The Future of DDR: Special Project on Addressing the Frontier-Issues in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration to Meet an Evolving Operational Landscape

- **Brief description of the project**

Over the past decade, armed conflict has continued to evolve, becoming increasingly complex and involving a diverse set of non-state armed actors. The latter range from armed groups with political agendas and grievances, to groups designated as terrorist organizations, criminal networks, gangs and local self-defense groups. These actors frequently operate at multiple levels (local, national, regional, international). Although mostly starting off as internal conflicts, domestic armed conflicts often take on regional and international dimensions as conflict actors from within the country collaborate with external forces for mutual benefit. This increased internationalization of domestic armed conflict is hampering the search for peaceful solutions and making these conflicts deadlier, more protracted and more resistant to resolution. This coincides with a geopolitical context that is less conducive to the political settlement of disputes

These key phenomena and "frontier issues" have pushed Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) practice to evolve in lockstep. Along the way, new approaches and tools have been developed, and new risks borne out of global trends have been identified. These risks further complicate how the United Nations support Member States to meet the needs of ex-combatants, their dependents and the communities into which they (re)integrate.

In 2021, with support from the Government of Germany and in collaboration with the Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (BICC), the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) produced a study to identify more clearly which frontier issues DDR practitioners have been encountering over recent years[1]: i) fewer meaningful political settlements and solutions to conflicts; 2) an increase in violence by non-state actors and an increase in conflicts at local and regional levels; 3) the designation of armed groups as terrorist organizations; 4) the continued fragmentation and multiplication of armed groups; 5) the regionalization of conflict and insecurity, including through the impacts of climate change; and 6) epidemics and pandemics in conflict settings.

  - Objective of the project

The study was written for practitioners by practitioners and represented an important effort in analyzing new trends in DDR policy and practice while also capturing lessons in a manner that will be useful to policymakers and practitioners alike. In particular, the findings of the study also point to how DDR efforts concretely contribute to the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, as well as the A4P+ priorities, across key commitments such as those on politics, WPS, peacebuilding, partnerships and sustaining peace. The project made several recommendations for member states, partners in the UN system, as well as DPO itself. DPO identified three key recommendations to focus on which include: 1) recommendation on climate change and DDR; 2) recommendation on public information and strategic communication; 3) recommendation on mental health. **The objective of this project is to carry forward these recommendations and bring the study's recommendations to life in a way that is useful and actionable for DDR practitioners on the ground.** One recommendation has already gained traction and received funding from Denmark, and the implementation of the project will initiate within the coming months. The goal of this project therefore is to launch efforts aimed at **placing greater focus on two of the three priority recommendations on public information and strategic communication, and on mental health. The following three recommendations have been selected as priority recommendations by DPO.**

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[1] *The Evolving Nature of DDR: Study on engaging armed groups across the peace continuum*, with a foreword by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix: https://bit.ly/39DKyak.

1. **Frontier issue III: On the regionalization of conflict and the regional dimensions of DDR:** climate-driven conflicts related to competition over natural resources, including those witnessed in the Sahel between farmers and transhumant herders, as well as tensions related to natural resource management, also point to the need to more strongly consider DDR beyond the national level and incorporate regional and sub-regional dimensions. This need is most pronounced in contexts, for example, where foreign combatants are active, and there is a need for repatriation and resettlement in addition to DDR. <u>Recommendation III.2:</u> *The issues of climate-induced and transhumance-related conflict—especially the proliferation of weapons among herder and farmer communities and interactions between armed groups and these communities—are intricately connected to DDR related issues and could benefit from DDR-related programming and activities.* This recommendation is currently already being funded by Denmark and is a clear indication of the significance of the frontier issues identified in the DPO study.

2. **Frontier issue II: On public information and strategic communication (PI/SC) in DDR settings**: Splintering armed groups, increased actor fragmentation but also divisions among armed groups in contemporary DDR contexts highly affect how DDR practitioners can and should engage from a public information and strategic communication perspective. The fragmentation of armed groups coupled with the advent of social media and other digital communication channels have resulted in disinformation and misinformation gaining more prominence in settings where DDR process are taking place. <u>Recommendation II.2</u>: *The advent of social media coupled with the fragmentation of armed groups will result in an even more crowded communicative space. Additional tools need to be developed to analyze, anticipate, and monitor armed group behavior (including misinformation and disinformation) as part of a comprehensive public information and strategic communication DDR strategy.*

3. **Frontier issues IV: On mental health and psychosocial support in DDR contexts:** Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is a crucial aspect for ex-combatants in the context of DDR processes that warrants further examination. Excombatants' and associated groups' long-term exposure to armed conflict and violence, separation from their families and communities, low standards of living and possible social exclusion and community stigma directly affect their mental health. Combatants may still experience psychological stress or develop mental health and substance use issues long after demobilization and reintegration. Beyond the group of combatants, common mental health conditions in communities living in fragile, conflict-affected, and vulnerable settings that are also relevant to the DDR population of concern (ex-combatants and persons associated with armed forces and groups). <u>Recommendation IV.2:</u> *The overall integration of MHPSS in DDR programming is lacking. One particular aspect that deserves immediate attention is the need to increase the understanding of strong social ties and low-intensity MHPSS interventions' role in improving social cohesion and supporting social reintegration.*

These three frontier issues and their corresponding recommendations **were selected as priority recommendations because of their explicit contributions to advancing A4P+ priorities. Moving forward, DPO aims to make advances in launching efforts to address the recommendations on Public Information and Strategic Communication and on Mental Health by** using a phased approach which is meant to be sequential and iterative:

A. <u>A study or research phase</u>: to outline the scope and extent of the recommendations. This will include a mapping of existing guidance and literature, as well as identifying research and technical partners with the capacities to deliver on the recommendations' specific operational needs. The output of these phase would typically include a scoping paper, research study, or the development of preliminary guidance or methodology.

B. <u>A pilot phase</u>: to test out the research outcomes and provide a reality check on the assumptions underpinning them. This will also be a chance to develop new partnerships in field locations and develop preliminary approaches to partnerships and coordination. The outputs of these phase would typically include a pilot project proposal, development of selection criteria of contexts, and the implementation of the project over a 12-month period.

C. <u>A knowledge management phase</u>: to codify new recommendations and course-corrections that stem from the pilot project during phase B and finalize any guidance that may have been produced during phase A. This phase is also a chance to develop concrete operational guidance drawing from field experience. The output of this phase would typically include guidance material for practitioners, training material include modules, and new partnership frameworks with the view of operationalizing new approaches in other contexts.

o   What is the expected impact of the project?

With this iterative process in mind, the expected impact of the project is threefold: new guidance, new and innovative tools for the field, and most importantly the development of new programmatic entry points through which DDR objectives can be furthered in contexts where DDR practitioners are faced and grapple with these frontier issues. This may also include the recruitment of one junior staff (DDR Special Projects Officer) member to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of all three special outcomes under this project and their associated outputs, outcomes, and activities.

Expected outcomes, outputs and proposed activities

Outcomes	Outputs	Proposed Activities
Development of **a light, agile and scalable data-driven tool that DDR practitioners can deploy in conflict settings to monitor disinformation and misinformation related to ongoing or planned DDR processes** In complement, develop an operational handbook to aid DDR practitioners in quickly developing counter-narratives and conflict-sensitive sensitization material through the use of templates and other evidence-based tools, in line with the recently finalized Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) module 4.70 on Public Information and Strategic Communication in DDR which was finalized in early 2021	Phase A: Research of existing sentiment and influence analysis tools and/software that scan social media, for example Talkwalker (currently being explored by MONUSCO) Identification of specific requirements for a social media analysis tool for DDR practitioners Development of recommendations of Lake Chad Basin Commission in line with a recent United Nations Security Council resolution (SC 2349, 2017) Phase B: Needs assessment of DDR contexts in which misinformation and disinformation stemming from	Commissioning the development of adapted IT solution Roundtable discussions with academia and DDR practitioners Research on best practice in public information and strategic communication in conflict settings Recruitment of consultant for the development of the handbook Finalization and copy-editing of the handbook Consultation with DPET-led misinformation and disinformation working group at HQ and field level

	armed groups is hampering the effective implementation of DDR processes Pilot test of misinformation and disinformation IT solution and the development of CVR project in response in at least one peacekeeping operation identified by the needs assessment Phase C: Developing operational guidance that could be used to promote voluntary exists of combatants leaving Armed Groups, including those Designated as Terrorist Organization (AGDTO), in line with relevant security council resolutions and the IDDRS (particularly 5.40)	
Improving access to basic health care services in conflict settings: mental health and psychosocial support to ex-combatants and affected communities through, and as part of, DDR and CVR programming is strengthened	Phase A: 3 country profiles including lessons learned exercise where MHPSS has been used successfully (with a focus on approaches undertaken by national health institutions) Review MHPSS interventions as part of DDR, including the applicability of specialized interventions such as group-based sociotherapy for ex-combatants Phase B: Development of pilot project focusing on the DRC, developing MHPSS interventions in support of the recently finalized national programme on DDR: pilot project may also include Libya	Review MHPSS interventions as part of DDR Focused review on evidence linking MHPSS interventions and recidivism and outline sustainable efforts to address MHPSS that are endogenous, and community driven that can be reinforced to support former combatants and communities Mapping of tools and approaches to enable non-specialized personnel (such as DDR practitioners) to support in the identification, referral, and treatment of ex-combatants with mental health illnesses (only for low intensity MH interventions) Convening MHPSS experts and DDR practitioners

	Phase C: Amendments to the IDDRS module on Health and DDR, which includes section on Health and Sustaining Peace approach as well as MHPSS Operational guidance on mental health and psychosocial support for ex-combatants as part of the sustaining peace approach in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF	

- **Implementation timeline**

Through a mix of external support, existing technical partnerships, and ad hoc funding sources, it is important to note that work has already begun in moving forward on the operationalization of the three recommendations presented in the project using the phased approach outlined above (see table below). The recommendation on climate change and DDR in particular, has received funding and is slated to commence in the coming months. Progress on all three recommendations, however, remains piecemeal and unpredictable as it relies on equally unpredictable sources of external support. The proposal has been adjusted to complement efforts and resources that have already been secured.

This funding proposal is therefore designed to offer, for a period of 12 months, the necessary and predicable resources to accelerate progress on the implementation of the study's recommendations.

Recommendation	Phase A Research/Study	Phase B Pilot/field test	Phase C KM/Training
Funding received from Denmark: Linkages between recruitment and Climate Risks	*Project implementation partners identified; initial study will commence shortly*	*Sahel identified*	*Yet to commence*
Public Information and Strategic Communication	*Project partners identified*	*Yet to commence*	*Outline of field guide developed, pending availability of funds and completion of phase B*
Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in DDR contexts	*Project partners identified; draft analytical paper produced, pending finalization*	*Pilot countries identified through joint consultation between DPO and WHO*	*Yet to commence*

- **Explain how the project will further the implementation of the A4P+ priorities**.

As mentioned above, the decision to pursue the implementation of these three recommendations have been done on the basis of <u>their explicit contribution to advancing A4P+ priorities</u>. In addition, it is important to note that, while two out of these three workstreams <u>feature in the OROLSI-wide A4P+ workplan</u>. All three workstreams are explicitly linked to the following A4P+ priorities, results, and deliverables, as follows:

1. **The workstream on public information and strategic communications in DDR settings, is specifically linked to A4P+ Priority: 6**: Strategic communication // Result: 6.1 Strategic communications must play an enabler and multiplier effect across all mandated areas and in support of the entire Declaration of Shared Commitments // Deliverable 6.1.3. Systematize strategic communication support/training to leadership and a wider range of mission personnel, especially those whose functions include regular engagement with local communities and who can significantly contribute to storytelling on the impact of UN peacekeeping, and/or to address mis/dis-information and hate speech.

2. **Both the workstream on Climate change and Mental health and psychosocial support, are specifically linked to A4P+ Priority: 1**: Collective coherence behind a political strategy // Result 1.3. Strengthen quality of our analysis and reporting to Member States // Deliverable 1.3.3. Identify and strengthen new capacities needed by missions (e.g. political economy, climate security, gender analysis, impact of new technologies) to improve the quality and depth of their analysis and make greater use of other analytical capacities on the ground, including through greater collaboration with UNCT and IFIs/RDBs.

- **How have gender aspects been included in the design and implementation of the project? How does it help the Department implement its women, peace and security and gender parity commitments?**

Gender considerations: By policy and design, gender mainstreaming is an integral part of DDR, included in all DDR Section projects and initiatives. Adjusting DDR to new environments has resulted in tools, such as CVR, that ensure increased balance among combatant and non-combatant men, women, boys and girls benefiting from DDR processes.

The proposed operational guide on designing effective strategic communication interventions, will take into consideration the needs and interests of women and girls, who play a central role in peacebuilding at the community level. Female ex-combatants and other WAAFAG must be informed about their eligibility for DDR and any special programmes for them, which may require specific strategies and approaches. PI/SC messages will therefore also encourage the participation of women and girls in the DDR process. The operational handbook will ensure that key messages, communications material and information campaigns are gender responsive, taking into account the need for tailored messaging that addresses the specific needs of women, men, boys and girls. It will also be important to ensure that the tools and guidance produced through this project captures specific misinformation that targets women and girls.

One of the key aspects of the climate change and DDR project as well as the project on mental health is that they will be able to include analysis of the gender and the ways in which gender dimensions need to be taken into account when addressing the link between climate change and DDR, and the specific needs of women and girls with regards to mental health support.

- **Brief explanation of any risks that the implementation of the project may face and how to mitigate them.**

The phased approach to this proposal is an element of risk management. Each outcome-pillar is based on research and/or review. Failing to identify concrete programmatic entry points through research and reviews may prohibit the full implementation of subsequent activities. However, a viability study could provide recommendations related to the future direction of the project and projections about best implementation timelines. Initial phases, while the pandemic continues, will be focused on the outputs related to desk reviews, research, and analytical work. Country focused interventions and missions will be secondary, should travel and access allow as the pandemic-related restrictions begin to ease.

- **Proposed budget**

Item	Brief Description	Total Amount
Associate DDR Planning Officer (P2)	Coordinate, plan and support efforts related to frontier issues recommendations	$81,704
Research Consultant on PI/SC at $650/day for 4 months	Conduct market research, identify new tools, adapt them for use in DDR context.	$80,000
Two Research Consultants on Mental Health at $650/day for 2 months	Focusing on mental health and psychosocial support for ex-combatants as part of the sustaining peace approach	$176,000
IT-development partner PI/SC	Develop analytical tool including simplified user interface for easy use in the field	$50,000
Project Consultant (team of 4) Pi/SC	Development of Operational Handbook, as a complement to the IDDRS module: 4 consultants x 35 days	$98,000
Pilot Project	Testing out MHPSS in support of community reintegration in DRC, to improve community	$200,000
Copy-editing of handbook PI/SC	Layout, editing, printing, and translation	$20,000
Publication on Mental Health	Graphic design, print preparations; printing and dissemination.	$10,000
Programme Support Costs (13%)		$93,041.52
	Total:	**$808,745.52**