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## **DDRed in Liberia: Youth Remarginalisation or Reintegration?**

**Morten Bøås<sup>1</sup> and Ingunn Bjørkhaug<sup>2</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This report questions mainstream approaches to the reintegration of youthful ex-combatants. In Liberia, the disarmament and demobilisation was implemented quite effectively, but several questions can be asked about the components of reintegration and rehabilitation in the DDR-process. Most ex-combatants are currently unemployed or underemployed as the programmes initiated first and foremost prepared them for jobs that did not exist. The programmes also worked from the assumption that wartime experiences, networks and command structures had to be broken down as they were seen as counterproductive to peace and reconciliation. Drawing on previous research in Liberia the hypothesis is that reintegration can better be achieved through peaceful remobilisation that allows the ex-combatants to make use of the skills, experiences and networks gained through the war. This is illustrated by the recent experience of a nightwatch patrol in Voinjama in Lofa County that was based on rank and command structure from the war which responded to local community demands and filled a security vacuum. This is an alternative path to reintegration that needs further analysis, and the article argued that this should be based on the premises of a genuine understanding of the background of Liberia's young ex-combatants and the nature and form of their involvement in violent conflict. Many people were involved in the war, but most only fought for certain periods. The motivations for joining varied, but the collected data from our various studies shows that security considerations were among the most important factors. Most combatants were ordinary people who joined for the sake of protection for themselves, their families and their communities. DDR in Liberia, as elsewhere, is, however, built on the assumption that there is something particularly dangerous and marginalised about the group of people who constituted the rank-and-file of the factions involved in the war. This is, as we have seen, not necessarily the case. DDR is very much a reaction to the notion that these people are unattached to society, set apart in their own world, and therefore needs particular attention. The article will therefore suggest that DDR approaches are in dire need of a rethinking that links them more directly to programmes aimed at social cohesion and societal security.

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## **Introduction**

In the aftermath of the Liberian civil war almost 100,000 former combatants were demobilised through the Liberian Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programme (LDDRRP). This programme is hailed as a success both by the United Nations' Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and other international stakeholders. However, whereas disarmament and demobilisation was implemented quite effectively, several questions can be asked about the components of reintegration and rehabilitation. Most ex-combatants are unemployed or underemployed as the programmes initiated not only prepared them for jobs that did not exist, but also worked from the assumption that wartime experiences, networks and command structures had to be broken down as they were seen as counterproductive to peace and reconciliation.

This is, however, not necessarily the case. Drawing on previous and ongoing research in Liberia, the aim of this report is to question mainstream approaches to the reintegration of youthful ex-combatants, asking whether this may be better achieved through peaceful remobilisation allowing ex-combatants to make use of the skills, experiences and networks gained during the war. This can, however, only be probed through a genuine understanding of the background of Liberia's young ex-combatants, and the nature and form of their involvement in violent conflict. Many people were involved in the war, but most only fought for certain periods and whereas the motivations for joining armed groups were many, systematic research on ex-combatants reveal that security considerations were among the most important factors. Most combatants were ordinary Liberians who joined for the sake of protection for themselves, their families and their communities (see Bøås and Hatløy 2008).

This report is based on two different fieldworks. One implemented in Voinjama, Lofa County in 2009, the other in Monrovia in 2005 at Duala Market and Red Light District.<sup>3</sup> The two studies will be referred to as the 'Monrovia' data set and the 'Voinjama' data set in this report.

The method for data collection consisted of a combination of Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) and in-depth qualitative interviewing. RDS is a type of chain referral sampling that has been developed to identify hidden and elusive populations, but the method is also suitable for populations where no sampling frame exists

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<sup>3</sup> The fieldwork in Monrovia was conducted at two different sites in the town in order to achieve a good distribution of ex-combatants from different factions. This was not necessary in Voinjama, as the town is much smaller in size.

(Heckathorn 1997). This is the case for ex-combatants in Liberia. The Monrovia and the Voinjama samples consist of respectively 491 and 275 ex-combatants.

### **Understanding Liberian ex-combatants**

The ordinary Liberian ex-combatants are usually seen as young person with a history of unemployment, underemployment and idleness (Dufka 2005; UN 2004; UNOWA 2005), often based on a background as uprooted urban youths (Mkandawire 2002) or lumpen youths, prone to criminal behaviour and gross indiscipline (Abdullah 1998). The assumption behind the DDR-programme in Liberia was therefore that there is something particularly marginalised and violent about the pre-war lives of the young people who constituted the rank and file of the armed factions. The data collected in Monrovia, however, offered a different picture (see Bøås and Hatløy 2008) and the findings from the study in Voinjama supported this: the ex-combatants does not seem to have been any more idle, marginalised and alienated than any other group of young men in Liberia. Before they joined the insurgency they were never a world apart from their parents, relatives and local communities, but the majority were in fact living with them. Thus, suggesting that whereas one of the main objectives of DDR is to help reduce stigmatisation by means of programmes and processes to reintegrate former fighters, the programmes in Liberia may have had the opposite effect; by taking a group that was not particularly stigmatised and set them apart as an easily identifiable stereotyped group, marking them as something ‘other’ and problematic (see Jennings 2007).

Some reported that they were forced to join an armed group, but the findings in table 5 and 6 describes that, for the majority this was not the case. They made their decision based on the security predicament that they believed that they and their families were facing. Thus, suggesting that DDR approaches are in dire need of a rethinking that links them more directly to programmes aimed at social cohesion and societal security. Objectives more likely to be reached this report argues, if stakeholders work with rather than against the skills, networks and even the command structures acquired and established during the war. The road to reintegration and enhanced social cohesion and societal security can be better achieved through peaceful remobilisation of command structure than through first signposting a certain group (young rank and file ex-combatants) as particularly problematic for peace and stability and reconstituting their position as marginal by actively attempting to ‘destroy’ the skills and other sources of empowerment that may have gained during the war. The

irony is thus that current approaches to DDR may leave ex-combatants in a more vulnerable position of marginality when the end of the war is ‘written’ by those supervising the transition from war to peace that the DDR programmes should represent.

Before we turn to a discussion of our data, some brief clarification of major assumptions and concepts are necessary. First, an important assumption in the report is that, in societies undergoing conflict, armed groups can provide some sort of order and social organisation, and represent means for social integration and upward social mobility (see Utas 2003). In short, violence represents empowerment as well suffering and destruction. Although it is true that most of the combatants were poor and did not have a wide variety of options available, this is only an observation, not an explanation. It does not account for why many similarly situated young people did not join. Moreover, we argue that, just because people make choices under some level of coercion – not an uncommon occurrence in any society – this does not remove their agency and their ability to evaluate and act upon alternative coping strategies. The report is therefore built on the premise that people have agency, and they are not merely victims of circumstances and structures that they do not understand. It does not mean that they have an unlimited range of options they can choose from, but they are capable of acting within certain constraints and seize opportunities that are available to them. In this regard, the report is supported by Honwana's (2005, 2006) distinction between ‘tactical’ and ‘strategic’ agency. The first is narrow and opportunistic, ‘exercised to cope with concrete, immediate concerns of their lives in order to maximise the circumstances created by their violent military environment’ (Honwana 2006: 71). The latter is based on a position of power that enables a certain degree of control over the self and the decisions taken. It is an agency of a longer timeframe, where events and action can be planned and are not only ‘determined by random factors they could neither predict or control’ (*ibid.*).

Carefully examining the conditions and concerns that initially led some people to join militias and participate in armed conflict, rather than simply assuming that force, poverty, greed, grievances were the only factors that were determinative, illuminate the distinction between tactical and strategic agency. By joining one or several armed groups, many ex-combatants seem to have made tactical decisions rooted in security concerns, and years after the conflict ended their existence in post-war Liberia is to a large extent still tactical – opportunistic and oriented towards surviving, not thriving.

### **Characteristics of the Liberian ex-combatant**

As Table 1 and Table 2 describes, the overall majority of the ex-combatants are men. In Monrovia, 90 percent of the respondents were men, and in Voinjama the corresponding figure is 89 percent. This is as one might expect. Many more men than women participated in the different warring factions. Those women who did belong to a faction have mostly returned to their home communities without ever picking up the 'tag' as an ex-combatant. Among the women in the Monrovia, most claimed to have been involved only in supporting roles; e.g. 'bush wives', cooks, servants and porters. This is different in Voinjama as most of the women claim to have been fighters, some even in the role as commanders. In a qualitative interview one of the former female fighters were asked if she had cooked for combatants during her time with the rebel movement Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). She boldly answered that 'I never cooked; I had men preparing my food'. Women such as this one does not represent the majority of the female fighter, but her story is not only important, but also under-researched. The inability of current approaches to DDR to even see these women as anything than passive victims may in fact leave them in a much more difficult and marginalised position than the one they inhabited prior to the conflict.

The excombatants is a young population even if there is at least six years since they were demobilised. In Monrovia, 64 percent of the combatants are less than 26 years of age, and only nine percent are above 34 years of age. The former combatants in Voinjama are also quite young, 58 percent were below the age of 26, and 25 percent below the age of 31.

As shown in table 1, one-third of the ex-combatants interviewed in Monrovia were born in Montserrado, whereas the ex-combatants born outside of Greater Monrovia mainly originates from the counties of Lofa (15 percent), Nimba 13 percent) and Bong 11 (Percent). In the Voinjama (see table 2), 82 percent were born and belonged to Lofa. Almost none of the ex-combatants in the two data sets were of foreign origin. This is quite surprisingly as it contradicts several reports from international NGOs who argues that there is a West African community of regional rebels who cross borders both to take part in wars and to benefit from DDR-programmes (see Dufka 2005). The difference between the findings in this study and the reports from NGOs could be explained by two factors. Either they have already moved elsewhere, or this group of foreign ex combatants is much smaller than previous

research has indicated. We cannot completely rule out the possibility that they have moved elsewhere or returned to their home of origin, but even in Lofa where many claimed that Guineans of Koninake origin fought for their ethnic cousins the Mandingo in LURD, most of the ex-combatants (of Mandingo as well as Loma origin) claimed that they were quite few and that their number had been increased by Taylor propaganda. The Liberian war was a national conflict and not a war of regional mercenaries.



Table 1. Background of ex-combatants in Monrovia by interview site in percent

		Red Light	Duala Market	All
Sex	Male	84	99	90
	Female	16	1	10
Age	10-17	8	12	10
	18-25	46	66	54
	26-33	33	18	27
	34-52	13	4	9
Place of origin (county)	Montserrado	21	47	32
	Lofa	21	7	15
	Nimba	21	2	13
	Bong	18	3	11
	Sinoe	1	13	6
	Grand Bassa	5	3	4
	Bomi	2	6	4
	Grand Cape Mount	1	6	3
	Maryland	3	2	3
	Grand Kru	1	4	2
	River Cass	3	2	2
	Margibi	2	1	2
	River Gee	1	0	1
	Gbarpolu	0	0	0
	Grand Gedeh	0	1	0
	Abroad	0	1	1
Religion	Christian	92	86	90
	Muslim	4	10	7
	Other	4	4	4
Ethnic group	Kpelle	27	12	20
	Bassa	14	8	11
	Gio	13	0	8
	Kru	2	40	18
	Grebo	5	5	5
	Mano	9	1	6
	Gola	0	5	2
	Gbandi	6	2	4
	Loma	16	2	10
	Kissi	3	4	3
	Vai	1	10	5
	Other	4	10	7
N		280	211	491

Table 2. Background of the ex-combatants in Voinjama

		All
Sex	Male	89
	Female	11
Age at time of interview	18-25	58
	26-30	25
	31-35	10
	36-40	4
	41-45	2
Place of origin (county)	Lofa	82
	Montserrado	8
	Nimba	1
	Bong	4
	Grand Bassa	1
	Bomi	1
	Grand Cape Mount	1
	Maryland	1
	Sierra Leone	1
Margibi	1	
Religion	Christian	39
	Muslim	60
	Other	1
Ethnic Group	Mandingo/Mandika	53
	Loma	19
	Gbandi	12
	Kissi	7
	Kpelle	2
	Other	5
	No answer	1
	Do not know	1
N		275

### Participation in the civil war

As shown below in Table 3 and Table 4, the majority of the ex-combatants had either fought for LURD or Taylor's forces – the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) or other smaller militias allied to Taylor. Most of the ex-combatants at Duala Market had fought for LURD, whereas those in Red Light were mainly involved in Taylor's forces. In Voinjama, however, the overall majority had fought for LURD, and the remaining minority for Taylor allies.

Table 3. First armed groups of whom they were member, in percent by interview site

		Red Light	Duala Market	All
Armed group (first)	NPFL	62	11	40
	LURD	7	55	28
	AFL	9	0	5
	MODEL	2	3	2
	ULIMO-K	3	1	2
	ULIMO-J	0	2	1
	GOL and other	17	28	22
N		278	211	489

Table 4. First group they fought for, in percent (Voinjama)

LURD	81
Taylor allies	19
N	275

For the observant reader, the ethnic composition of the ex-combatants from Duala Market with regard to their faction affiliation may seem surprising: LURD was mainly a Mandingo project, but many of the ex-combatants from the LURD-affiliated Duala Market are of Kru origin (see Table 1). The answer to this puzzle lies in the combination of the logic of the war and the ethno-geographical stratification of the city of Monrovia.

The LURD rebellion (which dominated what may be called the second part of the Liberian civil war, from 1999 to 2003) emerged from Lofa County. Although the core fighting force of LURD was of Mandingo origin, this was not the case for all the combatants that took part in the final offensive against Monrovia in July and August 2003. The explanation is therefore that the closer LURD came to the city centre, the more combatants the insurgency needed. Taylor's men fought desperately to prevent them from crossing into the town centre through the two main bridges at Providence Island, which LURD fought to control. It was therefore necessary to recruit more soldiers instantly, without any time for training, and, as this part of Monrovia is known as the Kru Town, quite a number of boys and men of Kru origin were recruited to fight for LURD. In the environment of extreme uncertainty that the conflict had created, for some the most sensible thing to do to protect themselves and their family was to join the movement that suddenly controlled the area in which they lived (see also Human Rights

Watch 2004). Most of the Mandingo people who fought for LURD, including female combatants, seem to have returned to Gbarpolu and Lofa after the civil war ended. Conversely, those who originated from the Monrovia and Montserrado area remained in their home communities. The nature of the Monrovia-based recruitment into LURD was reiterated in interviews conducted by the author in November 2005 and May 2006 in Mandingo towns along the Guinean border and in qualitative interviews during the fieldwork in Voinjama in May 2009. In conversations with former LURD fighters, they were asked about what they thought about their ‘brothers in arms’ who were still ‘hanging around’ in Monrovia. Almost exclusively, they replied that these men were not true Mandingo warriors who had fought for a cause, but rather ‘hoodlums’ and ‘nobodies’ who had been recruited because they were needed as manpower for the final offensive on Monrovia.

It is not only of interest to know whom excombatants initially fought for, but also whether they changed sides during the course of war. Surprisingly few combatants fought for more than one group. In Monrovia only nine percent fought with two groups, and less than one percent with three groups. Among the 47 persons who reported that they moved from one group to another 27 moved from NPFL to LURD and other factions; while eight moved from LURD to other factions. In Voinjama almost no such movement between factions are recorded. This implies that is that much fewer combatants have switched between the armed factions than suggested by other reports (see Dufka 2005). Our data indicates that the young combatants who see war as an occupation – and therefore changed ‘employer’ when new economic opportunities (of looting and plundering) emerge – are relatively few. The ‘mercenary warrior’ problem argued by Human Rights Watch and other NGOs may exist, but this group seems to be smaller than envisioned. That said, the data also indicates (for example in a transfer from NPFL to LURD) that some people fought for a while, then returned to other, more peaceful activities, before yet again taking up arms.<sup>4</sup> This is in line with Ellis who observes that ‘there appears to have been a large number of people who took up arms at some stage of the war, but may have been victims at other times [...] . Even hard-core fighters seem to have remained attached to wider social communities’ (1999: 133).

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<sup>4</sup> Between a transfers such as this, there is a considerable time lag. People cannot have moved directly from NPFL to LURD, simply because LURD was still not formed when NPFL was active as an armed anti-government insurgency.

*Who they are*

As already stated, the majority of the ex-combatants claim that their main reasons for joining the insurgencies were security related: for their own protection and security, as well their families.

Table 5. Reasons for joining the armed group in percent by first armed group (Monrovia)

	NPFL	LURD	Other	All
Feel more secure	53	36	46	46
Keep family safe	47	24	34	36
Kidnapped or forced	23	32	43	32
Other reasons	25	25	23	24
Money and goods	17	27	22	21
Revenge	15	7	13	12
Wanted to fight	11	7	11	10
Nothing else to do	11	10	7	10

Each respondent could give three main reasons

As Table 5 shows, security was the most important reason for joining among the population from Monrovia. This seems to be regardless of what armed faction they belonged to. However, as is also evident, the security motivation is somewhat stronger for those that joined NPFL than for those with LURD. This could be due to the number of combatants who were involved with LURD for a short time during that insurgency's final offensive towards Monrovia in 2003. In addition to protecting themselves, it is likely that many also joined for other and more opportunistic reasons, among others to make some money and obtain some goods.

Table 6 Why former combatants joined the first armed group, in percent (Voinjama)

		All
Why did you join the first armed group?	To feel more secure	14
	I thought it would keep my family safe	13
	To feel more powerful and important	2
	I wanted to fight	1
	To gain access to money	4
	I had nothing else to do	5
	I believed in the cause the group fought for	3
	I wanted to join friends or family in the group	6
	My family encouraged me to fight	2
	I wanted to take revenge against other groups	17
I was kidnapped or forced	32	
N		275

The reasons for getting involved in Voinjama are similar to the answers reported in Monrovia. Table 6 shows that joining an insurgency due to security-related factors was a strong motivation factor among the ex-combatants. In both data sets, 32 percent reported that they had been kidnapped or forced. Abductions and forced recruitment were practised by all armed factions during the civil war in Liberia, but contrary to some NGO reporting, a high number of combatants also recruited themselves voluntarily into the armed group. It is every reason to believe that the figures reported here are more accurate than claims, often based on assumptions, that almost all fighters were forcibly recruited. The majority of ex-combatants were ordinary people who joined armed groups based on various reasons concerning protection and opportunity.

Their ‘ordinariness’ of the ex-combatants is also illustrated by whom they lived with prior to the war. These ex-combatants were never the ‘loose molecules’ of society: a hyper-mobile community of ‘lumpens’ hardwired to criminality and idleness, but a group of ordinary Liberian youth who mainly lived and lives with parents or close relatives. The majority of the former combatants in Monrovia and Voinjama had been enrolled in school and conducted some work (see table 7, 8, 9 and 10). It was only the minority who were unemployed in search for work.

Table 7. Who the ex-combatants are living together with now by whom they were living with before in percent (Monrovia)

		Lived with before				
		No one	Parents	Close relatives	Others	All
Living with now	No one	6	2	7	1	3
	Parents	10	39	5	21	30
	Close relatives	26	37	57	30	37
	Others	58	22	31	48	30
N		31	314	58	87	490

Table 8. Current activity by activity before they joined the armed forces in percent (Monrovia)

		Activity before joining armed group				
		Work	School	Domestic tasks	Nothing	All
Current activity	School	15	57	23	20	41
	Work and school	3	3	4	4	3
	Work	29	7	8	7	12
	Unemployed looking for work	23	18	23	35	22
	Unemployed not looking for work	30	15	42	35	22
N		110	292	26	55	483

Before they joined an armed group, the majority of the ex-combatants in Monrovia went to school (60 percent) and almost 25 percent were working. Often idleness has been claimed as one of the main reasons for young people to join armed groups (see UN 2004). However, most of the ex-combatants hanging around in Red Light and Duala Market had something to do before they joined an armed group. The same results are also evident in the data from Voinjama.

Table 9. Duties and whom they were living with before joining an armed group, in percent (Voinjama)

		All
Duties six months before joining the first armed group	Work	17
	School	63
	Housework	13
	Nothing	6
	Other	4
Lived with before they joined the first armed group	Parents/ Close relatives	84
	Alone	8
	With spouse/children	5
	Friends	3
N		275

Table 10. Living with after participated in armed group, in percent\* (Voinjama)

Spouse/own children	25
Parents or other relatives	52
Friends/ex-combatants	25
N	275

\*multiple responses possible, total percentages may exceed 100 percent

They went to school (63 percent) or worked (17 percent), and very few, only six percent, claimed that they had nothing to do, The majority lived with parents or other close relatives. After the war, the majority either settled down with their spouse and children or continued to live with their families. There is a subsection of 25 percent who now live together with friends made during the war, however none reported to live alone contrary to eight percent prior to their engagement in the civil war. To share a house with some friends was a much more affordable solution and some of the former combatants reported that they preferred to share a house/room with friends they trusted.

The most important thing to take note of, however, is that there is little in these background variables that indicate that our informants were more marginalised than

most other young people in Liberia. They went to school, worked and lived with either their parents or other close relatives. The ex-combatants background is therefore remarkably normal. It is, however, also important to keep in mind that pre-war Liberia was a country where exclusion and marginalisation were the normal conditions for most people. Most people were generally poor, disenfranchised, and without any access to or hope for upward social mobility (see Ellis 1999). The civil war that started on Christmas Eve 1989 did not improve people's living condition. For the majority, it only made them worse and less predictable.

There is also nothing in the datasets that indicates that they are ex-communicated from their families and local communities. The majority still lives with their parents or with close relatives. This indicates that their families and local communities recognise that people mainly started fighting in order to provide for their own, their family's and their community's security. Their original reason for involvement in the war was neither very political, nor overwhelmingly based on a desire for personal enrichment or due to idleness, but in order to improve their security situation. Their motivations for fighting may or may not have changed as the war continued, but the very fact that most of them still live with their relatives in their local communities suggest that their wartime experience has not turned these against them. Nevertheless, the DDR interventions has almost exclusively been based on the assumption that wartime experiences networks and command structures must be broken down as they would be counterproductive to peace and reconciliation. This is, as the following small case study from Voinjama illustrates not necessarily the case.

#### *Reintegration through remobilisation: the night watch in Voinjama*

After the end of the war and the termination of the DDR-programme, the ex-combatants in Voinjama (as elsewhere in Liberia) returned to the same life as the one they had lived prior to the war: a life of poverty, marginalisation and few if any potential for upward social mobility (for example 44 percent of the informants in Monrovia are unemployed; that is, with one exception: they were not ordinary Liberian youths anymore as they had assumed the status of ex-combatants. The job training and skills training that the DDR-programme had given them were of little use in their quest for employment, and their wartime experience was only defined in negative terms. This was also the case in Voinjama where many ex-combatants claimed that they felt useless and seen as 'disposable youths' by UN and other humanitarian actors that arrived in the area after



the war ended. They ended up precisely as poor as they were when the war started, the only difference was that they after the war also were singled out as a security threat, making their aspirations of work, progress and upward social mobility even harder to achieve. This was their life-world situation in Voinjama until new local security dynamics lead to a demand for the skills, networks and command structures that the ex-combatants acquired during the war.

After the war ended in August 2003, some sort of peace and stability returned to Voinjama in 2004, and the period until the end of 2007 was quite calm. However, in the early part of 2008, the city of Voinjama and the surrounding areas witness a sharp increase of criminality and uncertainty. Drugs were prevalent and armed robberies happened almost everyday. The Pakistani troops that constituted the local UNMIL attachment could not do very much, the local Liberian police not only lacked manpower and resources, but was also seen as corrupt, and a local judiciary system did not exist. In addition, rumours also started circulating that ‘Hardman’, a notorious expert in ritual killings were about to relocate from Gbargna to Voinjama and make this area the centre of his operations.<sup>5</sup> Thus, feeling increasingly under threat, local people and the business community, Loma and Mandingo alike turned to the only people they believed could provide security, the faction leaders from the war that still had command structure authority.

The one they turned to was ‘Master General’, a quite respected, but also much feared LURD leader during the war. Master General quickly seized the initiative and reactivated his command structures from the war (e.g. LURD), but also included some of his former enemies; that is people who had fought for Taylor or local Taylor-allied Loma militias. The product was an effective neighbourhood militia that acted as a night watch patrolling the streets of Voinjama every night from midnight to five am in the morning established. Master General was the ‘commander’, but the night watch was also given a civilian superstructure in the form of a committee consisting of a chairman (a Mandingo youth leader), a co-chairman (a rich Loma farmer) and a secretary (an educated Mandingo youth leader). This committee kept records of suspected criminals apprehended, before they were either handed over to the police or just chased out of the town and the area, and administered the revenue collection needed to maintain the night

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Hardman’ is not a mythical figure. He exists, but whether he in fact is a ‘specialist’ in ritual killings and planned to relocate himself to Voinjama is not important. People act on perceptions, and it is therefore the perceptions that are interesting and in this case not necessarily what was fact and what was fiction.

watch. Each household contributed 20 Liberian dollars per week, whereas shop owners paid 50 Liberian dollars per week for each shop or market stall that they owned.

In the months that this 'experiment' in local security provision lasted (basically to the end of 2008) crime dropped remarkably. The ex-combatants not only felt useful, but also were seen as valuable community members and not a latent security threat, and earned some money as well. Thus, what this case suggest is not only that peaceful remobilisation such as this through latent command structures can facilitate reintegration, but also create even state-like security systems that can fill a void that the Liberian state and its international partners had ignored. The night watch not only provided security, it also administered justice and collected revenue to maintain this system in a legitimate manner. When the system was dismantled it was simply because it was not seen as needed anymore, but the committee continues to meet to screen the security situation and discussions concerning the permanent re-establishment of the night watch continues. All of this happened and continues to happen without much involvement of the Liberian state and the UN and other international agencies, suggesting that the latter seem to stick to the assumption that the ex-combatants constitutes a particular difficult and dangerous segment of the Liberian population. The local community, however, saw them as what they really are ordinary youths who ended up fighting due to the specific circumstances of the Liberian civil war.

### **Some concluding thoughts**

The DDR program in Liberia, as elsewhere, is built on the assumption that there is something particularly dangerous and marginalised about the group of people who constituted the rank-and-file of the factions involved in the war. This is, as we have seen, not necessarily the case. DDR is very much a reaction to the notion that these people are unattached to society, set apart in their own world, and therefore needs particular attention. This is not the case in Liberia, and the DDR-programme may therefore have had the opposite effect.

This suggests that DDR approaches are in dire need of a rethinking that links them more directly to programmes aimed at social cohesion and societal security. In this regard, DDR can still play an important role as an official signpost for general demobilisation and disarmament, the first step towards an improved security situation, and a change from 'tactical' to 'strategic' agency. This has, however, not been the case of DDR in Liberia. Rather as the case study from Voinjama showed, a movement from

the 'tactical' to the 'strategic' aspect of agency only started when peaceful remobilisation occurred to serve a local demand for security. Re-examining security considerations can therefore help us understand these challenges, as well as illustrating the importance of basing post-conflict programmes such as DDR on knowledge derived from and specific to the local context.

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