

Afghanistan: Mediation-based DDR

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International priorities on counterterrorism delayed and contorted Afghanistan's DDR program. The 2001 Bonn Agreement after the Taliban fell did not include DDR. DDR began in Afghanistan in 2003 to address anti-Taliban militias. The first DDR programme offered individual former militia commanders political appointments as an incentive to go through DDR. This had the negative side effect of setting into place political appointees who the public accused of human rights abuses and corruption.⁵⁴ Rewarding these militia leaders with political appointment created a sense that counterterrorism was more important than human rights or the rule of law. It entrenched public distrust in the Afghan government and in turn also contributed to Taliban recruitment.

Without setting up DDR encampments to entice whole militia units to go through DDR together, donor governments channelled lower level former militia went through an individual DDR process. Beginning with soldiers giving up their weapons in a parade and attending a demobilisation workshop in which they promised not to take up arms again, the programmes offered demobilised individuals a package of food and clothing. However, without a peace agreement in place, DDR did not stick. Some demobilised combatants turned back to militia groups and some went to the drug trade.⁵⁵ At best DDR was a waste of time and money. At worse, the contentious political appointments resulting from these efforts entrenched public distrust of the Afghan government and increased Taliban recruitment.

The challenge

The lack of a peace agreement made it difficult to achieve sustainable DDR.

Theory of change:

Use mediation to address grievances at the local and provincial levels to enable sustainable DDR and human security.

A new generation of DDR programmes imagined that local Taliban commanders and their groups could disarm together through a mediated process that would address local grievances. A story from Helmand Province inspired this new model. An armed opposition group had agreed to stop fighting the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), reject out of area fighters, remove or show the location of planted IEDs (improvised explosive devices), allow freedom of movement to patrols, and accept Afghan National Security Force checkpoints. In return, the Afghan government agreed to increase Afghan security forces to ensure that there are Afghans partnered in all home search and patrols with international forces to address widespread complaints of international forces searching Afghan homes. The Afghan government also promised to begin short-term cash for work and long-term economic development opportunities for ex-combatants.

Afghan civil society was the only stakeholder in Afghanistan with the capacity to design and carry out a mediation-based DDR model. Afghan civil society organisations (CSOs) have been carrying out peacebuilding programmes in Afghanistan since the early 1990s to mediate water and land disputes, domestic violence and family issues as well as conflicts within community

⁵⁴ Patricia Gossman. *Transitional Justice and DDR: The Case of Afghanistan*. International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). June 2009.

⁵⁵ Caroline A. Hartzell. *Missed Opportunities The Impact of DDR on SSR in Afghanistan*. US Institute of Peace Special Report 270. April 2011.

development councils over setting development priorities. One Afghan CSO⁵⁶ designed a programme to harness Afghan peacebuilding capacity to this new generation of DDR. The Afghan CSO facilitated a pilot DDR programme based on mediation and grievance resolution from October 2010 through January 2011 in 3 provinces and 16 communities including the following components.

Rapid Response Team: The Afghan government identified emerging reintegration opportunities. Government staff provided permission letters to the Afghan CSO's field staff to conduct an independent assessment of economic, ideological, political and security grievances among the reintegrees and the communities to which they would return. This step provided information about the core grievances driving the insurgency. Those interviewed included commanders, reintegrees and members of communities ranging from households to elders and religious leaders, labourers, traders, and district level political leadership. This assessment helped identify potential "internally-generated" incentives for DDR including face-saving mechanisms for reintegrating, local security guarantees, and promoting local coexistence so as to foster successful reintegration rather than relying on "externally-generated" incentives such as financial payments.

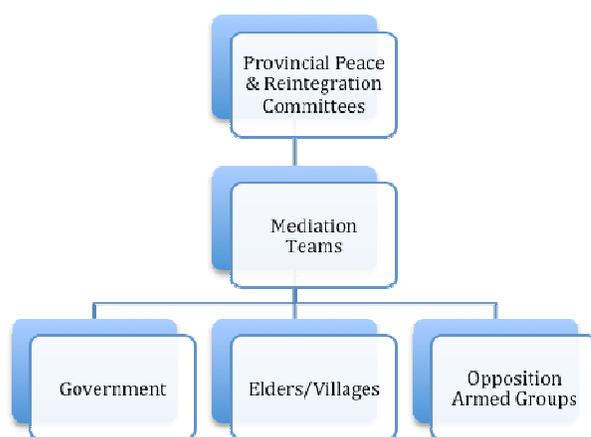


Figure 13: Structure of Mediation Teams

Provincial and Local Community Mediation and Grievance Resolution:

Government authorities identified a mix of diverse provincial leaders to join Provincial Peace and Reintegration Committees. The Afghan CSO trained provincial and local mediation and grievance resolution teams composed of two representatives from each group: government representatives, members of non-state armed opposition groups, and community representatives including local village elders, local mullahs, and community members.

In some communities, local peace committees already existed as part of the nation-wide network of existing

Community Development Councils. Where there were no peace committees, the Afghan CSO helped to set them up.

The mediation process included three phases. First, the process identified each stakeholder's key issues or grievances necessary to reach a DDR agreement. Second, the mediation explored options for resolving each of the issues. Third, the mediation developed a signed agreement that met all stakeholders' interests. By the end of January 2011, the Afghan CSO had trained 400 people in three provinces to help the reintegrees and communities cope with reintegration, leveraging both formal and informal justice systems. The programme also improved local capacity for addressing longer term conflicts directly related to the reintegrees as well as other issues such as local disputes over land, water, debts, domestic violence and other community issues.

⁵⁶ The name of the Afghan CSO is withheld intentionally given the security risks to civil society in Afghanistan.



Figure 14: Components of Grievance-based DDR Programme

Monitoring and Assessment Team: Afghan CSO research teams of four to six members monitored the roll out of the DDR programme in three provinces. The research teams also conducted focus groups to identify the effects of reintegration on the community, and track overall human security at the village and district level. To do this, the CSO developed a research tool based on locally identified human security indicators measuring people’s ability to move around, provide for their families and access governance systems and service. The human security indicator tool measured the accuracy of perceptions by counting actual events, such as the number of visits made to specific districts by local, provincial and national government representatives and the number of police interaction with the community. The research monitored trends and changes of both the former combatants and the communities into which they were reintegrating in terms of physical security, freedom of movement, economic well-being and access to governance and justice. The methodology provided direct comparison across provinces, including both qualitative and quantitative information delivered on a monthly and quarterly basis. The Afghan CSO then wrote policy recommendations for security policymakers based on the human security research.

Future DDR in Afghanistan: Political opposition to this approach eventually made it impossible for this programme to continue. Some of the former militia leaders cum provincial leaders who had benefited from political appointments during the first round of DDR may have obstructed a mediation-based DDR effort that would bring a new set of political rivals from the battleground. However, a negotiated end to the war in Afghanistan will create an unprecedented urgency for DDR.⁵⁷ The lessons from this peacebuilding approach to DDR will be essential to avoid the failures of past DDR processes such as technical fixes and short-sighted political appointments that undermine human security. DDR must address underlying grievances and needs, and reknit social relationships.



⁵⁷ DeeDee Derksen. *Reintegrating Armed Groups in Afghanistan: Lessons from the Past*. US Institute of Peace. PeaceBrief 168, March 7, 2014.