

## **From Conflict to Ownership: Participatory Approaches to the Reintegration of Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone and Liberia**

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The reintegration of ex-combatants has become recognised as a standard tool in peacebuilding. Empirical data on their effectiveness suggest varying degrees of success. The need for a more holistic, integrated approach, in which there is greater local ownership of the process, has long been recognised. However, putting this into practice remains a challenge.

The reintegration of ex-combatants ultimately takes place in the community, and merges with development and post-conflict reconstruction. This study uses the concept of “participation” from development discourse, to look at reintegration in Sierra Leone and Liberia. A participatory approach involves potential stakeholders having a say in how interventions are planned, implemented, and monitored. Participation is largely unexplored in the context of DDR. The study looks at the extent to which the reintegration programmes can be said to be participatory. It also seeks to identify the constraints and enabling factors in taking a participatory approach, and the impact on stakeholders. The data was gathered using focus group discussions and surveys of ex-combatants, and semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders.

It finds that participation and ownership are only seen to a limited extent, and only in certain situations. Many ex-combatants felt they did not receive adequate information, that it was often inaccurate, and that programmes did not proceed in line with their expectations. There was limited opportunity to have a say in the process, affecting the perceived degree of ownership in it. Women in particular were more likely to be excluded from the programmes. More participatory processes were however noted in specific areas, such as the programmes for children, or later interventions after the main caseload had been dealt with.

Constraints on taking a participatory approach which are identified include short timescales for implementation, security concerns, differing agendas between the various actors, lack of capacity, population movement, and post-conflict disruption. Participation proves to be a useful framework for assessing reintegration programmes, and for planning the more integrated approach which has long been advocated.