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# Evaluating the “Success” of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Programs: The Case of Congo-Brazzaville

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Evaluating the “Success” of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Programs: The  
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## **Abstract**

The end of hostilities between warring factions in Congo-Brazzaville has marked a decisive moment in the state's developmental history. Post conflict reconstruction is a foundational component of public policies that restore order within society, igniting the engines of economic development, and in obtaining sustainable peace. In recent years, Africa has experienced a disproportionate share of conflicts compared with other regions; and leads the world in the number of present intrastate conflicts. Since the end of the Cold War, some African states have made advances in post conflict peacebuilding and intergroup reconciliation. This article focuses on post conflict reconstruction through the lens of security sector reforms, primarily disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. This study asks, how can postconflict scholars and practitioners determine if a DDR program has been a success or failure? Using Congo-Brazzaville as a case study, this article integrates the literature of political science and program evaluation to assess the level of "success" in Congo's DDR programs. DDR is a highly complex and contingent process, and complete success or failure is unlikely, with most program outcomes result in a series of mixed effects. In summing the successes of individual indicators (e.g., weapons collected, munitions destroyed) DDR may be commonly perceived as successful, however, the conflict context, power dynamics, level of development, or social reintegration of ex-combatants may retard short-term gains for long-term instability. DDR programs should not carry the burden of peacebuilding themselves, and donor summary reports should not rely on easily quantifiable indicators in decreeing a program's success without contemplating domestic power politics and elite cooptation mechanisms.

Key words: Congo-Brazzaville, Africa, DDR, postconflict, sustainable peace, peacebuilding

## 1. Introduction

The extant literature on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs gives imperfect attention to the conceptualization of what constitutes program “success.”<sup>1</sup> How we conceptualize “success” matters a great deal for the advancement of DDR programs; and in understanding, pragmatically, if these expensive, complex, and multifaceted missions accomplish their desired goals and objectives or if they are susceptible to cooptation by domestic elites in pursuit of domestic political supremacy. DDR programs are designed to be short-term stabilization missions that assist governments and nonstate actors in transitioning from violent conflict to postconflict normalization (i.e., at minimum achieving a negative peace among belligerents). A successful transition from a state of war to a state of peace is fundamental in creating the conditions for economic development and reconciliation. Without successful DDR programs, obtaining normalization of society is excessively difficult. Even with “successful” implementation of DDR, normalization may not be obtained for a variety of complicated factors: conflict context, an asymmetric distribution of resources, or from elite cooptation. This means, DDR programs are necessary but not sufficient conditions for normalizing postconflict societies. They are an integral part of a broader conflict transformation process.

The line between where the cessation of hostilities end and postconflict development begins is often blurred. The purpose of this study is to analyze an interim stabilization period, that is often dotted with DDR programs, as is the case with Congo-Brazzaville since 2000. Political scientists and program evaluation specialists share similar goals with respect to DDR. Both professions aim to understand what factors constitute a program “success” and how these factors

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<sup>1</sup>I am sincerely grateful to John Clark for sharing his valuable insights on Congo-Brazzaville and for his comments on this paper. Many thanks to the journal’s editorial board for their flexibility with the author, and thank you to the anonymous reviewers for providing feedback on this manuscript.

work in tandem to buttress postconflict peacebuilding. Political scientists undertake this process from a theoretical and post hoc analytical process. Program practitioners and evaluation professionals bear responsibility for implementation and the program's real-time functionality. What factors enable scholars to determine DDR was a "success"? How is "success" operationalized? Have practitioners become exclusively focused on counting weapons, munitions, and persons without considering broader conflict contexts and elite motivations? These questions direct the analysis of this study's look into Congo-Brazzaville's DDR programs.

The main argument of this study is that due to the highly complex, multifaceted approach of DDR programs in Congo, program practitioners have narrowly focused on the collection of weapons, munitions, and the number of fighters who have passed through the program's demobilization centers. Extensive focus on these easily quantifiable indicators have diverted the program's attention away from issues of elite cooptation, conflict context, and domestic power politics which have enabled the regime to demobilize its opponents and strengthen its politico-military power. The Sassou government and partnering international agencies—the World Bank and the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program—have made progress in administering phases of DDR. However, these components may have been successful within their own right and scope, but in whole, the unreliability of ex-combatants within Congo who have been demobilized without much benefit may retard the short-term gains for long-term costs. Furthermore, much emphasis has been placed on the disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants with less financial support allocated toward long-term reintegration efforts. Finally, DDR programs have not taken into consideration the conflict context of ex-combatants and ulterior elite motives for disarming enemies of the state.

One purpose of DDR is to demobilize agreed upon combatants within society. These belligerents are agreed upon, most often, during the preceding peace agreement or ceasefire. In the case of Congo, the demobilized fighters were supposed to be non-state militias and elements of the national army. However, the Sassou government has managed to demobilize its opponents and effectively fund an asymmetric demobilization program, which pragmatically means the strengthening of regime power and authority at the expense of domestic political spoilers. This article is organized as follows: section two provides a brief history of the DDR literature in theory and practice and subsequently details the author's conceptualization of success and what political factors program practitioners should address. Section three applies DDR theory to the case of Congo-Brazzaville, and section four summarizes the author's argument and provides recommendations for new research on DDR.

## **2. A Brief History of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Theory and Practice**

When war officially ends states are faced with one principal security concern, that is, the disarmament and demobilization of warring parties to the conflict (Lewis et al. 1999, 129). Reintegration of former combatants is often regarded as a secondary concern in this process. Ideally the demobilization of ex-combatants and their reintegration as productive members of communities should be explicitly addressed in a peace treaty (ibid). Excluding DDR from a peace treaty hinders the prospect of "successful" demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants to society. Despite attention paid to DDR by conflict negotiators, execution of such programs requires more than token initiatives to collect small arms weapons that pay lip service to international norms. DDR is most helpful in postconflict societies when accompanied by comprehensive, national and sub-national umbrella policies designed to root out stealth combatants and decapitate

former command and control structures. In the years since its emergence, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR<sup>2</sup>) has been viewed by political scientists, security scholars, and development practitioners as necessary but not sufficient in creating the conditions for sustainable peace and incipient development (Lewis et al. 1999; Verkoren et al. 2010; Hamer 2011; Alusala and Lamb 2008; Zena 2013; Nezam and Marc 2009; Muggah et al. 2003; among others).

Since the 1990s there have been DDR programs in upwards of 30 countries with roughly two-thirds of them located in Africa (Nezam and Marc 2009, 1). Zena (2013) notes that in January 2013 there were about 500,000 individuals from militias, paramilitary groups, and national armies scheduled to participate in DDR across Africa (1). DDR programs have been implemented as part and parcel to peace treaties with noteworthy variation in program size, financial support, goals and desired outcomes. Inherent to DDR are temporary stopgap measures aimed at re-establishing collective security within a sub-national or national territory that has experienced violent conflict. The “cookie cutter” model begins with disarmament of the ex-combatants, demobilization of military units, and reintegration of those former armed personnel into local communities. In Congo, the disarmament phase awarded ex-combatants up to \$350 for weapons and ammunition returned for destruction, irrespective of whether the weapons were operational or defective (Muggah et al. 2003, 29). In Mozambique, DDR awarded ex-combatants monthly stipends for an extended period designed to address both disarmament and reintegration issues (Hanlon 2004, 375). The monthly stipend provided an incentive for ex-combatants to disarm and relinquish their weapons while concurrently providing them with an ability to survive on financial support.

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<sup>2</sup> Other processes include: disarmament, demobilization, and reinsertion (DDR); demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR); demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation (DRR); disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation (DDRR); disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRR); disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRRR); there are many variations of this temporary security/transition model. The variation chosen by the warring parties will emphasize certain components over others e.g. reintegration versus rehabilitation etc. See Muggah et al. 2003, 19.

However, in the case of the Niger Delta, ex-combatants were able to make more money through armed robbery, extortion, and other extra-legal avenues and then the financial award could provide (Ediede 2015). The cases of Congo-Brazzaville, Mozambique, and Nigeria allude to the necessity of incorporating DDR within a broader national umbrella policy to address state-society relations in postconflict situations that are rampant with insecurity and societal distrust.

It is important to maintain the notion that DDR programs are most commonly one component of a broader comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing instability and insecurity, and creating the conditions for sustainable peace in postconflict societies (MDRP 2009; Nezam and Marc 2009; Muggah et al. 2003; among others). DDR programs are not designed nor implemented to end *all* social ills of a conflict. These programs are designed with limited breadth and reach (much to their detriment). In order to evaluate the “success” or “failure” of these postconflict initiatives, practitioners have employed clear objectives, indicators, and targets for each phase of the operation. Such objectives include: calculating the number of weapons recovered and the quantity of ammunition retrieved from ex-combatants (and often citizens writ large), accounting for the number of re-education programs developed, and determining the number of persons that underwent demobilization, to name a few. It is in the numeric counting of weapons, munitions, and persons that this paper’s argument resides. Can DDR programs be labeled as “successful” if the number of weapons, munitions, and persons counted reaches the desired thresholds of practitioners? The simple answer is no. DDR programs cannot be solely evaluated on the attainment of these objectives without considering the social-political context. This is the primary argument of this study, which is fleshed out more fully in section four.

## **2.1. Implementation**



State management of small arms and weapons in postconflict settings is fundamental to (re)establishing security sector reforms and interpersonal trust among belligerents to a conflict. Often DDR programs must confront this task with limited international and national resources. Prior to demobilization, disarming combatants becomes priority one in achieving a cessation of hostilities and embarking on the path toward sustainable peace. Programs entice ex-combatants to relinquish their arms and munitions to practitioners and local authorities by awarding them financial or physical supplies in exchange (Nezam and Marc 2009). Too often, disarmament programs are initiated in the immediate aftermath of warring parties reaching a peace agreement. In this context, both the government and nonstate-armed groups distrust one another's interests and motivations for the disarmament process. Previous programs have not distinguished between the return of functional small arms weapons and malfunctioning ones. In Haiti, the buy-back program exchanged cash for malfunctioning and broken weapons, which it is speculated that the cash received for such deteriorating weapons served two interests: to purchase newer, better equipped small arms weapons and to line the pockets ex-combatants (Muggah 2005). Not only do buy-back programs of functioning and malfunctioning weapons create incentives for spoilers to game the system, these policies establish a marketplace for the sell and trafficking of weapons into a postconflict zone for the attainment of program cash, thus fueling the black market sales of weapons and bolstering the informal economy in favor of "former" belligerents (O'Conner 1996).

Given these concerns, ensuring the secure stockpiling of returned weapons prior to their disposal is necessary in creating an appropriate chain of custody beginning with the ex-combatant handing over his/her weapons and extending until their destruction. Without accurate and effective chains of custody it is foreseeable that individual criminals, organized crime units, or ex-combatants will circumvent this process and retrieve their weapons before destruction. Without

secure locations for munitions storage, disarmament is meaningless. Moreover, disarmament programs should be “proportional and fair,” and attempt at all costs to avoid asymmetrical disarmament, that is, the disarming of an armed group with the neglect of another, which alters the power dynamics of the peace agreement. This was the case in Angola under the disarmament of the MPLA and UNITA forces; the MPLA were reduced by about 65 percent while UNITA was able to maintain its force more broadly with only 26 percent reduction in fighting capacity (Greenhill and Major 2007, 18-19). This asymmetric disarmament altered the power dynamics of the peace agreement and caused fundamental shifts in the strategic decision-making of elites. Disarmament practitioners must take these circumstances into account when enacting the first phase of DDR programs, perhaps, because without doing so they may not reach the second implementation phase.

Despite the complexities of disarmament, demobilization of belligerents from mobilized groups is a multistage process. Many programs place ex-combatants in containment or demobilization centers designed to acclimate soldiers to the norms and expectations of postconflict civilian life. The aim is to ensure disarmament and the breaking of previous chains of command structures that place officers and elites above their subordinates. This task is immeasurably more difficult than the disarmament phase. In many cases, a soldier’s entire adult (or childhood) socialization has taken place within this extended unit making it unthinkable to take actions without authorization from his/her commander. Some programs have linked the demobilization phase with reintegration of ex-combatants into communities of either their choosing, if applicable and feasible, or communities chosen for them given their desired employment sector or social reintegration needs (Nezam and Marc 2009, 4). The premier task of any DDR program is to successfully break the chains of hierarchy established through the bonds of combat and reintegrate

ex-combatants into societal settings where they can create connections through employment and other civilians that replace their hierarchical associations of the past. As this has been noted before, it is worth mentioning here, fomenting clear breaks from the past among ex-combatants is crucial to creating the conditions of success for the future; yet all too often this phase of DDR programs is under-funded, neglected, or unable to accomplish such tasks, with many ex-combatants maintaining their loyalties to fellow soldiers after demobilization (Themnér 2013, 304-12). When there is limited social employment for ex-combatants to rely on they return to these networks of armed companions that reinforce the cycle of violence through criminal activity and extra-legal means of meeting their daily needs.

The final pillar of DDR programs is often the least funded and least executed but retains the most impact on sustaining peace between parties to a conflict. Reintegration can be undertaken through formal or informal means with the former avenue offering the candidates the best chance at successful reintegration to society. Nezam and Marc (2009) contend the formalized process of reintegration allows ex-combatants to, “acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income” in postconflict settings (5). This is done through institutions established by program practitioners to transition former belligerents from a state of war into (ideally) productive members of society. Successful reintegration significantly reduces the likelihood of remobilization of ex-combatants. Providing employment and income comparable to that of their former career is paramount in establishing the idea of peace and civilian employment. Informal reintegrations raise the risk of remobilization and insecurity in postconflict states because they lack institutional support and transitional assistance provided to ex-combatants. Informal programs do not offer structured assimilation assistance for former soldiers, particularly, those adversely affected by the

consequences of war (i.e., child soldiers, female conscripts and soldiers, and those experiencing psycho-emotional after affects of war).

## **2.2. The Evaluation Criteria of “Success”**

Traditionally, “success” has been defined by program practitioners’ ability to effectively disarm and demobilize ex-combatants of a conflict and subsequently reintegrate them into society. This minimalist definition of DDR enables practitioners to justify their “success” of programs to donor agencies, organizations, and governments; however, relying on the minimal or numeric definition of “success” (i.e., counting the number of ex-combatants processed through DDR, munitions and weapons collected, etc.) prohibits practitioners from buttressing national policies of reconciliation and economic development. Utilizing limited definitions of success in defining DDR programs has given cannon fodder to opponents in attacking the ineffectiveness of such policies.

DDR programs are multifaceted and highly complex operations undertaken in some of the most difficult geographic and political conditions. Determining the success or failure of a program is equally complex. The ability of practitioners, donors, and governments to efficiently and effectively achieve the desired goals and objectives of DDR requires a broad commitment on the part of governments and indigenous agents to a conflict.

Conflict context, or war outcome, is a fundamental determinant of DDR’s chance of achieving “success.” Wars that conclude with a clear victor often undergo DDR for two reasons. First, the victor uses DDR to demobilize internal political competition that threatens the ruling elites’ authority and removes existing threats to their domestic supremacy. This was the case of Congo-Brazzaville under Sassou. Second, the victor engages in DDR to pacify domestic and international constituencies with less sinister motivations that include the integration of the

remaining military factions under a unified command structure. For either outcome, DDR serves as an integral component of a larger national policy despite its ideational origins. For DDR to contribute to a positive national outcome of reconciliation and economic development, practitioners must move beyond the simplistic accounting of guns and bullets (the disarmament phase) and enhance the reintegration training and short and medium term transitional support for participants.

Practitioners implementing DDR programs are caught in a double bind between those who fund the program's initiatives, and those who seek broader security sector reforms and the creation of stable social conditions that lead to sustainable peace and economic development. The development community relies heavily on rigorous program evaluation standards to evaluate the work accomplished by grassroots professionals and agents tasked with executing DDR on the ground. In order to evaluate the benefits and costs of donor financing, DDR programs have extensively relied on program evaluations that clearly demark each objective, sub-objective, and indicator. This is not to say that clear evaluation criteria is a de facto hindrance to DDR; this would be a mischaracterization of this article's findings. In fact, when DDR practitioners rely exclusively on counting the number of guns and bullets collected by category at the expense of neglecting broader social-political interactions of DDR (e.g., see Angola example above), these programs have the potential of being hijacked by political entrepreneurs and potential spoilers to peace.

In order to operationalize when DDR has been "successful" we have to examine three domains beyond the program specifics of counting weapons and munitions. DDR has been mistakenly blamed far too often for the failures of peace agreements and security sector reforms than should be attributed it. Before undertaking DDR programs and seeking to disarm armed fighters in a postconflict situation, practitioners, policymakers, and donors should examine three

domains to confirm DDR's viability of achieving "success" in a postconflict environment. First, power dynamics and personalities of leaders determine the extent to which DDR is conceived from the peace agreement, how the program is implemented, and who undergoes disarmament and demobilization. Postconflict scenarios are rife with conflict. Practitioners should be aware of domestic power dynamics and elites' postconflict intentions prior to establishing DDR. Ignoring the intentions and motivations of leaders who agree to DDR may result in similar circumstances that emerged in Angola between the asymmetrical disarmament of UNITA and MPLA forces that directly contributed to shifts in the militaristic capabilities of these armed groups and negatively impacted the peace agreement.

Intrinsically related to power dynamics is conflict context. In the case of Congo-Brazzaville, war outcome was in favor of President Sassou and led to the disarmament of the regime's domestic political opponents and the buttressing of the president's leadership, an outcome of this program. In states that have transitioned from war to peace by means of a positive war outcome for the one party over their opponent, DDR may be hijacked by domestic elites to support the regime's domestic dominance and weaken its opponents under the guise of security sector reforms and DDR programs. In these cases (including Congo-Brazzaville) practitioners report the quantity of weapons collected, bullets retrieved, soldiers disarmed and reintegrated into local villages, which may reflect the facts on the ground. However, the purpose of such program initiatives is not in achieving an equitable peace between previously warring factions, but is to demobilize opposition opponents and strengthen the regime's strangle hold over potential domestic spoilers. To the outsider, disarmament buy-back programs and demobilization centers reflect the ideational spirit of DDR but do nothing to break means of violence.

The third issue practitioners must be cognizant of is the extent of the lacuna in trust between formerly warring factions and civic society. The social trust deficit of a postconflict society is one indicator of social commitment to DDR and alternative national umbrella programs aimed at resolving or stemming political violence. Given arms and munitions are easily trafficked in to many global south states, the supply of rebel means remains present after a peace agreement has been reached. Thus, practitioners must engage with the demand side of the equation and foster social cooperation for disarmament and reintegration to take hold. If the trust deficit is high, social support for DDR falls precipitously. It is possible that DDR programs may be most useful during “ripe moments,”<sup>3</sup> in that, there must be a demand for disarmament among ex-combatants and civilians for the program to accomplish its objectives of securing the free flow of arms and munitions, and demobilizing militarized factions within a territory.

For postconflict disarmament programs to have the opportunity of achieving some level of success, policymakers, practitioners, and donor agencies must address domestic power dynamics of elites following the resolution of violent conflict. Second, control for the conflict context and impact of war outcome on the implementation of DDR and acknowledgement of its potential for being hijacked by domestic spoilers in hopes of returning to a state of conflict with political opponents. Finally, practitioners must consider the extent of mistrust present in a given postconflict society and the possibility that a ripe moment may not present itself immediately following the signing of a ceasefire or peace agreement for the implementation of DDR.

### **3. Disarmament for Autocracy: The Case of Congo-Brazzaville**

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of a “ripe moment” is derived from I. William Zartman’s (1991) article “*Conflict and Resolution: Contest, Cost, and Change*,” in which, he argues the resolution of (violent) conflicts may result from conditions that lead to a mutual stalemate between factions which foster critical moments for elites to partake in mediated or negotiated talks to resolve the dispute. Zartman’s concept is applied here to the conditions surrounding DDR that create its potential for success or failure.

During the 1990s and the early 2000s Congo-Brazzaville experienced civil wars for control of the state (Clark and Carter, forthcoming). Several factions were competing for control of the national government, including Denis Sassou Nguesso. Near the end of 1998 and early 1999 Sassou wrestled control of Congo from his opponents and grasped the presidency. Competing for control were three main militia groups: the Ninjas, Cobras, and Cocoyes<sup>4</sup>. Some scholars have argued that elements of the militias were organized and supported by the Sassou government in the war that began in December 1998 (Carter and Clark 2012, *passim*). This argument provides a caveat to the DDR program and its strategy for disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating ex-combatants into society; however, I will return to this issue later in this section for elaboration. Emerging from conflict as Congo has in the early 2000s (several times) is a difficult and exceedingly complex undertaking. Congo was saddled with numerous concerns, including providing public security reform, disarming of militias and national armies pursuant to the peace agreement, addressing poverty and economic development, and maintaining the peace. Civil wars sometimes conclude with one faction declaring victory and “winning” the conflict over the other. For peace to last, all parties must contribute toward a strategy aimed at winning the peace.

This section describes two DDR programs in Congo-Brazzaville from 2004-2005 and 2005-2009 that were partially funded and administered by international partners under the Congo regime’s direction. For the purpose of this review, I excluded one-off and limited initiatives the Sassou government has undertaken following the conclusion of the 1998-99 civil war. These initiatives were not implemented as part of a comprehensive DDR program and are outside the scope of this study.

### **3.1. The Preamble**

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<sup>4</sup> The names of militias varied between each war. See Clark and Carter (forthcoming) for an excellent analysis.



Prior to the implementation of two comprehensive DDR programs, the Sassou government initiated interim enterprises designed to stabilize and bring about security sector reforms. These initiatives are important for understanding the foundation through which DDR rests and the circumstances its practitioners confronted, but will not be included in the analysis of DDR's "success" as they were implemented outside the control of DDR practitioners. In August 1999 Sassou granted amnesty to all militias that were engaged in hostilities during the war. The Pool region of Congo, in subsequent years, became a hot bed of militia operations against the government (Clark and Carter forthcoming). This created intraregional disparities in Congo between the Pool region and other territories located along major access routes throughout the country, including, the city of Pointe-Noire. Largely rural areas remained outside of these violence corridors and resembled levels of peace or, at maximum, experienced low-level violence.

The targets of DDR were nonstate-armed groups named the Ninjas, Cobras, and Cocoyes. Each militia has a unique history and story behind their inception and various domestic allegiances. Ntoumi's Nsiloulou organized one subset of the Ninja militia. According to Carter and Clark the Nsiloulou militia is distinct from former Ninja militias and, it is argued, were a creation of Sassou designated to, "cleanse Pool [region] of its ethnic Lari population rather than protect it" (Carter and Clark 2012, 2). This cross allegiance organization prevents difficulties in administering DDR to all militias uniformly. The Sassou government, if responsible for the creation of Nsiloulou's militia, has incentives to disarm and demobilize other Ninja groups, and the Cobras and Cocoyes, in support of his strategy for maintaining domestic political and military dominance and minimizing the presence of spoilers to peace. In 2002, several thousand militias were remobilized on behalf of the government to fight insurgent rebels threatening the railroad from Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville (Themnér 2013, 312). The government remobilized 2,000 Cobras and 1,350 Ninjas in

support of their military engagement in this region. The remobilization of ex-combatants creates issues of concern and emphasis for DDR. If DDR is successful, ex-combatants should be disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated into society, thus leaving behind them the knowledge and motivation for war, and incentivize these ex-combatants for engaging in the marketplace through non-conflict employment. The government sends mixed messages to ex-combatants when it remobilizes them on behalf of national interests. If remobilization has taken place once, what is stopping the Sassou government from engaging in this strategy again? The remobilization of 2002 leads to the primary analysis of this study.

### **3.2. Under the Cover of Complexity: Domestic Power Politics and DDR**

The purpose of DDR in Congo, particularly the two programs enacted by the World Bank from 2004-2005 and the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) from 2005-2009, were aimed at transitioning militia and national army soldiers from active belligerents of the conflict to ex-combatants, with the ultimate goal of enabling the participants to become productive members of Congolese society. It is important to mention that ex-combatants are not a homogenous group. Zena (2013) classifies ex-combatants into three categories: self-demobilizers, fence sitters, and hardliners (2). This classification structure arranges ex-combatants according to their intentions under disarmament and reintegration programs. It is also necessary to group demobilizers by demographic characteristics (i.e., child soldiers, female soldiers, and willing versus conscripted members). Wars are often long fought campaigns waged by militaries or militaristic nonstate-armed groups that must rely on a heterogeneous mix of indigenous actors to continue their fight. When demobilization arrives, practitioners must not treat all categories and variations in participants the same. Some may require additional psychosocial healing or re-educational training compared with his/her compatriots.

In Congo, the regime sought to demobilize all three categories of ex-combatants—self-demobilizers, fence sitters, and hardliners. The self-demobilizers and fence sitters came first in the Cocoyes and Cobras. According to reports by scholars and practitioners of the DDR programs, between 15,000 and 25,000 ex-combatants have been demobilized. Themnér (2013) argues, 13,200 Cobras, 10,800 Cocoyes and between 5,700-6,000 Ninjas were demobilized as part of this process (312). However, the hardliners were more difficult to demobilize, stemming from their loyalty to their immediate commanders and belief in the modus operandi of each organization. Of the three militias, the Ninjas retain the most hardline soldiers and operated several bases throughout the Pool region in years since. The remaining space of this section is devoted to unpacking each stage of Congo's DDR programs and the level of the state's involvement in coopting this process for political gain.

### **3.3. Disarmament**

Despite the, so-called, self-demobilizers' and fence sitters' participation en mass, problems remained with the implementation of the disarmament phase in Congo. Disarmament was comprised of five sub-objectives including: the number of weapons collected and disposed of, quantity of munitions gathered and destroyed, the quantity and percentage of ex-combatants disarmed, and the assessed amount and percentage of weapons and munitions available in the conflict zone. While no process in DDR is "easy," disarmament is comparatively more straightforward to initiate than the remaining tasks. Ex-combatants are provided financial incentives for returning weapons and corresponding munitions. Weapons and munitions were awarded a point value and ex-combatants were given points in exchange for the equipment they turned in. For instance, one rocket launcher, machine gun, or equivalent weapon was awarded 400 points, one assault rifle like the AK-47 was given 200 points, a pistol is 100 points, and the lowest

reward was for a firing cartridge or firing element equal to one point (Alusala and Lamb, 2008, 4). In exchange for these points, ex-combatants could use their compensation to purchase products, such as, mattresses for 2,005 points, bed sheets for 395; a machete was worth 664, or a hoe for 321 points (Ibid). In essence, the DDR programs provided a market place and financial benefit for participants to engage with the process. This is not to say that the marketplace worked uniformly efficiently or effectively as designed. Given human ingenuity and resources practitioners cannot eliminate the spread of weapons but can implement safeguards that would prolong their proliferation. For example, ex-combatants may use their points awarded for the return of a machine gun to purchase a mattress and subsequently sell the mattress to a third party for cash and then purchase a firearm. DDR programs are not setup to deal with second order effects such as this and have such been criticized for creating marketplaces where firearms proliferate in place of disarmament (see Muggah 2005).

Another component of the program, which was not effectively implemented or addressed by program practitioners in an unbiased manner, was the monitoring of asymmetric disarmament. According to the peace agreement, which brought about the implementation of DDR programs in Congo, there was a recognition that both militias and national armies under Sassou's government would collectively disarm together. The Sassou government agreed to disarm 6,000 soldiers as part of a comprehensive peace agreement that aimed to bring about public security and reduce, if not eliminate, political violence. This symmetric disarmament (and demobilization) did not occur. Based on the research available, all reports and scholarly articles point toward the notion that Sassou's regime did not disarm many forces and concurrently supported the disarmament of his opponents and the three major militias in Congo that could vie for power. Some Cobra fighters were integrated into the ranks of police, gendarmerie, and national army. From the evidence

available, it seems clear that Congo supports the argument that strong leaders in authoritarian states may use the international credibility of DDR programs to disarm their enemies, while maintaining their respective military strength, thus preserving the stability of the regime and its maintenance of domestic political power.

Despite DDR's attempts to demobilize nonstate-armed groups several thousand fighters have subsequently remobilized on behalf of the government in the early 2000s, and some on their own accord. This remobilization strikes the underlying chord of distrust and insecurity within the Pool region and Congo-Brazzaville writ large. That is, disarmament may take away the weapons, ammunition, and the interim capacity of ex-combatants to fight, but DDR cannot deactivate a fighter's mentality. Militiapersons who feel they have been unjustly treated, socially or economically, or politically marginalized in society have strong motivations for returning to the bush. The fact remains, weapons are easily accessible in central Africa. An assault rifle can be purchased for \$40-\$67 USD in Brazzaville or in Sibiti the value drops to \$13-\$27 USD (Demetriou et al. 2002). The unfortunate reality of disarmament is that ex-combatants can always rearm at a future point when their relative deprivation falls below self-described acceptable levels. This temporal dilemma is precisely why subsequent pillars of DDR, specifically, demobilization and reintegration, perform a crucial role in buttressing initial gains accomplished but demand support in their own right from national umbrella policies aimed at maintaining a sustainable peace. Without practitioners' acknowledgement of power dynamics, conflict context, and ripe moments for demobilization, DDR programs will constantly be fighting against the grain.

### **3.4. Demobilization**

Congo-Brazzaville's postconflict programs fit the cookie cutter model of DDR. Demobilization and participant reinsertion to local communities transpired under one phase.

Throughout the demobilization phase practitioners recorded the number and percentage of demobilized persons, percentage receiving trauma and psychological assistance (of those diagnosed), the percentage receiving educational training, those undergoing HIV/AIDS screening, and members who were reinserted to local communities with and without financial support. During this process, ex-combatants were given the opportunity to receive educational training that would assist them in their reintegration process. Education was limited to a maximum of five days for ex-combatants. This drawback led to under-educated fighters attempting to assimilate into the formal and informal economy while retaining their one true talent, knowing how to wage war. It is suspected that many of these participants were involved in the remobilization campaigns discussed above. As with any government program, financial constraints play fundamental roles in determining the breadth and depth of each initiative. In Congo, these limitations impacted the length of educational training fighters received during the demobilization phase.

Demobilization is the process by which ex-combatants strip themselves of their uniforms and military/militia affiliations and orient themselves toward civilian lifestyles. This means educating ex-combatants, who in many cases spent years fighting in the bush, and turning this training and spirit into a trade or skill that enables them to thrive in a social-economic setting. Throughout the educational training process, program participants were not readily diagnosed and treated for trauma and psychosocial issues; this is especially harmful to vulnerable groups within ex-combatants, namely child soldiers and women soldiers. These two sub-groups of ex-combatants often face the most difficult demobilization or reintegration obstacles. Demobilizing militiapersons from their uniforms and formations and donning civilian clothes, with at most five days of educational training, does little to prepare them for life after war.

HIV/AIDS screenings of ex-combatants have been beneficial in educating program participants about the spread of the pandemic. Congo-Brazzaville's better-known neighbor, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has vast experience with militias roaming the countryside. As part of this internal struggle, many combatants have engaged in rape as a tactic of warfare, particularly in the eastern regions of the DRC near Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Conducting HIV/AIDS screening as part of the DDR process helps tame the spread of the disease. When militias or national militaries engage in rape as a tactic of war they propagate the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus. Adequate screenings at demobilization centers have helped diagnosis-affected individuals and directed them toward treatment.

### **3.5. Reintegration**

There are two dominant mechanisms of reintegration. First, ex-combatants are taught the benefits of social-economic reintegration that comes from participating in the economy. Second, and less acknowledged, is the incorporation of former belligerents into the political space after conclusion of hostilities. Political reintegration is much more difficult to manage, particularly from the perspective of DDR practitioners responsible for a fraction of postwar stabilization programs. Social-economic reintegration is more feasible despite its multi-faceted nature and the many hurdles ex-combatants face through this process. Both programs have placed attention on economic reintegration of ex-combatants. Congo-Brazzaville practitioners have highlighted this aspect as important; however, awareness of this issue has not translated to extensive financial support. Ex-combatants were given initial small micro-credit loans to assist themselves in establishing a business or product to sell and earn income. Further studies should address this aspect of the programs and assess the extent to which micro-credit loans and financial incentives

have resulted in achieving their desired impact. The author is not aware of any studies examining this aspect of the programs.

External actors i.e., national or DDR practitioners, can promote social reintegration but acceptance must come from the local community (Hamer 2011, 23). Ex-combatants interviewed as part of a study in 2011 indicated that after they were reintegrated they maintained the label as an ex-combatant (Hamer 2011, 24). These interviewees felt they could not escape the label as an ex-combatant. When items in the community went missing or something unusual transpired they were accused first before other individuals in the community because of their history with the militias (ibid). The social stigma ex-combatants face confronts them in systemic challenges. If local residents fear that ex-combatants steal and commit crimes they are less likely to engage these individuals and offer them employment. Sustained unemployment provides incentives for ex-combatants to engage in black market criminal activity, which perpetuates the cycle and their stigmatization.

Second, ex-combatants are made scapegoats for locals. Ex-combatants face economic hardship associated with reintegration (i.e., finding suitable housing, food, and employment). When ex-combatants are awarded micro-credit loans in the absence of employment, second order effects are felt within the community. Civilians who faced the wrath of ex-combatants during war disapprove of the economic assistance ex-combatants receive, thus increasing the relative deprivation and envy among local residents and those attempting to assimilate. The chance of confrontation between these groups over available financial and physical resources becomes great. Finally, many ex-combatants maintained their old connections to fellow ex-combatants and commanders (Themnér 2013). This reliance on preexisting networks creates the opportunity for remobilization to occur. Disbanding these preexisting networks through means other than force is



encouraged; however, this is not easily accomplished as in the case of Congo-Brazzaville, the Niger Delta, and Colombia.

### **3.6. Enforcement and Other Mechanisms**

There are three primary objectives lumped under program enforcement. The foremost enforcement goal from an objective standpoint is the monitoring that all parties (including the conflict victor, if present) abide by the agreed upon DDR program. In Congo, lack of enforcement and program cooptation has resulted in asymmetric demobilization and the securitization of the regime's control over its territory at the expense of group inclusivity. The Congolese government has initiated two programs in the Pool region to further disarm and demobilize militias under the auspices of two military operations known as Kinzounou and Kimia in 2009 and 2011, respectively. These operations have been carried out with a heavy hand by the government, attempting to crush opposition and eliminate all armed or political opponents to the regime, and have not abided by DDR standards or norms. Second, the DDR programs have not engaged in public awareness campaigns aimed at de-stigmatizing the label "ex-combatant" in communities across Congo (Hamer 2013). The stigma associated with being labeled an ex-combatant is systemic and culturally engrained. Monitoring efforts of vulnerable groups, including women and child soldiers, has been lax. From the allocation of resources and personnel, Congo's DDR programs have placed much of their emphasis on disarmament programs of political and military opponents and less on long-term reintegration efforts. After militias have been disarmed and disbanded, the regime's commitment to integration has waxed and waned which has caused limited remobilizations of fighters subsequently.

## **4. Conclusion**

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) has become an integral part of postconflict stabilization and peacemaking. Evaluating the success or failure of DDR benefits both the scholarly community's theory generation research and the policy and practitioner community's application of those theories as best practices in emerging postconflict states. Are DDR programs able to achieve a successful outcome if internal objectives are met (i.e., the number of weapons collected, fighters demobilized, etc.) and yet have an aggregate neutral effect on the stabilization of a postconflict state? This question lies at the forefront of postconflict states that coopt DDR programs for the securitization of the regime through demobilizing its opponents and maintaining domestic political control.

When one group undergoes DDR it inevitably benefits another group, either explicitly or implicitly. In Congo-Brazzaville disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the Cobras, Ninjas, and Cocoyes benefited the Sassou government on numerous fronts. First, DDR militarily strengthened the regime by eliminating its opponents and rival militia factions. This point cannot be overstated. This action also strengthened Sassou politically by reinforcing his dominance over the political space within Congo-Brazzaville. Third, self-demobilizers and fence sitters widely underwent disarmament and demobilization while some hardliners remained mobilized throughout this process. As reported by Carter and Clark (2012), a subset of the Ninja militias have their roots from the Sassou government. Likewise, this allegiance to the regime by certain militias allowed for their supporters to benefit from this asymmetric disarmament.

There is a perceived sense of insecurity in the Pool region, along transit corridors to Pointe-Noire, and among the broader population in southern Congo. Ninja bases remain active throughout the Pool region which spawned Operation Kimia in 2011. Military, police, and representatives of the judiciary intervened in this area by cracking down on Ninjas operating freely. The lack of

public security, particularly in Pool, presents major setbacks to DDR practitioners. As part of the programs' goals, securing the Pool region was a core objective. To date this objective has not been reached.

One of DDR's main objectives is to improve postconflict stabilization by reducing the risk of relapse through disarmament and demobilization measures. Notwithstanding the asymmetric disarmament of the regime's opponents, the likelihood of a return to conflict in Congo-Brazzaville is low. This is to say, the opposition forces do not have the capacity to engage in armed conflict with the government, but this does not indicate that they do not have the motivation to do so. Capacity versus motivation is a critical distinction. While the capacity is minimal the motivation of ex-combatants remains present (e.g. local Ninja combatant groups). One warning sign is the lack of economic opportunities for ex-combatants in Congo. The economic conditions preclude many from actively participating in the marketplace, a consequence of such increases the opportunity cost for rebellion.

In sum, the return to war is unlikely given the relative of strength Sassou's government. The regime's strength has been bolstered by DDR through the disarmament of Sassou's political and military opposition. DDR's primary accomplishments have been in reducing the capacity of militias and rebel groups to arm and mobilize. But, very little has been done to correct the grievances and motivations of these organizations that fueled their efforts a decade ago. In order for DDR to be termed a "success" practitioners would have had to address long-term grievances and motivational issues of these militias and their social-political exclusion. Assessing any DDR program requires a unique understanding of complex processes, which the program enacts, but also understanding the social-political environment. While practitioners have labeled specific components of Congo-Brazzaville's DDR program a success, the overall impact has been

multifaceted and net neutral on postconflict reconstruction. Specific indicators may point toward positive outcomes, though future shifts in the political power of militias could send Congo into disarray. Success may be in the eye of the beholder but yet to reach the shores of Congo-Brazzaville DDR program.

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