

BOOK REVIEW

Ibrahim Bangura, ed. *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Africa*. New York: Routledge, 2023. 302 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$31.99. Paper. ISBN: 9781032487793.

How societies are reestablished after conflict remains a key concern for citizens and policymakers, as unresolved issues in one conflict tend to become the seeds that grow into a subsequent one. Programs to transition combatants through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes are often a critical component to building an enduring peace after conflict. In *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Africa*, editor Ibrahim Bangura and his contributors weave together a rich perspective on the evolution and practices of DDR in Africa, adding to the existing literature. Throughout the book, the authors argue that if DDR programs are to succeed in their policy and practical objectives, then context matters in DDR program design and implementation. From this vantage, the book should be a welcome addition to the shelves of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

The book opens with a survey of DDR's evolution and a focused analysis of key contextual themes that have been learned through decades of successful and unsuccessful DDR programs: transitional justice, children associated with armed groups, gender perspectives, and dealing with violent extremist groups. The remainder of the work contextualizes these themes through ten unique case studies contributed by a team of practitioners and researchers. The selection of case studies covers a mix of traditional and evolving practices of DDR in Africa, each highlighting an aspect of DDR in support of the editor's contextualization argument. Case studies on Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone examine the long-term effectiveness of DDR processes following negotiated ends to civil wars, while the cases of Zimbabwe and South Africa examine the efficacy of reintegration mechanisms in postliberation struggles. The innovative combination of DDR practices and community violence reduction in the Central African Republic points to new ideas on stabilizing conflict, while the appropriateness of DDR in addressing community militias is examined in the case of South Sudan. The evolution of DDR concepts during ongoing conflicts is highlighted in cases studies covering Nigeria's and Somalia's respective efforts to induce and handle defections from Islamist insurgencies.

The book's strength lies in its comprehensive approach to the theory and practice of DDR in Africa. It adds to a body of knowledge on DDR—often

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comprised of policy papers, workshop reports, and studies of specific instances of DDR activity—by synthesizing case studies with thematic issues. In this way, the contributors achieve the book's aim of arguing that context matters in designing successful DDR programs. The division of the conceptual section provides practitioners and policymakers deeper insight into key considerations in DDR to ensure that policy and programming decisions consider all involved in a conflict, not just the archetypal young male combatant. Likewise, for those with little knowledge of Africa's many conflicts, the cases quickly arm readers with a basic understanding of the conflict and its actors before delving into the case's thematic DDR issue, making this a useful volume for practitioners working on DDR issues outside of Africa. The studies on Nigeria and Somalia are the most valuable, as they point to the leading edge of DDR theory and practice, namely the use of DDR's many tools and techniques to reduce an opponent's strength to conclude a conflict.

However, the volume has some minor weaknesses. As an aid to the policy-maker and DDR planner, aside from highlighting a specific contextual theme in each case, the case studies could be improved by including a look at how DDR plans were developed and implemented. With each case being the product of unique factors, influences, and decisions, including this aspect of the case would enable the book to have greater value to those determining the scope, timing, and resourcing of future DDR interventions. Furthermore, the copy-editing could be improved. The use of acronyms and their spelling is inconsistent throughout, decreasing accessibility of the text to laymen. Likewise, inconsistently formatted bibliographic citations in several chapters decrease accessibility to additional sources for those wanting to know more about the subject of DDR.

Every war or conflict contains social-political dilemmas that must be addressed to achieve a durable peace: What to do with those members of society who chose to use violence on behalf of their group? How should they be induced to turn from violence and towards the life of an everyday citizen? Decisions on what to do with ex-combatants and their future place in society, are inherently political—and not technical—questions. Successfully addressing these questions—and thus designing technical approaches—necessitates a great deal of context specific to a given conflict. By highlighting this critical aspect, the book succeeds at meeting the editor's goal.

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[doi:10.1017/asr.2024.170](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2024.170)