LEAVING CONFLICT FIRMLY BEHIND THROUGH THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF ARMED GROUPS

Notes for DDR and Peacebuilding Practitioners

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Berghof Foundation

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Executive summary

This report compiles key lessons learnt on the political dimension of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration) gathered through a project jointly conducted by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DDR Section) and the Berghof Foundation.

In comparison to other sectors of post-war reintegration for ex-combatants, such as socio-economic reinsertion and security sector integration, DDR and peacebuilding practitioners have paid limited attention to the political trajectories of former armed groups. Yet DDR and political transformation are intrinsically linked in the minds of non-state armed groups, who see the prospects for exerting political agency as a condition for their demilitarisation.

Following an explanatory account of the interlinkages between DDR and political transformation and a series of four country examples from Mali, Colombia, Mindanao/Philippines and Northern Ireland, the report outlines six factors of successful political transformation. These are: sustaining internal cohesion within the transforming groups; favourable peace agreements and other legal frameworks; right timing of transitional justice as a trust-building endeavour; maintaining the political will of the state party to the conflict; promoting gender-sensitive transformation; and ensuring sustainable implementation of the new political settlement. For each set of factors, we highlight opportunities and avenues for external actors to support and facilitate such transformations, both during and after peace processes.

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List of Abbreviations

BARMM Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

CMA *Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad* (Coordination of Azawad Movements)

CSA *Comité de Suivi de l'Accord* (Agreement Monitoring Committee)

CSIVI *Comisión de Seguimiento Impulso Verificación a la Implementación* (Implementation Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification Committee)

DDR Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo

FARC-EP *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army)

FMLN *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)

FRPI *Force de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri* (Ituri Patriotic Resistance Force)

IDDRS Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards

IRA Provisional Irish Republican Army

MILF Moro Islamic Liberation Front

NSAG Non-state armed group

UBJP United Bangsamoro Justice Party

UNDPO United Nations Department of Peace Operations

Introduction

This report synthesises the learnings from a project on the political dimension of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), jointly conducted by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO, DDR Section) and Berghof Foundation.[1] The project constitutes a contribution to the operationalisation of the UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) Module 2.20 on 'The Politics of DDR'.[2] While the module covers several dimensions of DDR and politics, the project focused specifically on the intersection of DDR processes and the transition of armed groups and/or their members into the political sphere of their country through conversion into political parties or other non-violent political entities.

In comparison to other sectors of post-war reintegration for ex-combatants, such as socio-economic reinsertion and security sector integration, DDR and peacebuilding practitioners have paid limited attention to the political trajectories of former armed groups. This project aimed to contribute to filling this gap by collecting first-hand knowledge on past and ongoing political transformation processes and fostering multi-sector exchange and creative thinking on this topic, in order to build the foundations for more coordinated and comprehensive engagement in the future. One particular aim was to assess the added value of the international community's engagement to support and facilitate such transformations, both during and after peace processes.

In December 2021, we jointly convened an expert workshop in Berlin on the topic of 'mediating political reintegration'. The workshop brought together distinguished experts and practitioners from the complementary fields of peace mediation, DDR and democracy support to exchange ideas about past approaches, lessons learnt and future options for effective political transformation of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) as part of mediated peace processes. The attendees included senior mediators and policy-makers from the UN, EU and European governments, senior experts from conflict resolution INGOs and political foundations, seasoned DDR practitioners combining HQ and field experience, and leading academics.[3]

This was followed in June 2022 by a high-level event at UN headquarters in New York. Titled 'Living political transformation – Voices of Witnesses', it featured a panel of politicians from former armed movements (or associated parties) in Northern Ireland and El Salvador, as well as a senior advisor to the transitional government led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao/Philippines. In addition, two recorded testimonies from Colombia and the Basque Country were screened during the event. The panellists testified on their personal and collective journeys from armed insurgency to peaceful political engagement in the democratic system of their country and exchanged with UN staff and representatives from member states on the challenges and opportunities of political transformation.

In addition to these events, the project also contributed to a series of research briefs on the 'political dynamics of DDR', produced in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academic and the Politics after War network.[4] Finally, a series of short video clips was produced, featuring former members of NSAGs from Aceh/Indonesia, Colombia, Kosovo, Mali, Nepal and Sudan, who shared their experiences of war-to-politics transitions and their lessons learnt for international support.[5]

This report presents an overview of the learnings garnered through the aforementioned activities. The country case illustrations provided throughout the report are based on first-hand accounts, practical experiences and research results shared by various participants.[6]

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4   The series can be accessed here: https://politicsafterwar.com/2022/06/14/joint-brief-series-paw-fba-and-un-dpo-orolsi-ddr-section-on-the-political-dynamics-of-ddr/
5   The clips are available here: https://berghof-foundation.org/work/projects/non-state-armed-groups-and-political-transformation
6   Unless otherwise stated, the empirical data and case study analysis mentioned in this report originate from the discussions during the project activities.

How are DDR and political transformation inter-related?

Many intra-state conflicts are born out of collective sentiments of political exclusion, socio-economic marginalisation or deprivation of basic needs among certain groups in society. When these grievances are expressed through violent confrontation against the state, addressing the underlying claims for greater inclusion is key to ending the conflict.

Prospects for political transformation need to be considered at key junctures in peace processes, for instance in peace agreements, which often constitute the legal foundation of DDR processes and the post-war social contract.

Political Transformation: A definition

The term 'political transformation' is used in this report to refer to a collective or individual process of NSAGs and their members transitioning from armed to peaceful politics. For a collective transformation to be deemed successful, the NSAG should have dismantled its wartime structure and formed a new entity, enabling its members to express political claims and to influence the democratic political system either directly (as elected politicians or civil servants) or indirectly (e.g. as civil society activists). Alternatively, former combatants may also undergo successful transformations individually, by renouncing armed activities and subsequently taking up positions in an existing political party, in legislative and executive bodies, or in more informal spaces influencing political governance, such as civil society organisations, social movements, ex-combatant associations, think tanks and interest groups. Political transformation is not restricted to contexts of peace processes; it can also take place in the absence of negotiated political agreements. Finally, it is worth noting that the term 'transformation' is preferred over 'reintegration', as the latter would imply that NSAGs and their members have previous (i.e. pre-war) experience in political participation, which is not always the case.

Often, the prospect of exerting political agency is a latent or explicit condition for disbanding military structures on the part of NSAGs. This is explicitly recognised in the revised IDDRS Module 2.20 'The Politics of DDR'. Whereas the vehicle to exert political agency during conflict is violent confrontation, it must be turned to peaceful means in a post-war environment. By voluntarily giving up their military capacity in the context of a disarmament and demobilisation process, NSAGs lose a significant source of leverage and power. They are more likely to take this risk if their members are able to pursue alternative avenues for exerting political agency. Therefore, opportunities need to be offered to former combatants to pursue their political claims in a non-violent democratic order, in order to establish and preserve sustainable peace. According to the rules of the democratic game, prospective political actors are required to give up their arms in order to credibly participate in civilian politics. DDR and political transformation are thus concomitant and mutually beneficial processes.

Members of NSAGs fulfil a variety of wartime functions as commanders, fighters or in non-combatant roles, and also aspire to play different roles in a peaceful society. While only few of those get a chance to become political leaders after their demobilisation, rank-and-file combatants may also aspire to preserve their sense of political agency. Therefore, DDR programmes should not only provide for their economic wellbeing and reinsertion into the job market, but also help them to establish themselves as full citizens with political and social rights. This can be done, for example, through political education curricula that allow former combatants to learn about their civic rights, duties and avenues for political engagement in a peaceful democratic system.

After the end of armed conflict, political engagement by former combatants can take place either through formal party politics or through civil society entities that allow their members to exert political influence informally, such as social movements or veteran associations. The type of support that is provided needs to account for these different forms of political engagement that former combatants may pursue, as well as the multi-dimensional need to build the structures of a political party within the (reformed) democratic system of the given country.

Whereas DDR programmes are already part of most peacebuilding efforts in contexts of intra-state conflicts around the world, systematic support for political transformation is still lacking. Considering political reintegration as part of UN DDR mandates contributes to a holistic approach to the peaceful transformation of armed groups by considering all possible sectors for absorption of their leaders and combatants (political and administrative apparatus, security sector, job market, etc.) in an integrated and coordinated fashion.

During the project activities, specific examples of political transformation were studied in more detail together with direct protagonists and external support actors. During the expert workshop in Berlin in December 2021, two sessions were dedicated to the country cases of Mali and Colombia. At the June 2022 policy event in New York, speakers shared their personal experiences in El Salvador, Mindanao/Philippines and Northern Ireland, among others. The country examples displayed on the next pages draw on these discussions to shed light on the diverse trajectories of political transformation and their intersection with DDR in contexts of negotiated peace settlements.

A gun is deactivated as part of the FARC-EP disarmament process in Colombia. (Photo: UN Photo, Renata RuÌz / flickr)

Northern Ireland – The value of a long-term perspective

The political party Sinn Féin and the armed group Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) have operated in parallel for most of the 20th century to oppose British rule in Northern Ireland. After the escalation of the conflict in the early 1970s, Sinn Féin refrained from competing in elections due to the dominant narrative that this would entail compromising the group's main principles.[7] During this time, the IRA was the dominant actor in the struggle for the nationalist cause. After the election of imprisoned militant Bobby Sands to the House of Commons in 1981, the Republican movement once again adopted a dual 'Armalite and ballot box strategy', whereby Sinn Féin contested elections in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, while the IRA pursued an armed struggle against the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and loyalist paramilitary groups.

Following a ceasefire by the IRA in 1994, the Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998 by most of Northern Ireland's political parties. It created a political architecture that enabled a levelled playing field for political opponents in Northern Ireland. Until the self-led demobilisation of the IRA, the parliamentary arena was frequently used by unionist politicians to put pressure on Sinn Féin to accelerate the disbanding of the military structures of the IRA. One could thus argue that the continued existence of a paramilitary force hindered effective political power sharing.[8] On the other hand, Republicans insisted on making progressive concessions on the weapons issues only alongside parallel 'tangible progress' in the implementation of other peace accord provisions. These included the withdrawal of British troops, the reforming of the police and justice systems, and the establishment of some island-wide political institutions. The IRA decommissioned its weapons in several stages, culminating in a final declaration in 2005 announcing that the process was completed and instructing members to pursue exclusively peaceful means.[9]

One of the most important conditions for the full transition from armed to non-armed politics was the unity of the Republican movement. In order to ensure internal cohesion during the peace process, the leadership engaged in intense consultations with members and supporters across the political party, political prisoners, the diaspora in North America and relatives of killed members. The rank-and-file had to be convinced of the value of a compromise as a strategic step towards the ultimate goal of addressing the root causes of the conflict in a more effective manner.

In the process of garnering internal support for a peaceful strategy, external players came in as an important factor. Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams was granted a visa to the U.S. in 1994 to consult the Irish American community, who played a crucial role in the peace process. Peer advice from representatives of former NSAGs that had already gone through political transformation processes – such as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa – was also sought and received. International actors also served as guarantors, overseeing the implementation process. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, composed of several international figures, oversaw the voluntary decommissioning

7   McEvoy, Kieran (2012). Agents of change – Ex-prisoners, ex-combatants and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland. In: Véronique Dudouet, Hans J. Giessmann and Katrin Planta (Eds.), Post-war Security Transitions: Participatory Peacebuilding after Asymmetric Conflicts. London: Routledge.

8   Whiting, Matthew and Sophie Whiting (2022). DDR and Post-War Politics: Lessons from Northern Ireland. Joint brief series: The Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW, and UNDPO/OROLSI DDR Section. https://fba.se/en/about-fba/publications/ddr-and-post-war-politics-lessons-from-northern-ireland/

9   Dudouet, Véronique, Hans J. Giessmann and Katrin Planta (2012). From Combatants to Peacebuilders – A Case for Inclusive, Participatory and Holistic Security Transitions. Policy report. Berghof Foundation. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/the-political-transformation-of-armed-and-banned-groups-lessons-learned-and-implications-for-international-support

of IRA weapons. International involvement created the confidence and trust for the movement that independent actors would guarantee a safe transition, while it was feared that the British government lacked the political will to fully implement the agreement.

Since the first election campaign run by Sinn Féin, its political support grew slowly but steadily, reaching over 20% of the electorate from 2001 onwards, culminating in 29% of the votes and 27 seats as the strongest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022. This shows that gaining and maintaining electoral success is a process that happens gradually over time, as party cadres (many of whom had been serving long terms of imprisonment) become more skilled in navigating the institutional setup of the country and built their confidence and experience as party candidates and representatives. In the case of Sinn Féin, a political component was part of the movement from the start, but the move to exclusively peaceful politics allowed for meaningful democratic engagement.

Peace Process		**1998:** Good Friday Agreement, Prisoners release			**2007:** St. Andrews Agreement: Establishment of power-sharing executive
Security Transition	**1994:** Temporary IRA ceasefire	**1997:** IRA ceasefire	**2005:** IRA weapons decommissioning completed		**2007:** Official recognition of Northern Ireland police
Political Transformation	**1980/81:** Electoral success of Sinn Féin in response to hunger strike of IRA prisoners			**2006:** Strongest party among Catholics	**2022:** Sinn Féin elected largest party in Northern Ireland Assembly

Mindanao/Philippines – One actor with multiple roles

In 2014, a comprehensive peace accord was signed between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Since the late 1960s, several NSAGs had been engaged in armed struggle in pursuit of independence for the Muslim majority Moro areas on the Southern Philippine island of Mindanao. The MILF eventually agreed to settle for self-governance through the newly-established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The security track of the peace accord was labelled as 'normalisation', covering issues of DDR, socio-economic recovery and transitional justice. This concept was favoured by the negotiators, since they perceived DDR as synonymous with surrender to the government forces. This illustrates the importance of tailoring the terminology of peace agreements to the sensitivities of the specific context. The decommissioning of MILF weapons is overseen by an independent international body, underlining the armed group's ownership of the process.

The implementation process was constructed as a trust game with four stages along the political, security and development tracks, to advance a fair and sustainable outcome. Both parties have to fulfil their own deliverables in each stage before moving on to the next. This step-by-step process builds trust and guarantees that none of the parties has to give up their leverage too early. The disadvantage that comes with this arrangement is that when one side is not delivering, the entire implementation process is delayed. This design diverges from a conventional approach to DDR which constructs demilitarisation as a precondition for political participation. While the decommissioning of the MILF is still under way (around half of the troops have undergone DDR), the movement has already gained political power.

In 2014, the MILF founded the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) in order to field candidates in subsequent elections. Its electoral success has been mixed so far, as testified in the local elections in May 2022, when its candidates lost against established political clans in 27 out of 36 municipalities. This demonstrates that the transformation from bullets to ballots takes time and the status quo cannot be reversed immediately in the first post-transition elections. In contrast to the electoral process, the transitional government of the BARMM established in 2019 is dominated by MILF cadres, who underwent a swift conversion from commanders and negotiators to ministers and civil servants. Given that the 'normalisation' process is still under way, this resulted in a concentration of power by MILF leaders who currently hold three simultaneous functions as leaders of the armed movement (MILF), the political party (UBJP) and the BARMM government. This entanglement comes with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. For instance, the poor electoral results of the UBJP gave rise to strong criticism by opposition voices in BARMM, alleging that the transitional government has been proven to lack a governance mandate and democratic legitimacy. The autonomous transitional government and parliament have been prolonged for three years until a competitive election in 2025. During this extended interim period, the political dynamics in Mindanao, as well as the political will on the part of the new central government in Manila to support the implementation of the peace accord, will in turn influence the speed and full completion of the decommissioning and demobilisation process. This example demonstrates, as in the Mali case, the dynamic relationship between politics and DDR.

The specificity of international actors is also worth noting, as there were no major supranational organisations involved at the start of the peace process. Instead, the negotiations were facilitated by Malaysia and supported after 2009 by an international contact group made up of four countries and four NGOs. A ceasefire mechanism was introduced that also included international guarantors, but most mechanisms in place entail ownership by the parties themselves. Both parties rejected UN involvement, with the MILF seeing it as an indication of surrendering, while the government considered it a sign of state failure. Since the peace accord, however, UN agencies have taken on important roles in providing funding and capacity-building for peace implementation. Sustained involvement is needed to facilitate the MILF's process of political transformation, but also to support the socio-economic development pillar of the peace accord.

Peace Process	2014: Comprehensive Peace Accord	2018/19: Ratification of Bangsamoro Organic Law and creation of BARMM	
Security Transition	2014: Peace Agreement Annex on Normalisation	2021: 50% of MILF combatants have de-commissioned	2022: Resumption of decommissioning, start of "third phase"
Political Transformation	2014: Establishment of the UBJP party by the MILF	2019: UBJP/MILF assigned seats in power-sharing government and transitional parliament	2022: Limited success in local elections; extension of transitional institutions

Colombia – Is a political vision enough?

During the Havana peace process in Colombia, the transformation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) was a central element, if not its centrepiece. Land reform and political participation were long-term goals of the FARC-EP Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group established in 1964. Its leaders viewed the peace process as a vehicle to transform their struggle from armed to political means, and former Colombian President Santos once said that the essential purpose of the peace negotiations was to exchange 'bullets for ballots'.

In the 2016 Havana Peace Agreement, DDR and political transformation were designed as reciprocal and parallel processes with built-in incentives and conditionalities, with each stage requiring certain actions or benchmarks to be met in order to proceed to the next stage. For example, the government had to provide security guarantees and create safe zones for the guerrillas to lay down their arms, and the FARC-EP had to relocate and complete the tripartite verification process in the safe zones in order to acquire a new legal status. The government also accelerated the passage of legislation to allow FARC-EP members to create their own political party or have seats in Congress. This sequential approach gave the parties a structure to work within and a sense of momentum and progress, and helped to ensure the parties' informed consent, as well as incentivising compliance.[10]

FARC-EP laid down its arms under a UN Verification Mission in the first six months after the agreement. Whereas the demobilisation of 14,000 members, including 7,000 combatants, is seen as a huge achievement, other pillars of the agreement are still being implemented, facing delays and severe obstacles. Among these obstacles, it is important to highlight that the security situation in the country remains difficult. Around 300 FARC-EP ex-combatants have been killed in the last five years. Nevertheless, the change in government that happened in June 2022 shifted the outlook to more effective implementation, bringing sustainable peace back onto the horizon. In addition, the Havana Agreement provides guarantees for continued dialogue between the signatory parties in the post-agreement phase, which helped to consolidate communication channels with the new power-holders.

FARC-EP leaders had largely overestimated their popular support, including in areas under their control and influence. This was clearly reflected in the number of votes they received during the 2018 parliamentary elections. The newly established party was not able to gain enough electoral support to expand its representation beyond the ten reserved congressional seats that it was granted by the peace agreement. Nevertheless, the peace process between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government opened a window for the political left in the country. The topics raised during the peace process, such as inequality and the rights of marginalised groups, have emerged as important issues in public political discourse. Although the former NSAG has not been able to transform this momentum into electoral success so far, more established leftist parties have filled the vacuum, and the ex-rebel leader Gustavo Petro (from a guerrilla group that demobilised in 1990) emerged victorious from the presidential elections in 2022.

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10 Institute for Integrated Transitions, 2021. DDR Innovations from the Colombian Peace Process with the FARC-EP. IFIT Practice Brief. https://ifit-transitions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/DDR-Innovations-from-the-Colombian-Peace-Process-with-the-FARC-EP.pdf

During the peace negotiations and early implementation phase, there were tensions within the movement. The old guard kept a strong grip on power and there was not much change in leadership despite a push by younger generations of ex-combatants to decentralise the party. This led to a strong sense of disconnect between the leaders and rank-and-file members who felt sidelined during the reintegration process.

Finally, it is worth noting that as in the Philippines, the terminology of DDR was also rejected by the FARC-EP, because they wanted to break away from the conventional model applied to other armed actors and individual fighters who had left the guerrilla group in previous years. The Havana Agreement purposely refers to a 'transition to legality' instead of demobilisation, 'putting weapons beyond use' instead of disarmament, and 'reincorporation' instead of reintegration. These sensitivities need to be considered when mediating and drafting peace agreements.

Peace Process	**2012:** Start of formal negotiations	**2016:** Havana Peace Agreement – failed ratification by referendum	**2016:** Revised agreement signed and approved by Congress	
Security Transition	**2012 and 2013:** Unilateral ceasefires	**2016:** bilateral and indefinite ceasefire	**2017:** FARC-EP demobilisation and decommissioning under UN Verification Mechanism	
Political Transformation		**2016:** Peace Agreement dedicates 10 seats to FARC-EP members in Congress	**2017:** Establishment of FARC party (it became Comunes in 2021)	**2018 – 2022:** Very low score in general elections, but growth of the political left

Mali – Trust deficit and informal governance arrangements

In Mali, the Algiers Peace Agreement was signed in 2015 between the government and two major coalitions of armed groups: the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), comprising armed opposition groups from Northern Mali, and the Platform of Movements (known as the Platform), consisting of pro-government armed groups. Since the accord was concluded, these signatory coalitions are no longer labelled as armed groups; instead, the term 'movements' is officially used.

For these movements, political participation was a latent but crucial consideration in the peace process. This resonates with historical ambitions in Malian rebellions since the country gained its independence. Their demands evolved around denouncing the historical marginalisation of Northern Mali, seeking greater representation and inclusion in state institutions and better access to basic services, pursuing claims for self-determination, and/or demanding justice and accountability for past human rights abuses. The Algiers Agreement builds on three preceding peace accords that the then governments were unable or unwilling to implement. This has led to a situation where consecutive generations of NSAGs continue on a path laid out in the past.

Armed movements have represented important political actors in the north of Mali since independence and have de facto governed large parts of the territory, especially in peripheral areas neglected by the central government. These groups have gained support and political legitimacy by liberating territories or protecting populations against other armed actors (such as jihadists or pro-government militias). Some of their leaders have also been co-opted and instrumentalised by state authorities through patronage networks and divide-and-rule strategies.

Since the 2015 agreement, three elections have taken place in Mali, without the direct participation of the signatory movements. They boycotted the 2016 local elections, claiming that these were against the peace agreement, while they did not nominate candidates in the 2018 presidential elections and 2020 parliamentary elections, but supported the incumbent President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and his party. The signatory movements appointed four ministers and one commissioner but these government appointees have failed to play a role as trust-building intermediaries between the central state and the northern region. In the interim period until the full implementation of the Algiers Agreement, regional governors were appointed, with advisory nominees from the CMA and the Platform. Since 2017, interim authorities from the signatory movements have also been appointed at the regional level to identify and deliver on local needs. Nevertheless, these efforts have been seriously undermined as the necessary resources needed for these processes were withheld by the central government.

With regard to the DDR process, progress has been very slow. Mistrust among signatory parties continues to be one of the core challenges obstructing viable peace, and the resulting delays in its implementation have undermined their confidence in the peace process. In addition, the Algiers Peace Agreement lacks linkages and sequencing between the security, political, justice and development pillars. The Malian central government and the international community focus most of their attention on the security pillar and neglect progress on institutional and political reform, while the signatory movements are waiting

for progress on the latter as a condition for their full demobilisation. At the same time, violent jihadist groups pose a constant security threat to local communities from which the signatory movements derive their legitimacy. This creates bottom-up pressure for the movements to stay armed in order to protect their communities in the absence of reformed state security forces.[11]

In August 2020, a group of military officers staged a coup, overthrew the elected government and established a National Committee for the Salvation of the People. While the transitional authorities seemed resolved to accelerate the implementation of the peace agreement, the prospects of successful security and political transformation remain deeply uncertain, especially since a second coup in May 2021, which further limits civilian participation in government.[12]

Peace Process	**2013:** Start of formal negotiations	**2015:** Algiers Peace Agreement between government, CMA and Platform		
Security Transition	**2013:** Ceasefire agreement		**2017:** Establishment of joint patrols	**2018:** Official launch of DDR; full implementation is pending
Political Transformation		**2016:** CMA boycotts local elections	**2017:** CMA nominates local interim authorities	**Since 2016:** no direct participation in elections, but allocation of government positions to CMA leaders

11   Aurélien Tobie & Boukary Sangaré (2019). The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali. Necessary Adaptations of the Strategies for Re-establishing Peace. Stockholm: Stockholm Inter-national Peace Research Institute. https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/other-publications/impact-armed-groups-populations-central-and-northern-mali

12   International Crisis Group (2022). Commentary: Mali: Staying Engaged Despite Souring Relations. www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/mali-staying-engaged-despite-souring-relations

What are the key ingredients of successful political transformation?

Based on the intricacies of DDR and political transformation processes in Northern Ireland, Mindanao/Philippines, Colombia and Mali, several key elements were found to play a role across all these cases. The diagram below visually displays these elements and their interactions.
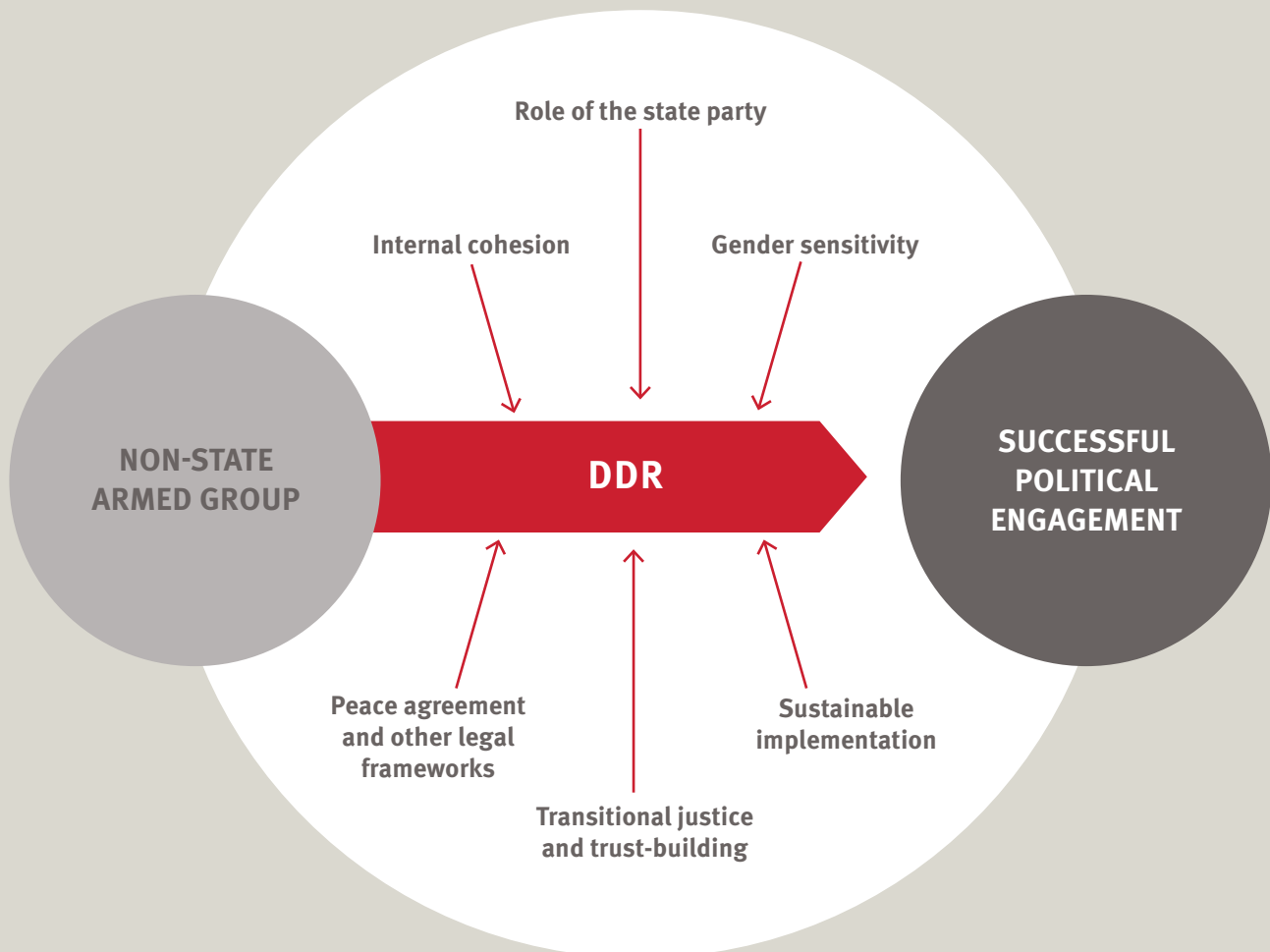
Figure 1: Key ingredients of successful political transformation

Internal cohesion of the transforming movements

One of the vital preconditions for successful peace and transition processes is internal cohesion within the involved NSAGs. As Nelson Mandela famously said: 'Internal negotiations with one's own people are often the most difficult ones to manage.' A lack of unity within the movement can have detrimental effects on the shift to peaceful political engagement.[13] Various internal rifts emerged in the cases reviewed above: between leaders and rank-and-files combatants, between pragmatists and hardliners, between political and military cadres, or between the old guard and younger generations of female and male activists. If disagreement within some parts of the group reaches a tipping point of discontent, this can result in the emergence of splinter groups that may disrupt an ongoing peace process, delay implementation and provoke a relapse into violence.

Whereas the leadership is more likely to have a strategic vision and clarity of purpose on the benefits of entering into a peace process, embarking on political transformation and going through DDR programmes, rank-and-file combatants may lack understanding of these cost-benefit calculations. In such situations, initial steps in these directions can create mistrust and dissent. Political agenda-setting and power-sharing deals at the leadership level further risks neglecting the diverse needs and ambitions of the broader movement. In order to prevent such scenarios, the establishment of horizontal and vertical consultation channels to co-develop or explain the vision for the future to members can play a conflict prevention role.

The ongoing process of political transformation by the MILF in the Philippines is rife with internal discontent since consultation with rank-and-file

Electoral campaign by the UBJP party, May 2022
(Photo: Mimmi Soderberg Kovacs)

combatants has been limited, resulting in a lack of unity among all segments of the movement. The delayed implementation of the socio-economic provisions of the peace agreement may further disgruntle the youth who feel that the 'peace dividends' have not reached them yet and who may be more tempted to join violent extremist groups aligned with the Islamic State (IS). Enabling consultations with these groups about strategic decisions enhances their understanding of the new strategy, improves their sense of belonging through becoming stakeholders in a common vision and paves the way for more participatory decision-making, which are essential ingredients for effective participation in the democratic political system. In Colombia, prior to the Havana Agreement, the FARC-EP's leadership delivered regular sessions to its members on the group's ideology and political agenda in order to increase their political awareness.

Furthermore, it is important to create a balance between nourishing the memory of what was achieved in the past and creating a new narrative that supports ambitions for transforming

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13 Ishiyama, John (2022). Rebel party organisation and durable peace after civil conflict. Joint brief series: The Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDPO/OROLSI DDR Section. https://fba.se/en/about-fba/publications/rebel-party-organization-and-durable-peace-after-civil-conflict/

politically. Such a balance enables war veterans to feel appreciated and recognised while attracting new generations to engage in the political struggle. Throughout the turbulent course of electoral politics, with its successes and setbacks, the transforming actors need to maintain and project a long-term vision for a unification of different wings of the movement. In the current scenario in El Salvador, the youngest war veterans are around 50 years old. While they are convinced that any backsliding into conflict should be avoided, it is important that the younger generations have access to information about past conflicts and that history is taught and dealt with in a sound manner that informs young people about the heavy toll of war and the risks associated with conflict relapse. For this to happen, regular inter-generational exchange and dialogue are key.

Lessons for external support: Fostering peer learning and civic education

While keeping cohesion and unity are internal processes that can only be led by the transitioning movements themselves, international actors can play a support role by fostering a conducive environment, both during peace processes and throughout their implementation. For example, in order to support internal communication and consultation processes within NSAGs or their emerging political entities, they can facilitate platforms for peer exchange with other rebel-groups-turned-political-parties, enabling them to share their experiences of keeping the movement in line during turbulent transitions.[14] In Colombia, several delegations of former combatants were invited by the guarantor countries to Havana, where they met FARC-EP negotiators and exchanged lessons learnt on many topics, including the role of strategic communication and intra-party consultations

during the various stages of peace processes.

International NGOs with trusted access to (former) NSAGs can also provide learning spaces and capacity-building for their members in order to encourage a gradual transformation of wartime hierarchical command structures towards inclusive decision-making mechanisms that are more suitable for peaceful politics. At the leadership level, external support can play a decisive role in the successful formulation of a political agenda, as well as in conveying this to the group's members. When it comes to mid-level leaders and rank-and-file members, technical and financial support can be provided for tailored training schemes on democratic governance and civic education (party systems, electoral laws, political representation mechanisms, etc.) so that former combatants are able to make informed decisions in response to their leaders' political transformation plans by being equipped with the practical and necessary knowledge of the (reformed) political system of their country.

Peace agreements and other legal frameworks

A well-planned and inclusive peacebuilding process design is at the core of a sustainable peace agreement. It should include security guarantees for demobilising combatants, socio-economic support for their civilian reintegration and rebel-to-party transformation provisions – when the latter is an explicit or implicit demand of the NSAG. A large number of NSAGs that established political parties and participated in their country's democratic system after the end of conflict were signatories to peace accords that facilitated their political transformation. More specifically, 47% of these agreements had specific rebel-to-party provisions, and a larger number had dedicated

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14 See Berghof Foundation projects: Negotiation Support to Resistance and Liberation Movements (https://berghof-foundation.org/work/projects/negotiation-support-to-rlms) and Supporting women in Resistance and Liberation Movements in peace negotiations and post-war transitions (https://berghof-foundation.org/work/projects/supporting-women-in-rlms-in-peace-processes-and-transitions)

provisions to facilitate the signatory parties' participation in government.[15]

Such provisions have been absent from the majority of the peace agreements signed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mali. During the peace process with the *Force de Résistance Patriotique d'Ituri* (FRPI) in the DRC, the prospect of FRPI transforming into a political party was not on the table. Mediation support actors dismissed this possibility on the assumption that such a transformation was not a viable option for the NSAG in question and that there was already a considerable number of political parties in the country. With regard to Mali, only one reference to 'political path' is made in the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement.

This can be explained by the parties' capacity gaps at the time and the lack of a unified analysis by the mediation teams, as well as the local culture, which does not prioritise party politics.

By contrast, the collective transformation of the FARC-EP into a political party was a central element of the 2016 Havana Peace Agreement. It comprised elements of political participation, political opposition rights and electoral reform. However, the agreement lacked clarity and depth with regard to the political, economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri shake hands at the signing ceremony of the Havana Peace Agreement in Cartagena, Colombia. (Photo: CCARRION/ Flickr)

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15   Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi and Luís Martínez Lorenzo (2022). Peace Agreements and the Political Integration of Armed Groups. Joint brief series: The Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDPO/OROLSI DDR Section. https://fba.se/en/about-fba/publications/political-engagement-by-former-armed-groups-outside-party-politics/

Temporary power-sharing arrangements – such as participation in a unity government or reserved seats in Congress – are also conducive to effective political transformation. They can facilitate mutual trust-building between the former adversaries through the establishment of a consistent working-level relationship in the form of shared governance responsibilities with clearly demarcated roles. If effectively implemented, these arrangements equally contribute to building trust and support for the post-war realities among the affected population. In addition, they can help to acquaint former insurgents with the intricacies and daily realities of democratic politics prior to their participation in competitive electoral processes. These experiences enhance their chances of accepting the rules of the game and participating effectively and peacefully in future elections to take place after the end of the transitional period.

Moreover, peace agreements should encompass a broader transformative agenda that benefits both NSAGs and marginalised groups, such as electoral reforms, structural changes to the political system (e.g. decentralisation efforts) and accountability mechanisms for incumbent power-holders. By combining targeted measures to facilitate the political transformation of NSAGs with inclusive provisions aimed at opening up the political system, drafters of peace accords can best prevent winner-takes-all majorities and ensure more meaningful political pluralism.[16]

Finally, peace agreements need to establish inter-party bodies for the verification and monitoring of their implementation, which can also be used as spaces for continued dialogue between the signatory parties. Examples are the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) in Mali and the Implementation Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification Committee (CSIVI) in Colombia. These arenas also help to build trust between the implementation parties in order to enable

reciprocal steps towards DDR, state reform and political transformation.

Lessons for international support: Context sensitivity

The investigation of different cases of political transformation reveals the vast spectrum of conflict types, NSAGs and government actors involved. Each of them has different preconditions and particularities. In processes of mediation support and DDR planning alike, a contextual analysis of the specific conflict is crucial. During peace negotiations, careful analysis is needed to determine the seriousness of the political agenda of the NSAG concerned, as well as the range of motives which drew combatants to join the armed struggle. The results of this analysis should inform the design of DDR and political transformation processes to enhance their prospects of success, for instance by determining whether they should focus on collective or individual pathways to peaceful politics. Nonetheless, the ownership and decision-making authority on steps towards political transformation should lie with the conflict parties themselves.

Contextual analysis should further inform the timing and sequencing of different stages and pillars in a peace accord. The sequencing of transitional arrangements such as interim governance schemes, accountability and justice mechanisms, and DDR programmes is vital for successful political transformation in the long term. In contexts such as the Philippines, leading NSAG figures were immediately appointed to political posts as part of the peace deal. In order for such arrangements to advance peace and sustainable democratic transformation, a careful assessment of the circumstances is needed, with consideration given to the timing of justice and accountability mechanisms, and those leaders' readiness for, and previous experience in, politics.

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16 Véronique Dudouet, Katrin Planta and Hans J. Giessmann, 2016. The Political Transformation of Armed and Banned Groups – Lessons Learned and Implications for International Support. UNDP/Berghof Foundation. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/the-political-transformation-of-armed-and-banned-groups-lessons-learned-and-implications-for-international-support

A mural showing the face of Bobby Sands, leader of the 1981 hunger strike in Maze Prison in Northern Ireland. He died after 66 days on hunger strike, one month after his election into the British House of Commons (Photo: Olaf Baumann/ Wikimedia)

These are relevant dimensions that influence both the perception of such appointments as legitimate and the emergence of a coherent new party from the NSAG's collective transition process.

Sensitivity, creativity and flexibility are also required with regard to the terms and concepts surrounding DDR and political transformation. In Colombia, Mindanao and Northern Ireland, the terminology of DDR was rejected by the NSAGs due to the negative connotations they associated it with. The parties need to be given the necessary space to come up with a 'dignifying' language in order to convince their hardliners and supporters to embrace a peaceful political strategy.

Transitional justice and trust-building

As highlighted in the IDDRS Module 6.20,[17] DDR and transitional justice are interlinked post-war processes which can mutually reinforce each other. Transitional justice mechanisms – such as prosecutions, reparations, truth commissions and institutional reform – also influence the success of political transformation processes.

War-to-politics conversions are conditioned not only by formal provisions enshrined in peace agreements, but also by public perceptions and voters' acceptance of former combatants as trustworthy political representatives of their interests. Transitional justice and DDR programmes should aim to build trust between the former NSAG, government actors and the rest of society – including communities receiving ex-

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17   Dudouet, Planta and Giessmann (2016), op.cit.

combatants. In Colombia, FARC-EP leaders entered party politics and started running for election while still having to appear in court and facing prosecution for the crimes they had committed during the insurgency. This prevented the newly established political party and its representatives from gaining the confidence and support of most Colombians.

Successful trust-building is also influenced by the kind of transitional justice mechanisms applied in the given context. Enabling victims' participation in the design of such mechanisms is key to ensuring that these mechanisms respond to their needs and expectations. For example, the establishment of financial support schemes for victims and social groups that are economically affected by the conflict can be implemented in parallel with economic support provided to former combatants through DDR programmes, to increase society's acceptance of political transformation and the peace process more generally.[18] Transitional justice programmes are also more likely to be endorsed by former combatants if they match their own realities and experiences. The example of Northern Ireland shows how former IRA militants became actively involved in transforming local practices of 'punishment violence' into a new approach based on the principles and practices of restorative justice.[19] This self-led initiative equipped former combatants with skills in non-violent community mediation and dispute resolution, which led to a sense of agency, as well as accountability towards local communities.

Transitional justice processes also provide an opportunity to bring to the fore and acknowledge the structural patterns of injustice and state violence at the roots of the conflict. The political project pursued by former NSAGs is often fed by narratives of collective grievances from the

past. Truth commissions and other mechanisms for 'dealing with the past' enable ex-combatants to share their own stories of past violence and injustice, and pave the way for reconciliation. This may include narratives about the colonial past, since the claims of many NSAGs are rooted in colonial legacies and injustices that still influence contemporary social realities and power dynamics. In Mindanao, the aggressive conversion attempts by the Catholic Church during Spanish colonial rule, as well as the resettling of Christian Filipinos to the predominantly Muslim island of Mindanao during the US colonisation of the Philippines,[20] contributed to the MILF's pronounced Muslim identity and self-determination claims for the Moro nation. Similarly, in Mali, the enduring consequences of a colonial past influence both the dynamics of the north-south conflict and the ongoing peace process.

Finally, truth-telling processes contribute to shedding light on the complex layers of conflict affectedness of marginalised population groups and ex-combatants such as women and indigenous communities. They can further break up dichotomies of perpetrators and victims by giving former combatants a platform to share their personal stories of victimisation.

Avenues for external support: Close coordination between DDR and transitional justice programmes

External actors – such as mediators, guarantors or technical advisors – can help to ensure that post-conflict transitions are designed in a way which allows for sufficient trust-building between the population and the former rebel-group-turned-political-party. As highlighted above, an important ingredient for trust-building is the content and timing of transitional justice mechanisms and

18 Figari Layús, Rosario (2014). Implementing Transitional Justice: Insights from Latin America, in: Moving Beyond: Towards Transitional Justice in the Bangsamoro Peace Process. www.forumzfd.de/system/files/document/forumZFD-Moving%20 Beyond-Towards%20Transitional%20Justice%20in%20the%20Bangsamoro%20Peace%20Process.pdf

19 McEvoy (2012), op.cit.

20 Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi, Kristine Höglund & Melida Jiménez (2021). Autonomous Peace? The Bangsamoro Region in the Philippines Beyond the 2014 Agreement. Journal of Peacebuilding, 16(1), p.62.

their sequencing with other pillars such as DDR and political transformation. If former combatants are granted political leverage (for instance through assigned seats in Congress or positions in power-sharing governments) unconditionally, this might create some resentment among war victims and other groups affected by the conflict. International actors can encourage and support accountability measures for past crimes committed by NSAGs, thereby advancing the sense of justice among the population that will pave the way for trust towards the new political actors. For example, in the case of Colombia, guarantor countries and the UN convinced former combatants to accept legal verdicts that were issued against them. Moreover, as colonial legacies often play a role in the discourses of NSAGs, the recognition and denomination of these legacies will not only contribute to a sounder knowledge base to inform programming, but will also enhance the credibility of external actors from the Global North that engage with the transforming group(s).

The role of the state party to the conflict

As we have seen, the successful political transition of armed groups is influenced by their preparedness, their internal cohesion and their ability to navigate the country's formal political system, as well as by the public perception and acceptance of the former combatants' entry into politics. On the other side of the conflict divide, another major factor for success is the political will of the government to accommodate its former armed challengers within the democratic system.

As a counterweight to DDR, state actors must be ready to implement their own commitment to institutional reforms. According to the terms of the peace agreement, this may entail both political and security sector reforms, in order to open the political space to new contenders, while ensuring that the state's restored monopoly over the use of force is exercised in an accountable and

Men hold the flag of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Mali. (Photo: Magharebia / Wikimedia)

legitimate manner. Where state security forces are perceived to be part of the conflict drivers or have been instrumentalised as such in the course of the conflict, reform of the security apparatus is needed in order to (re-)establish trust between the population, the security sector and former combatants. This may require regulations to (re-) balance the composition of the security and defence sector in accordance with the ethnic, religious and regional make-up of the country, to reform command structures, and to enhance civilian oversight and judicial accountability. Generally, there is a perception that changes in state institutions are long-term processes, while the dismantling of armed structures of non-state actors should be implemented quickly. The expectation of DDR as a short-term, quick-fix process fails to leave sufficient space for NSAGs to undergo in-depth transformations that are conducive to peaceful political pathways.

Furthermore, security guarantees are essential to protect disarmed ex-combatants while they

transition into political careers. Security vacuums during DDR processes can be fatal for demobilising troops and severely damage ex-combatants' trust in the state system. In Colombia, almost 300 ex-combatants have been killed since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, and several political candidates have been assassinated.

In a democratic system, the implementation of peace accords is likely to take place across several electoral terms, with new incoming governments being mandated to sustain the commitments made by their predecessors. Peace accord signatories are hence required to take a leap of faith in future governments, betting on their continued support for the peace process, when undergoing DDR and preparing for unarmed politics. In several countries discussed in this report, peace implementation was severely affected by the course of elections. In Colombia, the 2018 elections greatly hampered the implementation of the Havana Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, while in the Philippines, the presidential election in

President Rodrigo R. Duterte, state officials and MILF negotiators approve the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) at Malacañan Palace on August 6, 2018. (Photo: King Rodriguez/ Wikimedia)

2022 brought to power Marcos Jr., whose father, as former president, contributed to the outbreak of the conflict in the Bangsamoro region. Its impact on the political future of the MILF and on the prospects for sustainable peace remains to be seen.

Avenues for external support: Levelling the playing field

During peace processes and in post-war environments, there is an inherent power imbalance between incumbent government actors and (former) NSAGs with regard to access to resources, expertise and international legitimacy. In this context, it is crucial for state actors to allow their political adversaries to build their legal, political and technical skills ahead of, or during, negotiations, in order to formulate a clear vision of what they want to come out of the peace process, and later on to be able to abide by their agreed commitments. External support roles are key in enabling such learning and skills-building. It is crucial for the international community to recognise that engaging with (former) armed groups during peace processes and post-war peacebuilding does not violate the principles of state legitimacy on which states and international organisations rely. Rather, it helps to pave the way for stability and sustainable peace by (re-) integrating these disenfranchised citizens into society. Their political engagement within the democratic system will contribute to increased pluralisation of the party landscape and greater representation of social groups that may have been previously excluded or marginalised.

One factor that exacerbates power imbalance between governments and their contenders is the policy of banning and criminalisation of NSAGs. The terrorist proscription and labelling of armed groups not only lead to stigma and social exclusion of former combatants, but also create very practical hurdles to managing everyday life and engagement in democratic politics, such as the inability to open a bank account and obtain a visa for travel. Instead of using proscription solely as a punishment and public 'vilification' strategy, third-party states and the government concerned should make more use of positive conditionality by raising the prospects for de-listing of (former) NSAGs in-country and internationally as an incentive for their members to engage in peace processes, DDR and political transformation.[21]

Moreover, external actors such as UN missions and guarantor states should support monitoring mechanisms to ensure the security of former combatants, and to scrutinise the implementation of peace agreement provisions on the part of the state. Diplomatic engagement to encourage or pressure the government to abide by its obligations should not be seen as an infringement of state sovereignty, but rather as a contribution towards sustainable peace, as it fosters inter-party trust and can help state actors to overcome internal blockages.

Gender sensitivity

Women have played significant roles in NSAGs in many conflict zones throughout the world. These women, who represent up to 40% of members of armed movements, come from diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds, join armed struggle for a variety of reasons, and perform multiple functions through direct involvement in fighting and non-combat auxiliary roles.[22] However, cultural norms and practices favouring a patriarchal and masculinist mindset, which tend to be reproduced by NSAG hierarchies, relegate female members to supporting and secondary roles, especially during DDR processes.

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21 Haspeslagh, Sophie (2021). Proscribing Peace: How Listing Armed Groups as Terrorists Hurts Negotiations. Manchester University Press.

22 Cruz Almeida, Claudia, Véronique Dudouet and Victoria Cochrane-Buchmüller (2022). Gender-inclusive conflict transformation: Insights from female former combatants and women associated with resistance and liberation movements. Policy Insight Series (1). Berlin: Berghof Foundation. https://berghof-foundation.org/library/gender-inclusive-conflict-transformation

MILF women participate in a workshop on self-led post-war organising in Mindanao, July 2022 (Photo: Berghof Foundation)

As a result of restrictive selection criteria for DDR support schemes which exclude non-combatant members, or gender-blind approaches which neglect the specific needs and interests of women combatants, the design and implementation of many DDR programmes exacerbate the precarious situations of demobilised women in post-conflict settings. In these cases, women who have been marginalised by and in relation to their male counterparts during the conflict are denied access to educational and economic reintegration packages. At the same time, female members of armed groups are exposed to severe stigmatisation and exclusion by receiving communities, while male ex-combatants often face fewer obstacles to reintegration into civilian life, taking up political positions and even creating a personal nimbus of war heroism supported by patriarchal ideals.[23] This inaccessibility of DDR benefits, social exclusion and denial of political agency create a threefold burden of post-conflict marginalisation.

In addition, women are often denied agency in life choices related to family planning and marriage.[24]

Entering an armed movement can be a vehicle of liberation for women who come from restrictive environments. Being part of an insurgency that promotes the transformation of gender roles in a conservative society can create ownership of one's own life course. Through membership of the armed group, women are connected with like-minded peers and build networks that can be maintained purposefully – for peaceful ends – after the end of the armed conflict. For instance, these connections can turn into important support networks for post-conflict reintegration if female ex-combatants cannot or do not want to return to their families and communities of origin. Transition support schemes such as DDR programmes need to enable women to build upon the specific social capital and agency they may have gained during their time with the armed

23 Matfess, Hilary (2022). Women and Rebel to Party Transitions. Joint brief series: The Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDPO/OROLSI DDR Section. https://fba.se/en/about-fba/publications/women-and-rebel-to-party-transitions/

24 Dietrich Ortega, Luisa Maria (2009). "Transitional Justice and Female Ex-Combatants: Lessons Learned from International Experience", in: Cutter Patel, De Greiff, Waldorf (Eds.). Disarming the Past. New York: Social Science Research Council.

group in order to prevent them from falling back into a hostile pre-mobilisation social environment or slipping into poverty and social exclusion.

Female ex-combatants need to be able to make their voices heard in the public sphere to continue the political struggle through non-violent means. Since institutional political party systems in many countries, and especially higher positions, are still male-dominated and largely or completely inaccessible to women, female veterans have been engaged in informal activism outside of political parties in a multitude of ways. Social and protest movements, veteran associations and civil society organisations, for example, provide constructive avenues for political engagement beyond party politics. In El Salvador and Colombia, women ex-combatants have been at the forefront of feminist mobilisations through CSOs, and their activism influenced the national political agenda on gender issues, which translated into new legislation on women's rights.[25]

Avenues for external support: Early inclusion is key

External actors can promote the inclusion of women from the conflict parties at all stages of a peace process, be it as negotiators, peacebuilders or political leaders. Women's early and meaningful participation at the peace table is especially crucial to allow them to take on a meaningful role in the post-war transition phase, as it is harder to account for their needs, interests and capacities during implementation if they have not been recognised in a peace agreement and the design of DDR and political transformation processes. This is acknowledged by the IDDRS Module 5.10 on Women, Gender and DDR, which calls for women's involvement at the negotiating table to ensure that their interests and needs are reflected in gender-responsive DDR provisions and DDR planning.[26]

Gender-responsive DDR schemes also require a thorough analysis of the positions and roles that women played in the NSAG, their social and educational background, and their individual and collective aspirations for the future. The range of programmes offered to demobilised female combatants, supporters and dependents needs to account for the specific skills and capacities which they acquired throughout the conflict, and to build upon these instead of trying to bring women back to 'pre-conflict normality'. Social support networks, social mobilisation, fundraising, organisation and strategic communication skills can be crucial for enhancing women's post-war political engagement. Third-party actors such as INGOs and UN agencies can help widen the range of options available for demobilised women to sustain their social engagement in a peaceful environment by funding and providing tailored capacity-building in both formal politics and informal political mobilisation.

Sustainable implementation

The precondition for sustainable peace is rigorous implementation of agreements, including DDR programmes. Whether the negotiated frameworks include provisions on political transformation or not, DDR programmes need to consider political transformation prospects on the collective or individual level. Since DDR processes are situated at former combatants' points of transition into civilian life, they present important opportunities to equip these individuals with the necessary knowledge to pursue political goals within the democratic structures of their country. This can help to preserve a sense of agency for social and political change that might have guided them into the armed struggle. For those groups and individuals without a clearly defined political vision at the time of the armed rebellion, learning how to engage politically can manifest a new

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25 Dudouet, Véronique and Claudia Cruz Almeida (2022). Political Engagement by Former Armed Groups Outside Party Politics. Joint brief series. The Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UND-PO/OROLSI DDR Section. https://fba.se/en/about-fba/publications/political-engagement-by-former-armed-groups-outside-party-politics/

26 See UN IDDRS Module 5.10 'Women, Gender, and DDR'. www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-5.10-Women-Gender-and-DDR.pdf

MINUSMA reconnaissance visit of cantonment site in Ilouk, Mali 2015 (Photo: UN)

dimension of empowerment. The inclusion of civic education in DDR is critically important, especially in contexts where former NSAGs are clearly disenchanted with politics, as is the case in Libya, for example. Even engagement by former members of armed groups without a clear political agenda can pave the way for peace processes by channelling grievances into a new socio-political programme.

Experiences from different contexts indicate that sustainable political transformation of NSAGs is a long-term process. Organisational and mental transitions from armed to unarmed engagement take time. They require a learning process of adjusting leadership, structures, discourses, visions and strategies. This process may unfold over several electoral cycles, and continued monitoring and support are important to prevent these transitions from veering off course, for example through authoritarian backsliding by a former NSAG in government.

The experience in Colombia also shows that given the poor performance of the former FARC-EP guerrilla movement in the last elections, its former members may stand a better chance of entering politics through membership of pre-existing political parties. It is crucial, therefore, to avoid limiting the scope for former members to remain with their old movement after transition. Instead, providing political skills to individual ex-combatants is as important and purposeful as supporting the political conversion of the former armed movement's structures within the party landscape. At the same time, maintaining collective mindsets and interpersonal ties between former comrades is important for mutual support in an environment of social isolation in the immediate phase after the end of conflict, and marginalised groups such as women and indigenous former combatants benefit particularly from the empowerment they experience through peer support.

In addition, lessons learnt from past transformations of former NSAGs into political parties – including the experience of the FMLN in El Salvador[27] – show that electoral success may be built progressively over several electoral terms. Internally, it can take time to balance post-conflict interests, there may be shifts in ideology and political goals, internal democratisation may be delayed, leadership roles may be disputed and result in power struggles, the new party may need a few electoral setbacks to learn how to navigate the political system, incumbent elites may resist changes to the status quo, and a multiplicity of additional factors pave the path of a party born out of an armed movement and can delay electoral success. Externally, building a new support base beyond the wartime constituency also takes time, and as mentioned above, transitional justice mechanisms and de-criminalisation are required for citizens to build trust towards the new actors on the political stage.

Avenues for external support: Do not shy away from long-term engagement!

Rebel-to-party transformations are long-term processes that require sustainable support, coaching, training, advocacy and funding. For instance, during DDR programmes, civic education should be provided to rank-and-file combatants on their political rights and duties as active citizens. In many cases, combatants have been living outside of the social frameworks for an extended period of time and therefore need to be re-accustomed to them. External parties can provide training on the country's political system. Individual ex-combatants should also be given psychological support and adequate time to undergo mental transitions from combatant to citizen and political subject. In Colombia, the political system is very intricate and former FARC-EP members were not sufficiently accustomed to it in order to meaningfully

participate. For example, knowledge of how to design an effective electoral campaign, or how to raise and manage funds in an accountable way, was lacking. In addition, former rebel groups lack knowledge of how to construct a new public identity by breaking away from wartime coercive practices and developing more positive political narratives for campaigning and marketing of their party. External actors can make crucial contributions through the provision of continued capacity-building in these areas during the different stages of party consolidation.

It is also important to consider that former armed groups are typically sceptical and distrustful of the existing political system, which is often associated with corruption, nepotism, elitist capture of positions and self-enrichment by politicians at the expense of the rest of the population. As argued above, external actors can support the building of trust towards the political system by encouraging, and funding the implementation of structural reforms in accordance with the provisions of the peace accord. With regard to the implementation of the Algiers Agreement in Mali, it became clear that more involvement by the international community in monitoring and advocating for the implementation of the political and development pillars could have done much to progress the transformation of the signatory movements. In the Philippines, continued international support is required to facilitate the political transformation of the MILF and consolidate the ongoing transition to self-governance in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.

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27 Following its rebel-to-party transformation in 1992, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) remained in opposition for several years before becoming the strongest faction in the National Assembly in 2000, eventually winning the presidential election in 2009.

Conclusion and outlook on next steps towards operationalisation

Building on the identified ingredients for successful political transformation, we conclude with key messages for DDR and peacebuilding practitioners in moving forward the operationalisation of international support relating to the politics of DDR.

- **Avenues for the political transformation of NSAGs should be considered in every peace process.** During negotiations, mediators and other peace support actors should explore specific options to facilitate political participation by demobilised combatants. Collective or individual pathways to politics may be envisaged, depending on the context, the political claims pursed by NSAGs, their organisational features, and the aspirations of their members.

- **The timing, sequencing and terminology surrounding DDR, political transformation and transitional justice need to be carefully crafted to account for internal and contextual sensitivities.** Related provisions in peace accords and other legal frameworks should be formulated with due consideration for the needs of the parties to build trust internally (e.g. with their own hardliners); between them (e.g. through reciprocal and incremental implementation of DDR and state reform); and with the population (e.g. through timely transitional justice mechanisms).

- **Political transformation and civic education should become standard components of DDR programmes.** When dealing with NSAGs with a strong political identity, political training should be offered as part of socio-economic reintegration packages. Education schemes for rank-and-file combatants should enhance their awareness of their political rights and duties as active citizens. These topics should also be integrated in DDR training curriculums for national and international staff (e.g. DDR commissioners, UN agencies).

- **Rebel-to-party transformations are long-term processes that require sustainable support, coaching, training, advocacy and funding.** Former combatants and other actors associated with demobilised NSAGs need to undergo strategic, mental and organisational shifts from armed to peaceful politics. External support roles are key in enabling such transitions. DDR practitioners should cooperate and coordinate their activities with other peacebuilding organisations specialised in capacity-building support for political transformation processes. INGOs and political foundations are well placed to facilitate learning and skills-building, for example through tailored training on democratic governance, or by facilitating spaces for comparative learning and international peer exchange with former-militants-turned-peaceful-political-leaders. Special attention should be paid to gender-sensitive approaches to the DDR/political transformation nexus, for example by supporting demobilised women to sustain their social engagement through both formal politics and community activism.