual and reproductive health, which play an important role in reducing gender disparities, have often been treated as irrelevant to reintegration and to peace and stability more generally.

Lessons learned for gender-responsive reintegration:

1.   The way in which DDR breaks up, transforms, or replaces social support networks for male and female armed group members needs careful consideration. Social support structures for former combatants, as well as other community associations (e.g. youth centres, women's groups) can play an important role in reintegration and in positive social change.

2.   Mental health and psycho-social support services should be included as part of a package of reintegration support. The approach will vary depending upon local capacities and financial resources available – but ideally would support services that can be accessed by both former combatants and other members of the community.

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[48] Tarnaala, E., 2016.

[49] Tarnaala, E., 2016. For instance, a Saferworld study in Nepal in 2009 found 80% of female combatants interviewed feared rejection by their families due to perceptions Maoist female combatants were promiscuous, aggressive and had broken gender norms.

[50] Colekessian, A., 2009.

[51] O'Niell, J. (2015). Engaging Women in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: Insights for Colombia, Inclusive Security.

[52] Recommendations on Afghanistan's Reconciliation, Reintegration, and Transition Processes, The Institute for Inclusive, www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/ recommendations-on-afghanistans-reconciliation-reintegration-and-transition-processes. Cited in O'Niell, J. (2015). Engaging Women in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: Insights for Colombia, Inclusive Security.

3.　　　Reintegration support that strengthens community resilience and capacity to integrate former combatants should be provided, rather than targeted benefits. Individual benefits packages are problematic for multiple reasons, including from a gender perspective.

4.　　　Structural factors that put women at a disadvantage, such as women's land, property and inheritance rights, discrimination in employment, access to education, childcare and health, need to be considered when designing reintegration support.

Changing harmful gender norms

A large body of evidence from diverse contexts shows that **the social and cultural norms that underpin gender inequality are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict.** Numerous studies documenting the reasons for joining or for supporting armed groups show that men and women have different motivations, and that expectations surrounding men and women's social roles play a central role. Furthermore, a body of evidence shows how political and military leaders use gender norms—especially norms and expectations around being a man—to recruit combatants and build support for armed violence.[53] For instance, joining armed groups and using violence may be promoted as a way to achieve other markers of manhood, such as getting married and gaining economic and political status within the community. Gender norms are also intimately related to how group identity is formed along ethnic, religious and nationalist lines and can play a central role in nationalist and identity-based justifications for armed violence.[54]

Just as men and women have different motivations for joining armed groups, their experiences of DDR are distinct, and shaped by gender norms. There are often strong pressures to solidify patriarchal gender norms as part of efforts to bring about peace, stability and 're-establish social order.' For both male and female ex-combatants, DDR can be profoundly disempowering for multiple reasons. For women, they may be expected to return to traditionally acceptable social roles; for men, DDR can represent a loss of manhood and status forged within armed groups.[55]

Lessons learned:

1.　　　Efforts to demobilise armed groups or to dissuade individuals from supporting armed violence need to understand how gender norms and expectations shape motivations for participating in armed groups within the specific context. Their messaging will be more likely to succeed if it is cognisant of these dynamics.

2.　　　DDR can represent an opportunity to re-negotiate and question social expectations surrounding men and women's roles, particularly as part of the reintegration process. The starting point for this may be assessing and creating space for former combatants to reflect upon their own desires and aspirations, rather than imposing a model of what reintegration support should look like.

3.　　　Work to engage with and change gender norms needs to be handled sensitively. Gender norms and practices are intertwined with cultural, ethnic, and religious identity; efforts to change them can be perceived as a threat to the collective identity or as an imposition from outsiders, especially in situations where groups already feel threatened due to conflict or identity-based discrimination. There are, nonetheless ways to work on these issues in a sensitive and locally

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[53] Wright, H. 2014. Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens. Saferworld: London.

[54] Yuval-Davis, N. 1997, 'Women and the Biological Reproduction of The Nation' in Gender and Nation, Sage Publications; Nagel, J. 1998. Masculinity and nationalism: gender and sexuality in the making of nations. Ethnic and Racial Studies: 21, 242-269.

[55] IAWG DDR, 2012.

owned way, especially by supporting levers for change from within communities. Approaches including engaging with traditional and customary leaders, with young men and women, working through education and media, as well as through dialogue processes.

SGBV prevention and response

SGBV is heightened during and after conflict. This violence is part of the continuum of violence experienced by women and girls in both wartime and peacetime; it also is fundamentally related to conflict dynamics and plays a role in perpetuating organised violence.[56] Research has found that the drivers of SGBV during conflict overlap with the drivers of militarised violence, pointing to the need to understand and address all manifestations of violent behaviour holistically in prevention efforts.[57] Conflict-related sexual violence is increasingly well documented and recognised as a matter of international peace and security.[58] Conflict settings have greater prevalence of, and risk factors for, intimate partner violence (IPV),[59] sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and forced and early marriage.[60] Sexual violence against men and boys in conflict is less well-studied—but several studies surveying former combatants and returnees show it is more prevalent than previously assumed.[61]

SGBV often remains high in post-conflict settings. Conflict is a predictor of subsequent patterns of IPV in post-conflict settings across sub-Saharan Africa [62] It has been documented across many contexts that when former combatants return home, rates of IPV and family violence often spike: "an end of violence in the public sphere is widely seen to precipitate and escalation of violence in the private sphere".[63] There are multiple factors behind this trend. Studies across different contexts have shown that men exposed to trauma and those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression are at heightened risk of perpetrating IPV as well as violence against children.[64] Alcohol and substance abuse problems have also been connected to higher risk of IPV and family violence. This is combined with social difficulties former fighters face in making the transition to civilian life after returning home. Combatants socialised into violence may find it difficult to adapt to non-violent behaviour after returning home; DDR can represent a loss of manhood, leaving men

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[56] Evidence reviewed in Robjant, K. et al, 2020. Trauma, Aggression, and Post Conflict Perpetration of Community Violence in Female Former Child Soldiers—A Study in Eastern DR Congo, Front. Psychiatry.

[57] Swaine, A., Spearing, M., Murphy, M. and Contreras, M., 2017. Intersections of violence against women and girls with state-building and peacebuilding: Lessons from Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Sudan. What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict and Humanitarian Settings.

[58] "The term 'conflict-related sexual violence' refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.". UN SG, 2019. Report on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

[59] Murphy M. et al., What Works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crises: Synthesis Brief.

[60] McAlpine, A. et al. 2016. Sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in settings affected by armed conflicts in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. BMC International Health and Human Rights, 16:34

[61] The findings of several studies from DRC, Liberia and Sudan, as well as documentary reports from other countries, are reviewed in UNHCR, Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in the Syria Crisis, 2017. pp. 13-14. See also, Dolan, C., 2014. Into the Mainstream: Addressing Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict.

[62] A study combining household survey data and geo-referenced conflict data from 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa found that conflict intensity had a significant impact on the likelihood that a respondent had experienced IPV after the conflict. Østby, G. 2014. Violence Begets Violence: Armed Conflict and Domestic Sexual Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, paper presented at the Workshop on Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict: New Research Frontiers, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University. Cited in Wood, E.J. 2014. Conflict-related sexual violence and the policy implications of recent research. International Review of the Red Cross: 96(894), 457–478.

[63] Bradley S. 2018. Domestic and Family Violence in Post-Conflict Communities: International Human Rights Law and the State's Obligation to Protect Women and Children. Health Hum Rights: 20(2):123-136.

[64] Evidence reviewed in Bradley, S. 2018.

in limbo if they cannot live up to expected masculine roles in civilian life; feelings of humiliation, disempowerment, failure and defeat may lead men to assert their power in the private sphere, and may also lead to re-mobilisation.[65]

These dynamics point to the need to include SGBV prevention in DDR programmes. However, the ability to do so effectively is often severely challenged in fragile contexts. Health and social services that are key to both preventing SGBV and supporting survivors—especially mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR) services—are typically inadequate in conflict-affected areas. Legal and institutional protections for survivors of SGBV are often poor, and the capacity and accountability of security and rule of law institutions is often severely compromised; often these institutions are responsible for perpetrating and sanctioning SGBV. Furthermore, social norms and customary and religious systems that justify SGBV are often common.

Lessons learned:

1.   Male and female ex-combatants, as well as members of communities, need access to MHPSS, SRHR and multi-sectoral SGBV services to deal with the consequences of SGBV as well as to prevent SGBV from occurring. Ideally, these services should be provided as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach at the community level. Such support also needs to understand and address through outreach the social barriers (e.g. gender norms, social stigma) to accessing support, which are specific to the experiences and particular needs of different demographic and social groups, including young men, young women, male ex-combatants, female ex-combatants, etc. Usually these services are delivered outside the framework of DDR and stabilisation support, for instance through humanitarian and development assistance, but play a crucial complementary role and the linkages need to be made.

2.   It is increasingly acknowledged that DDR programmes should incorporate psycho-social support services to male and female ex-combatants and their dependents. This support should integrate SGBV prevention and also provide support to male and female survivors of SGBV. For example, DDR programmes may refer former combatants and dependents to these services where they already exist, while at the same time bolstering the capacity of service providers to take on the DDR caseload.

3.   The question of how to challenge impunity for SGBV in a sustainable way through formal and traditional legal and justice institutions in conflict contexts is challenging. These efforts should be survivor-centred. Efforts to address SGBV have often included providing legal aid and support to enable survivors to access justice, however if rule of law institutions are not equipped to handle SGBV cases sensitively and to protect their safety, this may not be an appropriate starting point. Survivors are unable to seek justice without guarantees of physical protection due to fear of retaliation from perpetrators.[66]

4.   Different models of transitional justice have been developed to try to address mass human rights abuses that have occurred during conflict, but these mechanisms have often failed to handle the widespread gender-based violations that occur during conflict.[67] Traditional justice mechanisms have been used in transitional justice processes in a number of contexts (e.g. Rwanda, Mozambique), and have the advantage of being accessible to the population, quicker than formal mechanisms, and providing reparative (rather than retributive) justice. However, these mechanisms also pose a number of problems with respect to justice for women and handling of SGBV cases. [68]

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[65] UN Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on DDR, 2012. Blame it on the War?: Gender dimensions of violence in DDR.

[66] Enfield, S. 2020. Supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. K4D Helpdesk Report.

[67] Scalon, H. & K. Muddel, 2009. Gender and transitional justice in Africa: progress and prospects.

[68] Scalon, H. & K. Muddel, 2009.

Recommendations for gender responsive support to the P-DDRCS

Defining questions for the future of DDR and stabilisation support in DRC are currently up in the air. Although the SCF has been formally extended through 2024, it is unclear whether international stabilisation support will continue to be channelled through this mechanism. A strategic review of the SCF and I4S is currently underway. Among the questions being considered are the continued relevance and added value of the SCF/I4S in light of the GoDRC's launch of the P-DDRCS which aims to merge DDR and stabilisation, the recent transition plan that maps out the phased withdrawal of MONUSCO, and an anticipated $250 million World Bank Stabilisation Programme.

The intent behind the P-DDRCS and the launch of the new national DDRCS strategy appears to be to put in place a single nationally led programme that brings together previously separate DDR and stabilisation efforts. However, the new strategy is vague on key issues and there is a risk that it will not be implemented in a genuinely participatory and decentralised manner, which would considerably limit the space for women's participation.

Overall, the national DDRCS strategy provides a weaker strategic departure for WPS in comparison with the I4S. The focus on women's agency and participation, which is a pillar of the I4S, is lost in the national DDRCS strategy. In spite of the many shortcomings discussed above, the fact that WPS was one of five pillars of the I4S provided a stronger conceptual and strategic starting point, encouraging a focus on women's agency and participation and dedicated resources for WPS/gender in many projects. In comparison, the national DDRCS strategy includes gender as a cross-cutting theme, but the implications for the various pillars have not been adequately fleshed out.

Recommendations for gender-responsive DDR and stabilisation in DRC

A.   Ensure that support to the P-DDRCS is operationalised in a decentralised, context-based manner, which places inclusive democratic dialogue and participatory conflict analysis at the centre of the approach. This provides a broader platform within which civilians and community members, including women, can potentially have a voice.

B.   Design participatory conflict analysis/assessment processes to take into consideration gender power relations. This should consider not only conflict drivers, but also peace drivers (i.e. positive capacities, actors and incentives that support peace), provide ample space for women to express their perspectives, and include analysis of gender norms and power relations as they intersect with conflict and peace factors.

C.   Design stabilisation planning and dialogue processes to be deliberate in working to overcome barriers to women's participation and influence. Gender expertise should be provided to the provincial and local planning process where priority stabilisation objectives are defined and reviewed. These planning processes need to be designed so that

there is space for men and women to discuss how gender dynamics interact with conflict and so that women's perspectives are brought to the surface.

D.   Support services that are non-discriminatory and can benefit the community as a whole—avoid individual entitlement schemes as well as targeting certain categories of people as 'at risk.' This can inadvertently fuel negative stereotypes and stigma, and also put women at a disadvantage. Instead, support should recognise men and women's agency and support their ability to make constructive life choices and to contribute positively to their communities, including as agents of change.

E.   Ensure the social and psycho-social dimensions of reintegration are prioritised. This is critical to successful outcomes and provides an entry point to integrate SGBV prevention and response, as well as work on gender norms.

F.   Consider the terminology used and how it is understood locally, by men and women. 'DDR' and 'Stabilisation' have a historical legacy in DRC that may be difficult to overcome when trying to craft a new approach. If DDR is conflated with targeted support to ex-combatants/mostly male 'spoilers,' women may be reluctant to engage. Women may not see their activities as relevant and may call them something else, such as 'peacebuilding', 'reconciliation,' or 'economic empowerment'. 'Gender' also has a range of connotations, and may be taken to mean 'women's issues'[69] – alienating men or leading to neglected opportunities to work with men and boys.

Recommendations for gender-responsive support through an existing or new fund

A.   **The fund manager should have a mandate and institutional set-up that enables agile political engagement and coordination** at national and provincial levels in support of locally driven peace and DDR processes. This should include senior-level capacity for political engagement on WPS and gender, and be supported by in-house gender and conflict analysis and expertise, as well as specific gender and DDR/CS technical expertise.

B.   The fund should strengthen its partnerships and coordination with UN agencies and other actors working on WPS and gender equality in DRC, such as UN Women, UNFPA, and international and Congolese NGOs working on gender equality and WPS.

C.   **Specific objectives, targets and results related to WPS and gender equality should be defined in the programme results framework**. However, a mainstreaming approach will not work if the strategy or programme framework into which gender is to be integrated is not relevant or operationalised effectively, or if there is not an adequate system in place to track results and outcomes.

D.   **The fund should provide clear guidance when issuing calls for proposals as to how WPS and gender should be integrated at the project level**, so that this is considered in the initial design and selection of projects. Specific WPS and gender equality results/outputs should be defined and allocated a dedicated budget at project level.

E.   **The gender expertise and credentials of the implementing organisation(s) and project team should be a criterion for evaluating calls for proposals—as should support to Congolese civil society organisations on these issues.** These criteria

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[69] Cano, M. (2019). Gender Analysis of North and South Kivu. Commissioned by CARE DRC.

should be designed to encourage support for Congolese civil society organisations and women's organisations and to build their gender, WPS and DDR/peacebuilding expertise where this is needed.

F.   A budget for gender and WPS should be ring-fenced and tracked, for example through a dedicated funding window. Previous efforts to mainstream gender by allocating 15% of the budget at the activity level to gender equality have led to a very diluted approach. Notwithstanding the importance of integration, a budget for gender/WPS may need to be ring-fenced in order to ensure funds are deployed strategically to support WPS/gender and that results and expenditure are tracked.

G.   Consider a mechanism that can provide flexible, longer-term (4+ year) programme funding versus shorter term (1–2 year) projects. Stabilisation and peacebuilding are long-term processes; changing gender norms and power relations, building capacity, mutual accountability and trust between stakeholders, and progressing from dialogue to action takes time *and requires continuity in terms of process and the actors involved*.