Invisible Labour: The Political Economy of Reintegration in South Sudan

Jairo Munive
Published online: 06 Dec 2014.
It is essential that you check the license status of any given Open and Open Select article to confirm conditions of access and use.
Invisible Labour: The Political Economy of Reintegration in South Sudan

Jairo Munive

This article considers the 2005–12 Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme in South Sudan. Current DDR practice centres on ex-combatants’ reintegration through encouraging entrepreneurship and self-employment and thereby their willingness to take risks and responsibility. However, South Sudan’s DDR programme invisibilizes and obscures the ex-combatants’ endogenous capacity to adapt and generate an income. Based on in-depth interviews with participants of the DDR programme and key stakeholders, the article argues that DDR interventions seldom capture the labour market experience of demobilized combatants. The article concludes that self-employment is the solution to the process of reintegration, empowerment and ultimately a key to statebuilding.

Keywords South Sudan; DDR; labour; employment; economic recovery; post-conflict intervention

Introduction

South Sudan achieved independence from Sudan in mid-2011 as the culmination of a long peace process following decades of civil war. In the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) the Sudanese Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process was drafted, and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) from the north and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) from the south agreed to demobilize 180,000 combatants (90,000 each).

The DDR process as stipulated in the Security Arrangement of the 2005 CPA was envisaged as an interim security measure that aimed to address the core issues of proportional force downsizing, rationalization and standardization in the formation of a national Sudanese army. As an integral part of the CPA, the parties agreed to implement a DDR process. The programme was placed within a ‘comprehensive process of national reconciliation and healing throughout the country as part of the peace and confidence building’ (Chapter Five, CPA). Actual demobilization in southern Sudan, however, only started in 2009. By late 2011, only 12,525 combatants and women associated with the armed forces (WAAF) had been demobilized (out of the projected 90,000), and even fewer were assisted with reintegration. The DDR faced serious delays due mostly to a
combination of lack of willingness of the key actors to actually start downsizing the active-duty forces, and to the broader but bona fide challenge of designing and implementing such a complex exercise in a difficult environment.

With DDR programmes, employment and improved economic livelihoods are considered to ameliorate the perceived risk that ex-combatants and high-risk youth pose to stability in post-conflict settings. The steering logic is that if armed mobilization during civil strife is the result of economic pull factors, then peace initiatives should focus on providing much-needed alternative civil economic incentives, i.e. skills training with an eye to future entry into the labour market. Ex-combatant reintegration through DDR programming in South Sudan accordingly centres on entrepreneurship, self-employment and the concomitant willingness to take risks and assume responsibility. Reintegration, in other words, seeks to constitute ex-combatants as active and economically responsible individuals. However, this article argues that South Sudan’s DDR programme invisibilizes, obscures and ignores the ex-combatants’ endogenous capacity for resilience and adaptation through eliding actual strategies of economic survival and evidence of people-led recovery. Too little is known about actual income-generating experiences of demobilized combatants. This is the result, it is further argued, of the neglect by programmers to undertake serious political economic analysis of South Sudan that takes into account the government’s tremendous security spending, the deep links between formal employment and SPLA patronage, and finally the vast informal sector where most South Sudanese earn a living.

The following article is arranged into three sections. The opening section provides an overview of the concept and theory of reintegration in DDR programmes. Employment is ascribed a central role in these programmes and is imbued with the transformative potential to ‘unmake’ combatant identities and change them into civilians. The second section analyses South Sudan’s economic context, briefly describing the structure of the economy. More specifically it focuses on the labour market, which is characterized by widespread informality. The third section reviews the main elements of South Sudan’s 2005–12 DDR programme, arguing that it primarily focused on economic reintegration/employment issues following best practice at the international level. Based on a case study from Torit, Eastern Equatoria State (EES), this section maps the endogenous economic survival strategies of DDR participants and argues that such activity routinely escapes the attention of programmers. I argue that DDR programmes are moving from the programmatic goal of ‘reintegration’ towards the more ambitious goal of creating rational, economically capable individual subjects. Furthermore the analysis shows that an indirect effect of the DDR programme is that the role of the state in economic development and expectations of state-provided welfare and social support are sidelined.

The article draws on secondary sources (historical sources, project and programme documents) and two months of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in 2012 in South Sudan’s capital, Juba, and the town Torit. Here the author conducted life history interviews and focus group discussions with over 50 DDR
participants, interviews with international and national actors engaged in the DDR programme, and participant observations among the DDR implementing staff (manager, staff, teachers and trainers) and participants.

Employment in DDR Programmes

A common challenge for all DDR programmes—whichever model adopted—is how to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life (Giustozzi 2012; McMullin 2013; Bowd and Ozerdem 2013). A range of manuals drawing on previous DDR processes present the ‘lessons learned’ on how to create the best conditions for reintegration, and volumes of reports analyse and describe past DDR programme failures or successes in reintegrating the target group (Rowe and Banal 2009). In the ‘Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards’ developed by a UN inter-agency working group in 2005 to ensure improved coordination and coherence between UN agencies, the following definition of reintegration is adopted:

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.2

In this definition reintegration is clearly understood as an economic and identity-changing process by which combatants are turned into civilians. Employment, which should take place in communities at the local level and ideally where ex-combatants lived prior to conflict, is privileged as the key to this transformation.3 It is generally accepted that young unemployed men are prime candidates for recruitment as soldiers in any civil strife (ILO 2010; Lamb et al. 2012), and that for unemployed youth with no real alternative, conflict is in fact regarded as an income-generating activity. Because ‘greed’ is assumed to be a motivating factor for mobilization, combatants are treated as rational utility maximizers, and unemployed youth, due to their acute economic marginalization, are conceived as prime candidates for warfare (Collier 2000). There are, however, no empirical grounds for the common assumption of a strong, automatic causal connection between unemployment, underemployment or low-productivity employment, violence and war (Cramer 2010).

The push for earlier donor interventions in support of private sector development believed to generate reintegration through employment is reflected in the United Nations’ Policy for Post-Conflict Employment Creation, Income, Generation, and Reintegration (UN 2009). The policy paper summarizes the UN’s three-track approach to post-conflict support, which combines relief and emergency interventions with longer-term economic planning. Track ‘A’ targets war-affected and vulnerable populations (particularly ex-combatants and
youth). It concentrates on consolidating security and stability, as well as implementing short-term, labour-intensive public works programmes to rebuild social and economic infrastructure. Track ‘B’ is intended to consolidate the peace process by rebuilding local communities through initiatives such as investing in local infrastructure, promoting local-level employment opportunities, restoring the natural resource base and rebuilding local government capacity. Track ‘C’ aims to assist the creation of sustainable and so-called decent work, involving macro-economic and sector policies, institutional capacity building and a framework for social dialogue. The UN is now in the process of developing an operational guidance note for the policy and the development of proposals for its implementation.

The importance widely ascribed to the economic logic of youth mobilization has had a profound impact on the way post-conflict interventions are framed (McMullin 2013; Munive and Jakobsen 2012). The steering logic is that if armed mobilization during civil strife is the result of economic pull factors, then peace initiatives should focus on providing much-needed alternative civil economic incentives, i.e. massive skills training with an eye to future entry into the labour market. Employment and improved economic livelihoods are considered to ameliorate the risk that ex-combatants and high-risk youth are perceived to pose to stability in post-conflict settings. The World Bank’s 2013 annual report goes even further, claiming that jobs can compensate for ‘the loss of identity and status associated with the dissolution of armed forces and militias and the income lost’ (World Bank 2012a, 195). Increasingly, and as an important development in the history of DDR, the concept of reintegration is conflated with the discourse of resilience, understood as resilience against remobilization, exemplified by the following quote: ‘Livelihoods or employment options that offer a sense of purpose and respect may thus provide an important source of resilience’ (UN/IAWG 2012, 12).

Furthermore, it is generally believed that education or vocational skills training of ex-combatants is a first step in economic reintegration. However, a recent independent evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) worldwide work with reintegration programmes concluded that ‘relevance can be limited and efforts conducted often limited both financially and technically’ (Conoir and Bonard 2013, 38). In many instances, DDR programmes send ex-combatants on vocational skills training courses and assume immediate results, which in reality rarely happen. In this regard the evaluation of UNDP concludes that: (a) training or vocational training is just part of a continuous, systemic and coordinated reintegration process whereby ex-combatants receive support for further employment, self-employment and integration in markets; (b) training and/or vocational training is often delivered at a standard level, hampering in some cases the possibility for many ex-combatants to acquire the required level of skills in saturated markets (tailoring, carpentry, mechanics etc.); (c) training in other cases is perceived by ex-combatants as a first step towards further entitlements. Generally ex-combatants are not fully committed to the programme; and (d) follow-up microenterprise investments do not
capitalize on state-of-the-art technology that could make a difference for programme beneficiaries (Conoir and Bonard 2013, 38). Furthermore, the evaluation report states that the type, quality and length of vocational skills training provided is central to the potential success of a DDR programme. However, in practice, the type of training carried out often does not amount to even half of the duration required for training a civilian in peace circumstances.

In short, training does not provide sustainable jobs, and, in fact, it might not even provide participants access to employment at all. More often than not, training is poorly suited to labour market needs. For some critical observers, vocational training persists because it is what donors and implementing actors know and are willing to fund, and it therefore involves little risk (McMullin 2013, 190–2). Despite the abundant literature on lessons to be learned from previous DDR processes there is little evidence that DDR programmes actually produce the desired outcomes (Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis 2010; Dudwick et al. 2013) and important loopholes and gaps remain, in particular concerning the mechanisms at stake in successful social and economic reintegration of former combatants (Berdal and Ucko 2013; Bowd and Ozerdem 2013; McMullin 2013; Munive 2013; Podder 2012, 2013).

Most DDR interventions are solidly grounded in neoliberal economic thought. The neoliberal economic approach seeks to promote the development of a free-market economy by eliminating barriers to trade (within and between countries), stimulating the growth of private enterprises and reducing the state’s role in the economy (Paris 2004). Based on neoclassical economics, the logic is that the unimpeded operation of markets is the optimum way to utilize economic resources (physical, financial, labour) and that any state intervention in the economy distorts market forces and should be kept to a minimum. Neoliberalism reorients the state’s role from sheltering citizens from capitalism’s vagaries to promoting greater exposure to the market. DDR under neoliberal premises frames ex-combatant reintegration assistance within the private sector and within a context of democratization and diversification of the economy. The neoliberal ideological dimension of DDR operates on the basis of the interpellation of ex-combatant subjects as free and self-governing. The economic reintegration of former combatants is the overriding ambition. Furthermore, DDR is seen as a technical and administrative exercise and the structural causes of war are somehow overseen given the aforementioned ‘greed’ interpretation of mobilization in most conflicts.

In spite of the tremendous focus given to markets in DDR programming, there has been very little sustained and direct analytical work on labour markets and employment issues in the burgeoning literature on the political economy of DDR. More attention has been given to the lack of proper socio-economic baseline surveys, the role of training, whether entitlements should target ex-combatants or the wider community, and to discussions over what programmes are supposed to achieve (improving security against longer-term developmental goals). Moreover, in the majority of the recent work on DDR there has been little
attention to labour issues, aside from the literature on labour-intensive infrastructure projects (McMullin 2013; Tamagnini and Krafft 2010).

In summation, DDR might be seen to operate on two levels: first an ideational level, or more precisely the comprehension of the nature of the problems; and secondly a policy level, which encompasses the kinds of external interventions that might be appropriate to address these problems. Reintegration concepts, in other words, provide us with a way of understanding the problematic of post-conflict countries; a discursive framework that can facilitate a set of practices and make possible a series of policy prescriptions. Employment is the key element for almost all DDR interventions to secure the transition of combatants to civilian life in spite of limited evidence on how labour markets function in conflict-affected countries. With that I turn now to consider the economic context of South Sudan.

South Sudan’s Economic Context

Historically, the oil industry and the public sector have dominated southern Sudan’s formal economy (Government of South Sudan 2012). However, only 12 per cent of the population depends on wages and salaries for their main livelihood and less than 4 per cent of the population is engaged in entrepreneurial activities, which illustrates the formal economic sector’s limited importance (NBS 2012, 32). Also the fluidity of cash reserves and the role of the black market currency exchange can be seen as reflections of a largely informal economy. A strict focus on the formal economic sector would therefore overlook the mainstay of the population’s daily economic activity in the largely unrecorded informal economy. Currently, South Sudan is witnessing a nascent private sector that includes informal, micro and small enterprises in low value sectors, largely headed by women (World Bank 2013, 26).

The Government of South Sudan’s approach to economic development is heavily dependent upon foreign investment and large-scale projects that prioritize resource extraction, in particular oil exports, which account for the majority of government revenues, financing 98 per cent of the 2011/12 state budget. A significant share of successive annual government budgets has been allocated to the security sector since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The stated policy to ‘develop efficient and effective armed forces, to safeguard security and implement the CPA’ (Government of Southern Sudan 2010, 1), has implied keeping security spending as a top government priority. In 2012, 41 per cent of government expenditure was allocated to security—mainly as salaries to the armed forces/SPLA (Government of South Sudan 2012).

Between 2005 and 2011 SPLA costs have increased by 33.6 per cent (Lamb et al. 2012, 52). One consequence of this is a new class division emerging between those working for the security forces on government payroll and the rest of the population—a gap likely to increase in coming years. External support for the security sector aims partly at reducing the size of the security forces and
redirecting military expenditure to other sectors such as health and education. State officials, however, argue that maintaining SPLA’s morale and loyalty to the government is central to securing the state’s short-term stability. Some observers view this as emblematic of patronage to a bloated military at the expense of development priorities (Young 2012).

South Sudan’s domestic political and security agendas are intertwined with a number of unresolved issues with Sudan. These include, among others, oil pipeline charges, demarcation of the border between the two countries and the status of the border region Abyei (Le Riche and Matthew 2012). Sudan faces severe economic challenges from the loss of oil revenues due to South Sudan’s shutdown of oil production in January 2012 as part of the negotiation process over pipeline charges. South Sudan’s government halted oil production in protest at what it said was ‘massive cheating’ by Khartoum over arrangements to share oil revenues, and the charges Juba was required to pay to export oil via pipelines to Port Sudan. The halting of production led to the implementation of significant austerity measures. A budget cut of 650 million South Sudanese pounds (SSP) per month—equal to a 24 per cent cut of the total budget—has been prescribed but not fully implemented. The austerity measures have implied reductions in capital and operational costs, while salaries have been left untouched. More positively, non-oil revenues, which accounted for 2 per cent of overall income in 2011, have doubled, and spending controls have been tightened (Government of South Sudan 2012, 10).

In 2011 South Sudan’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounted to a per capita income of US$1,859—much higher than its East African neighbours—but it has since then dropped to US$1,513 owing to large outflows to oil companies. However the accuracy of GDP figures remains difficult to ascertain, due to the country’s large informal sector, the lack of data covering trade with Sudan (one of its largest trading partners) and general poor data collection capacity (EIU 2014). At full potential, oil production contributes two-thirds of South Sudan’s GDP; at current prices, net oil export receipts of about US$9 billion per annum are projected to gradually decline by more than 50 per cent in the next 20 years (World Bank 2013, 6), mainly due to the gradual depletion of the country’s oil reserves.

Outside the oil sector, livelihoods are concentrated in low productivity, subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, which account for less than 15 per cent of GDP but engage about 78 per cent of the population. Among the working-age population in South Sudan as much as 84.4 per cent are performing unremunerated work, e.g. as unpaid family workers (ECSS 2012). Employment for the overall workforce, in other words, is dominated by low-productivity, unremunerated work and is concentrated in the agriculture sector (Guarcello et al. 2011, 19; Eisa 2013).

Although the country has abundant arable land, only 4 per cent is under cultivation, and modern agriculture and industry are almost non-existent (World Bank 2013, 6). After independence from the United Kingdom in 1956, commercial activity in southern Sudan was dominated by northern Sudanese. Since the CPA, foreign companies, mostly from Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, but also South Africa, have led investment in construction, manufacturing, consumer goods,
power and telecommunications, centred almost entirely in the capital Juba. The service sector in South Sudan is embryonic, and remains concentrated on food services and trade in construction materials, motorbike taxis etc. within Juba itself. Meanwhile, insecurity and a lack of opportunities in rural areas mean that Juba and other towns are experiencing an influx of unemployed youth (World Bank 2013, 6). Data from the 2008 census indicate that 94 per cent of young people enter the labour market with no qualifications at all (Guarcello et al. 2011, 4). Since skills are extremely limited among the population, foreign labour has filled this gap, particularly in Juba and other state capitals.9

As an alternative to oil exploitation, the agricultural sector is often perceived as a silver bullet for economic growth and poverty alleviation. However, farm production costs in South Sudan are much higher than those in most of its neighbouring countries (USAID 2011; World Bank 2012b; WFP 2013). They are especially high compared to Uganda, where production costs and food prices are the lowest in East Africa. South Sudan is uncompetitive in all key cost elements: higher labour requirements, mainly due to the need for land clearing after many years without land cultivation; higher labour costs, ranging from about US$5.2 to US$10.3 per man-day in Malakal, north of Juba, compared to US$1.0 in Uganda and US$2.3 in Tanzania; lower yields; and higher prices of tradable inputs and lower efficiency of their use (World Bank 2012b, 42). The largest contributor to farm production costs in South Sudan is labour (World Bank 2012b, 44). High labour costs are a result of: (i) high labour requirements for preparing land for cultivation; and (ii) high daily wage rates. High wages are, however, partially offset by low land rents since land is typically available at no cost in rural areas (Maxwell et al. 2014).10 Decades of conflict prompted farmers to flee their land, allowing regeneration and progression of vegetation towards climax formations (mainly forests and shrubs). In most areas, therefore, significant work is required to clear the vegetation before the land is cultivable. Labour is hired for this work but, according to the World Bank, it is ‘expensive and in short supply, especially during the planting and harvesting campaigns, making cropland expansion an expensive undertaking’ (World Bank 2012b, 44). In Uganda and other neighbouring countries initial land clearing was completed decades ago, explaining why these are more competitive. In South Sudan all farming is done manually with little mechanization or use of animals. In general, plot sizes are small and productivity low, caused by limited or expensive access to labour, markets, tools and inputs. As a result, retail markets in urban areas are mainly served by imports from Uganda and Sudan sold at very high prices.

To summarize this section, South Sudan faces enormous economic challenges. First, the exact number of the combined SPLA and the other organized forces is not known, but it probably exceeds 300,000 and directly consumes about one-third of government spending, since many war veterans remain on the public payroll. What is more important for the purpose of this article, however, is that the formal labour market is extremely limited and the non-oil economy underdeveloped, contributing to poor living standards and unemployment. Contrary to what is expected in post-conflict scenarios, labour is expensive and
in short supply. The odds against creating a successful market-driven DDR by promoting entrepreneurship, vocational training and the development of agricultural employment and growth are thus high.

The next section is divided into two parts. First it takes a closer look at the DDR programme in South Sudan and focuses on the endogenous survival strategies of programme participants in one specific site (Torit) and argues that these are outside the vista of intervention programmers. The second part argues that self-employment is in the end the solution to the process of reintegration, empowerment and ultimately nation and statebuilding.

**DDR in South Sudan 2005–12**

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration figured as an integral part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and the main objective of DDR in Sudan (both northern and southern) was, according to the National Strategic Plan, to ‘contribute to creating an enabling environment for human security and provide support to post-peace agreement social stabilization across Sudan, particularly in war-affected areas’ (Government of Sudan 2007, 5). The signatory parties were further committed to a ‘proportionate downsizing’ of their forces, and pledged to engage in DDR processes assisted by the international community.11

The CPA laid out the framework for the DDR process, but did not stipulate implementation issues in detail. The parties had agreed on voluntary and immediate demobilization of ‘non-essentials’, i.e. elderly, disabled and child soldiers. Besides this the CPA was mainly concerned with laying down the administrative arrangements for developing a DDR process during the pre-interim and interim period. It mandated the establishment of a National DDR Commission with joint representation from both parties, which would hold final responsibility for all DDR policy decision making. In addition, two DDR Commissions—one for southern Sudan and one for northern Sudan—were established. During the years following the CPA an interim DDR programme was developed, guided by a National DDR Strategic Plan (2007). This plan also identified the target beneficiaries: disabled and elderly combatants; child combatants and children associated with the armed forces and groups; and women associated with the armed forces and groups (Government of Sudan 2007, 5). The interim programme did not progress beyond conceptualizing and strategizing DDR and lacked implementation (STHLM 2010; Small Arms Survey 2011; Lamb et al. 2012, 57). Inertia and bureaucratic disengagement have been identified as the main causes of poor performance (Scanteam 2010; STHLM 2010). Lack of interest from national actors (notably the SPLA), donors and the UN led to overall sidelining of the DDR process, resulting in serious delays in implementation.
In a joint effort by the DDR Commissions in northern Sudan and southern Sudan the interim DDR programme was replaced by the multi-year DDR programme in June 2009. The multi-year DDR exercise received financial and technical support from the UN. In southern Sudan the programme targeted 90,000 ex-combatants. In the period preceding the 2011 referendum the southern Sudan DDR Commission focused on demobilizing a first batch of 34,000 candidates, predominantly the above-mentioned specific groups, while a second batch comprised 53,400 active SPLA soldiers. It is important to note that the discharge and disarmament processes agreed by SAF and SPLA did not include an arms reduction component. The SAF and SPLA ensured that eligible combatants reported for demobilization and collected weapons. However, the weapons were not destroyed, but stored under the control of each army.

The reintegration support was provided through implementing partner (IP) organizations selected and contracted for this work through a bidding process. Many local organizations submitted bids but none had the capacity levels that the southern Sudan DDR Commission and UNDP solicited. The first ex-combatant reintegration training undertaken in southern Sudan was carried out between June and December 2009 with support from donors. The programme participants could choose from one of the following reintegration options: (1) agriculture and livestock, including fishery and forestry; (2) small business development; (3) vocational training; and (4) adult education, i.e. accelerated learning. In addition, ex-combatants benefited from adult literacy and numeracy, as well as other civilian life skills training programmes. However, the available programmes varied across regions and implementing partners.

As part of the reintegration counselling, which was jointly undertaken by UNDP caseworkers and the implementing partners, ex-combatants were assisted to identify an economic reintegration option. Representatives of the southern Sudan DDR Commission demanded that ex-combatants signed an agreement indicating their preferred reintegration activity and the region selected for resettlement. Within three months the ex-combatants were required to return the referral slip to the commission’s state office in the region chosen for reintegration. At this point they were linked to an IP where the reintegration activity would take place. The individual economic reintegration support had a total value of US$1,750, of which the international community contributed US$1,500 and the government of southern Sudan US$250. Regrettably, the southern Sudan government did not live up to its part of the commitment (STHLM 2010, 39). Like the economic reintegration options, the specific content of the training kits distributed after completion of the different reintegration training options varied—not only between the selected activities and over time, but also between implementing partners and across the different states. The CPA-DDR closed by the end of 2012 and numbers from the final evaluation of the DDR reintegration component is shown in Table 1.
Markets for Labour? Reintegration as Self-Employment in Torit

Southern Sudan’s DDR programme’s highest priority was to assist former combatants in finding appropriate jobs and sustainable livelihoods by promoting entrepreneurship and increasing employability through vocational training, job placements, business training and assistance to start up small businesses, as well as encouraging informal sector trades such as tinsmith, blacksmith, bicycle repair, watch repair, motor vehicle mechanics, carpentry, etc. In contrast to work that considers more orthodox questions relating to the mismatch between training received and available jobs (i.e. those pertaining to the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ of skills and opportunities satisfactory to both job seekers and employers), this article is concerned more acutely with an analysis of how this process unfolds, and how DDR programmes seldom capture the labour market experiences of demobilized combatants. Labour markets for ex-combatants—and for that matter the rest of the population in post-conflict societies, I argue—are as much about dynamics of power as they are about equations of supply and demand. The DDR process in Torit is a vivid showcase of some of the paradoxes and difficulties of carrying out a market-oriented DDR process in a post-conflict economy that is not dominated by formal economic activities.

It is said that Sudan’s first civil war broke out in Torit, the county capital of Eastern Equatoria State (Johnson 2003, 29) and the state remained the epicentre of civil war from 1983 to 2005. Intense fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, as well as a number of other armed groups supported by both sides, unfolded here (Schomerus and Allen 2010). A wartime legacy of landmines and unexploded ordnance has made basic transport and access to land difficult in the state. There are high rates of possession of light weapons by civilians, resource competition and erosion of community structures, which in combination lead to volatile relations among and between communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of services provided</th>
<th>Number of ex-combatants</th>
<th>Total percentage of ex-combatants demobilized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demobilized</td>
<td>12,525</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received referral services</td>
<td>12,336</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered for reintegration</td>
<td>12,020</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed training</td>
<td>10,866</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided with start-up kits</td>
<td>10,750</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received one follow-up</td>
<td>10,646</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received two follow-ups</td>
<td>8,512</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Haile and Bara (2013).
DDR began in EES in 2010 with a first batch of 448 ex-combatants. The German International Cooperation Services (GIZ), contracted by the UNDP, implemented the reintegration component, and upon completion of the training course participants were awarded reintegration graduation certificates. In November 2011 a second batch of 507 ex-combatants began their reintegration programme, this time with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the implementing partner, but the programme logic remained unchanged. At registration the ex-combatants were informed about OIM, the reintegration programme and the rules and regulations of the training, and presented with a contract to be signed between each participant and the organization. The ex-combatants were tested on their literacy, numeracy and language skills and shown the toolkits they would receive upon successful completion of the programme. Furthermore a counsellor identified the ex-combatants’ training and special needs. Based on the skills and needs review, the participants were advised by IOM on their final reintegration option—small business, vocational training or agriculture. At the end of the registration day all participants received a per diem payment of roughly US$30 to cover transport and other expenses. The batch included 237 male and 270 female ex-combatants and data on reintegration options and gender is shown in Table 2. The programme ran for four months and each reintegration option provided: (a) basic knowledge in literacy and numeracy, (b) life skills education and (c) practical start-up support, e.g. assistance with acquiring a licence for those wishing to work as drivers.

Table 2. Reintegration data in Torit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reintegration options</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tailoring</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone charging</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiosk vendor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto-mechanic</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpentry</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT skills</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IOM (2012).

During fieldwork in South Sudan in 2012, I followed this DDR reintegration programme for six weeks running up to the ex-combatants’ graduation. Through participant observations, the performance of ex-combatants was observed to assess changes produced in their business activities resulting from reintegration support. I also carried out interviews with key stakeholders including South Sudan Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC) and
other line ministries at national and state levels, donors, UNDP, implementing partners (UN Agencies, NGOs), beneficiaries and host communities.

The empirical research on livelihood recovery in South Sudan is limited, and since 2007 a significant gap has existed in the published literature on the topic (Maxwell et al. 2012, 30). Maxwell et al. further argue that beyond evidence on external programming and interventions, recent evidence on people-led recoveries is also lacking. Informal employment is the main source of income, but no in-depth case studies exist on how entrepreneurial activities and small businesses have developed and how to support endogenous growth (Maxwell et al. 2012, 30). Similar evidence is also lacking in rural areas, especially in the context of farmers and traders who are expanding and diversifying their activities (Maxwell et al. 2012, 30). For this reason, I believe the findings of Maxwell et al. might be validly extended to cover the case of ‘ex-combatants’ participating in the DDR programme.

Compare, for instance, the skills offered by the DDR programme in EES (notably tailoring, food processing and driving), to the actual income-generating activities of the DDR beneficiaries: brewing and selling alcohol from maize, cassava, sorghum and sesame; making flour (sorghum, cassava and maize) and pastes (sesame, groundnut); cutting and selling grass and bamboo (for thatch and fodder); making and selling charcoal; trading vegetables; and engaging in casual labour. What is remarkable here is that numerous programme participants/ex-combatants were resourceful in generating income.

All of these cash-generating activities form part of the informal economy and run, I would argue, parallel to the essence of the training provided in the DDR reintegration programme—and are as such ‘invisible’ to it. This invisibility, one must add, is strongly gendered. The income-generating activities of women, in particular the brewing and selling of alcohol, fall largely outside the gaze of intervention programmers. In addition to the informal economic activities, as previously mentioned, it is a notable feature of work and labour in South Sudan that a large share of the population is engaged in work and activities for which they do not receive any form of monetary compensation, e.g. subsistence farming. However, limited data availability is a serious challenge in this area. The interviews and observations conducted for this study show that brewing and selling alcohol constitute one of the most profitable businesses in Torit and is an important income-generating and social activity for the ex-combatants. Still, the participants’ experiences, skills and techniques related to this activity were not mentioned at the training site run by the IOM, even though this business is a perfect example of an embryonic capitalist market activity. Selling vegetables at the market typically generates a US$2–3 profit, while brewing may easily double or triple that amount. In particular, the female DDR participants lived off brewing ziko (from dates), kweta (from millet) and mokojo (from corn, cassava and sorghum). The ‘cash’ advantages in this business are clear, and these female entrepreneurs (like the rest of the women in South Sudan), who have minimal control over land and the profits from farming, supplement farm produce by brewing as a means of generating income. Of course widespread alcohol
production and consumption may have important negative side effects for the communities, as described here in the EES Food Security and Livelihoods Bulletin published by the government and international NGOs. I quote at length:

There are common practices of group work where farmers in a neighbourhood cultivate in each other’s farms in shifts. This is comparatively better than the individual one but it also has some practical disadvantages. In such group work, usually local drinks ranging from Kwete (Merissa abiet) to local gin (siko) are served to the workers. These local drinks sometimes induce some queer behaviour on the workers in the field which would eventually disrupt the work. The clever hares would drink very fast and soon retire to snoring or singing horizontally in the field. Others come with loose hoes or molodos and would go out after every short while to fix the tool and always blame a neighbour or children. Sometimes these strong drinks turn the workers into Mike Tysons and the whole field becomes a boxing ring. All these activities at the end of the day lead to waste of resources and time. (EES 2008, 8)

The invisibility of certain economic activities, in spite of the potential of providing the goal of ‘reintegration’ and transformation from ‘combatanthood’ to ‘civilianhood’, is of course not new. Drawing from Mitchell’s (2008), thesis about how the economic discipline creates its world, one could argue that this invisibility is partly the work of DDR: the intervention is designed to demonstrate that participants of the programme are in need of reintegration and that this is best achieved through the prescriptions ordered by the programme. The income-generating activities outside the frame of the intervention fall outside the gaze of intervention programmers. It is therefore a matter of ‘seeing’ and categorizing.15

Another key element to consider is that labour markets in low-income, predominantly agrarian economies tend to be characterized by high degrees of segmentation along location and gender lines, and that very significant social and economic barriers exist for entry into certain activities (Sender and Pontara 2010). This is also true for South Sudan. Take, for instance, the case of the programme’s participants who finished the driving course. The only ‘private’ contractors where these could eventually be employed locally were the UN mission and a few international NGOs. Only one of the recently graduated drivers was able to secure a contract with an NGO at the time. The rest remained outside the ‘formal’ economy.16 In addition, some participants in the DDR programme found jobs as trainers at the DDR facility. For most of the graduates, however, the only choice was to migrate to the capital or elsewhere. The same is true for female participants in the tailoring training, who faced fierce competition from the second-hand stalls in Torit and Juba. Contextual norms, in particular, appear to be a factor that limits female performance as entrepreneurs, both directly and indirectly. In effect, certain activities are considered inappropriate to engage in for South Sudanese woman (such as waitressing and manual jobs like construction or truck driving), while office jobs such as work with organizations (national and international) or banks, cooking, cleaning, tailoring, handicraft, hairdressing and retail, are considered more appropriate.
The physical market for services in Torit—comprising motorcycle taxis, shops, restaurants, teashops, barbers, as well as *rolex*, chapatti, *mandazi*, computer and beauty services—are few and expensive. The most consumed services are food (*rolex* and chapattis), teashops and motorcycle taxis, but demand for services is low and there is a significant cash shortage in the market. However, this suddenly changes when all government employees (SPLA, police, wildlife management, local government and other civil servants) are paid, resulting in an increase of purchasing power and a cash injection into the local economy. In both Torit and Juba this provided fertile ground for specific kinds of investments, but international players were the first to enter local economic development while the local population was largely absent (Grant and Thomson 2013, 226). Regional entrepreneurs reaped the benefits of trade and business by controlling supply networks from Uganda and Kenya. Remarkably the final evaluation of the DDR reintegration project component overlooks many of the abovementioned factors. It rather emphasizes ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ as key variables influencing the successful reintegration of the beneficiaries. The evaluation states that business activities of beneficiaries were negatively affected by the communal way of life which resulted in: (i) sharing income generated by the beneficiaries with members of an extended family; (ii) not paying for services rendered by mechanics, welders, barefoot veterinarians etc.; and (iii) seeds distributed for agriculture being consumed by the extended families (Haile and Bara 2013).

A caveat is necessary here. By presenting the invisibility of some economic activities, I do not mean participants are rendered merely ‘objects of power’; nor are they co-opted through their involvement in the DDR. I argue that the subjectivity of the combatant is the object and outcome of the DDR programme. The DDR programme promotes rather than represses the participant’s subjectivity, it is a form of power that produces and relies upon active subjects rather than absolute subjugation. For participants, the DDR required a tactical engagement with the programme and they are clearly aware of the tangible benefits and entitlements in terms of cash, training and start-up kits. In other words, they want more of the same, not less. DDR in this regard is also a highly performative and symbolic exercise. During the participants’ graduation ceremony held at the Torit Technical School, members of state and local government attended together with representatives of the SSDRC, IOM, UNDP and United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). Guests had the opportunity to inspect the training facilities and some of the furniture, clothing and food that had been produced or prepared by the participants. For example, at the centre’s tailoring workshop, the participants sat behind their sewing-machines, and the uniforms they had made for local schoolchildren hung on display around the classroom. The start-up toolkits provided by the DDR programme played a tremendous role in signalling the transition to entrepreneurship. Some of the kits displayed at the ceremony included agricultural tools, laptops, carpentry and building materials, driver’s licences etc. DDR participants were urged again and again not to sell their kits in the market but to ‘go into business’.
Participants interpret the programme in broadly positive terms; but claim that it did not fulfil all of their expectations. This is perhaps the greatest paradox of DDR: in its main fundament it is based on a culture of entitlement, and yet its objective and end goal is to produce economically empowered and independent ex-combatants. Thus, all participants should become entrepreneurs in their own life ‘in the new nation’s name’, as the South Sudan DDR commission’s chair expressed to me, echoing a slogan of the institution he represents: rebuilding ex-combatants, rebuilding our communities, rebuilding our nation. Yet an indirect effect of the DDR programme is to sideline the role of the state in economic development and expectations of state-provided welfare and social support. In spite of the DDR programme being one of the key priorities of the government as it appeared in the South Sudan Development Plan for 2011–13. Such was the importance of the DDR programme as a major factor in development and security sector reform that when President Salva Kiir laid out what the first ever cabinet of the Republic of South Sudan would achieve before or during the first three months in office, DDR was one of the five priorities. It is worth pointing out that there is a narrative dissonance between the ideological foundations of the market-led DDR programme in South Sudan and local attempts to integrate them into a kind of master-narrative of the ‘nation’. Exemplified again by the chairperson’s words:

many ex-combatants do not even know that we have this programme for them ... we must take care of them because these are our people who brought the liberation we have today, we have this country today and it is our duty ... we recognize them as our heroes/heroines and martyrs because without their sacrifices, we would not have the Republic of South Sudan now.

This is in sharp contrast to the ideological foundations of the DDR programme as expressed by the Deputy Chairperson of the DDR commission:

The programme is ‘tailored’ to meet their expectations and economic realities in the country. Our economy is feeble and hence there is strong need to design appropriate trainings so that ex-combatants are self-sufficient after their reintegration into communities of return. (SSDDR2011)

Economic ‘War’ and the Enabling State

The post-conflict DDR lexicon is full of allusions to the war and the experience of conflict and suffering, now linked somewhat paradoxically to the experience of reintegration. For instance, the DDR commission speaks of how entrepreneurship constitutes the ‘new frontline’, and how ‘reintegration breeds an army of peace and development’ (SSDDR2012). The EES DDR commissioner speaks of ‘economic war’ being more painful than ‘military war’. But beyond these statements the DDR graduation ceremony in Torit stands as a remarkable testimony to what is expected of ex-combatants after finishing the programme. I quote at length from...
the speech given by the UNDP head of Conflict, Prevention and Recovery to the participants:

We have to be realistic; we have to lower our expectations. The government will not solve out your problems, only because you expect it like that ... then the reality on the ground will not satisfy you.

This training will give you the opportunity of self-employment. Let us be realistic—you won’t get jobs in government offices, that likelihood is very slim. This training can help you; People like you have been demobilized in many parts of the world. They were forming their own organizations and cooperatives and then it is the responsibility of you and not the government to support you. You are wrong if you are expecting benefits. If you want to go for civilian life you have to believe in yourself.

As a former soldier, I tell you: believe in yourself. With your strong will you can make a difference. Come together and find out where your capacity lies. If you are actively working in self-employment! The first thing is the first: employment. Don’t put your expectations on NGOs that will not deliver. You start from your own. Don’t rely on others! 

This quote is from the EES State Minister of Education’s speech, also from the ceremony:

The issue of the skills—you are saying that you are now ready and you need the government to employ you. When you go to a friend and you need a bull and your friend gives you the bull; then you realize that the bull is missing the bell, will you go back to the friend and say the bell is missing? Could this be an attitude? The government has given you the means. As for the bell, you yourself will need to find it. You are trained for self-employment. To be capable, that is the ultimate goal.

The reduced expectation of government and state to provide social security forms perhaps the most significant structural, albeit indirect, effect of the DDR programme. Life in the aftermath of conflict means self-employment and entrepreneurship, or, as expressed in a more recent speech by the EES state governor: ‘Youth, don’t expect government to give employment. Government does not provide employment but only provides and ensures enabling environments to allow investors to put in investment.’

Neoliberal priorities seem in fact to represent a general feature of contemporary DDR programmes. These priorities, McMullin states in a recent contribution to the DDR literature based on in-depth comparative case studies from Liberia, Namibia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone, are reflected in the limited state model of reintegration against the Keynesian policy innovations of the past that produced a number of economic and political benefits to populations (McMullin 2013, 77). He eloquently argues that neoliberal priorities are reflected in the ‘ubiquitous distribution of agricultural tool kits for subsistence farming and encouragement of small farming cooperatives’ rather than the development of comprehensive agricultural development plans (McMullin 2013, 245).
Nationals and internationals alike, in other words, specify entrepreneurship and support to ‘markets’, investment and export-led growth. In a nutshell, economic engagement and approaches to job creation are driven by neoliberal economic and political principles. Paradoxically, peace-building sidelines the role of the state in economic development and state-provided welfare support. South Sudan’s case illustrates that, in terms of political economy, a key element in peacebuilding interventions has been the drive to transform political economies into an aggressive neoliberal order of deregulation, privatization and market-ization (Pugh 2011).

This trend of marketization in peacebuilding in post-conflict states is confirmed in a recent report on job creation published by the World Bank. Value chain development is the new magic bullet. Value chain development means in this connection a proactive approach to private sector development that could generate and spark employment and the creation of jobs as well as help to rebuild fragile states (Dudwick et al. 2013). The report states that value chain development is ‘feasible even in the absence of well-functioning government institutions and supportive officials and lends itself to a flexible, incremental, and bottom-up approach’ (Dudwick et al. 2013, 3). The core of value chain development, it is argued, involves strengthening relationships that are ‘critical in fragile and post-conflict environments where trust and social cohesion have been shattered’ (Dudwick et al. 2013, 3). Relationships and networks can provide a basis for collective action to small and medium-sized actors in a value chain. The report concludes: ‘In fragile contexts, there is still a role for governments, but it is a facilitating rather than a leading role’ (Dudwick et al. 2013, 4). Business associations are considered the principal actors encouraging entrepreneurship and helping collective action problems by restoring law and order, roads and electricity (Dudwick et al. 2013, 4).

Conclusion

In sum, the DDR framework can best be understood as an ideational paradigm or discourse, facilitating a specific rationality of intervention. Reintegration in South Sudan centres on entrepreneurship, self-employment and thereby the willingness to take risks and responsibility. Reintegration, in other words, seeks to constitute ex-combatants as active and economically responsible individuals. Paradoxically, at the same time, South Sudan’s DDR programme invisibilizes, obscures and ignores the ex-combatants’ endogenous capacity for resilience and adaptation through eliding actual strategies of economic survival and evidence of people-led recovery. Too little is known about the economic activities and labour experiences of demobilized combatants. The article proposes that the starting point for a critical understanding of DDR programmes is to take questions of the subject’s economic agency more seriously.

Bluntly put, DDR as a programmatic exercise is unable to apprehend context. It ignores and excludes. Reality, in other words, is not amenable to this type of
intervention. The empirical realities of DDR undermine the theory of change implied by policy. As the South Sudan case demonstrates, DDR should be approached not as a definite form of knowledge that pictures the world and ex-combatants’ needs but as a highly performative exercise. DDR not only ‘knows’ very little about how to ‘fix’ perceived problems, it also has a limited understanding of the preferences and desires of those it seeks to help. When combined, these two arguments should lead to scepticism regarding the ability of DDR to effectively improve the human condition by reintegration through planning and intervention. In spite of the limited success, the reintegration ‘industry’ appears cyclical, ongoing and expansive.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors of the Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding as well as the participants of the workshop ‘Political Economy of Peace and Conflict in South Sudan’ at the Danish Institute for International Studies for useful comments and suggestions. Research in South Sudan was funded by a grant from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Danida Consultative Research Committee for Development Research [DFC No 11-104]. The views expressed in the article are solely the responsibility of the author.

Notes on Contributor

Jairo Munive is postdoctoral research fellow at the Peace, Risk and Violence Unit—Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. He has published in Journal of Agrarian Change, Conflict Security and Development, Forced Migration Review and International Peacekeeping. Email: jari@diis.dk

Notes

1 Southern Sudan is used here as the name of the autonomous territory prior to independence in July 2011.
3 For a critique see De Vries and Wiegink (2011).
4 As pointed out by Stepputat (2012), policies may have less to do with the needs and problems ‘on the ground’ than with the constitution of a joint identity or at least a joint purpose and language of the wide range of actors involved in the emerging field of security-development policy.
5 This corresponds to what Muggah (2014) calls first and second generation DDR initiatives. First generation programmes focused on promoting security and stability. They involved cantoning and decommissioning of military personnel. These targeted only combatants that received reinsertion and reintegration assistance. The shift to second generation DDR activities had the much broader goals of reconciliation and economic and
social development of both combatants and dependants, and civilian communities over the long term.

6 Interviews, government officials, Juba, 25 March 2012.

7 This is clearly a security issue for the government, since it could lead to an explosion of violence. See http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article44334 (accessed 1 Dec. 2013).

8 Since the nineteenth century, Sudan’s economy has been concentrated in the Nile region of the North. Characteristic of this agrarian economy (mechanized rainland farming, irrigated schemes) is that profit was dependent upon the existence of cheap labour lacking in citizenship rights. For an economic history and confrontations between Khartoum and the Southern regional government since the 1970s see Johnson (2003).

9 In fact the labour bill currently before lawmakers had plans to cut down on foreign workers and force foreign firms to hire domestic force labour.

10 Though women’s right to own land is recognized in the South Sudan 2009 Land Act, customary law restricts it and requires most land issues to be mediated through male relatives even in cases of female ownership.


12 Interview, SSDDRC chairman, Juba, 20 April 2012.

13 Eastern Equatoria State (EES) is one of the Republic of South Sudan’s ten states. It has an estimated area of 82,540 km² and lies strategically at the south-eastern corner. It borders Uganda to the south, Kenya to the south-east and Ethiopia to the east. The state has a population of close to 1 million and 86% of them depend on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. EES’s limited social services and infrastructure were largely destroyed during the 21-year civil war and the state suffered mass displacement of population. In recent years large numbers of IDPs have returned to the state, putting pressure on meagre social services and exacerbating tensions over land and resources (BCSSAS et al. 2012).

14 For a breathtaking description of the outbreak of the war see Johnson (2003, 21–37).

15 Likewise in Ethiopia, for example, half as many adult women as men were defined as economically active, even though the dominant activities of food production undertaken by women were defined as gardening; food production undertaken by men was defined as farming; gardeners were economically inactive, farmers were economically active (Sender and Smith, 2011, 56).

16 According to the country report on South Sudan from African Outlook 2012, the number of registered businesses in Juba has grown exponentially from 471 in 2006 to 8,894 in 2010. This situation, however, is by no means representative of the country, as formal business activity outside the capital remains extremely limited. The report can be accessed at: http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/South_Sudan_2012_Youth_Unemployment_Briefing.pdf (accessed 1 July 2014).

17 Rolex is a popular breakfast food often served from street vendors throughout East Africa. The term’s origin is ‘rolled eggs’, whereby the vendor fries eggs (often with onions and tomatoes) and then rolls them in a chapatti for consumption.

18 Here I rely on Mitchell Foucault’s’ understanding of power. See Foucault (1980).

19 Interview, SSDDRC chair, Juba, 20 April 2012.

20 Ibid.

21 Interview, Eastern Equatoria DDR county representative, Torit, 2 May 2012.

22 Address by UNDP head of Head of Conflict Prevention and Recovery to DDR participants, Torit, 9 May 2012.

23 Address by Eastern Equatoria State Minister for Education to DDR participants, Torit, 9 May 2012.

References


