



Women and DDR in Mozambique

The Exclusionary and Inclusionary Dynamics of DDR Programs

Protecting women from conflict-related sexual violence and facilitating their meaningful participation in peace processes are the cornerstones of the UN's Women, Peace, and Security agenda. However, the international community has yet to systematically engage with women as combatants and perpetrators of violence. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) is an important area that has often excluded women. Since 1992, Mozambique has participated in several peace processes and two national DDR programs (in 1992 and 2019). Although the 1992 DDR largely excluded women from the design and implementation of the program, the 2019 DDR addressed some of the shortcomings of the earlier process. In this brief, we examine the causes and consequences of these exclusionary and inclusionary dynamics.

Brief Points

- Between 2012 and 2019, the Government of Mozambique (Frelimo) and Renamo engaged in more than 100 negotiating rounds, but with one exception women were not included in the peace negotiations.
- During and after the conflict, women played various, often strategic roles to ensure their security and survival, but women remained outside the DDR negotiation and implementation process.
- The 1992 DDR program did not focus on female ex-combatants. By contrast, the 2019 DDR program, through seeking to identify employment and education opportunities for ex-combatants, their families, and the community, benefits a wider group of women.
- Female ex-combatants and women associated with armed groups in Mozambique receive support from DDR programs but are not actors with decision-making power.

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Women in DDR Processes

Women and girls are integral participants in armed groups. Between 1946 and 2015, 63% of rebel groups included women in some capacity, and in approximately 45% of the groups women held leadership positions.¹ Women and girls participate directly as combatants or commanders, or indirectly (either voluntarily or through forced recruitment) in such roles as spy, smuggler, translator, sex worker, wife, cook, nurse, or communication advocate.² Despite women's widespread and varied experiences on the frontlines, they are still often represented as victims of, rather than as actors in, conflict. Further, they remain grossly underrepresented in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) provisions of peace agreements (Hauge 2015), despite a growing international call that they be more fully included. More specifically, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) explicitly calls on all parties involved in DDR processes to consider and involve women. The UN's Integrated DDR Standards (2006) includes a separate module on Gender and DDR and provides detailed recommendations regarding the inclusion of women who are directly or indirectly involved in armed forces.

There are several possible reasons for the exclusion of female ex-combatants. First, there is a perception that women do not constitute a threat to peace and hence they are not targeted by such programs. Second, DDR programs operate with limited budgets; they thus tend to adopt a narrow definition of ex-combatants that, in most cases, includes only those women who possess weapons. Third, war-time mobilization strategies have important implications for post-war reintegration processes. Women who are forcefully recruited to become wives or combatants often escape before DDR programs start, reintegrating individually and spontaneously without financial and psychosocial support (Bouta, Frerks & Bannon 2004). Even when included in DDR programs, female ex-combatants tend to receive insufficient attention as beneficiaries, and they rarely become active participants in the negotiations preceding DDR programs. The lack of attention to and integration of women in DDR processes is problematic because research shows that women contribute to the activities of non-state groups in a wide variety of ways (both violent and non-violent). Also, the ways in which women contribute can impact the overall strategy of the non-state group.

In this brief, we examine the different roles women played in Mozambique's conflict between Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, Front for the Liberation of Mozambique), which represented the government, and Renamo (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, National Resistance Movement of Mozambique), and specifically on women's limited inclusion in DDR programs. Using primary and secondary sources, complemented by interviews with individuals involved in the 1992 and 2019 peace negotiations and DDR implementation in Mozambique, we show that, although the 2019 DDR program is more inclusive than the 1992 program, women were still excluded from the program's design and continue to appear as recipients of support and not as actors with decision-making power.

Peace and Conflict Dynamics in Mozambique

There are several conflicts taking place simultaneously in Mozambique,³ but we focus on the one between the Government of Mozambique (Frelimo) and Renamo. The guerrilla army Frelimo fought for Mozambique's independence from Portugal, which it gained in 1975. Two years later, in 1977, the country fell into a 16-year civil war between the Frelimo-led government and Renamo. Frelimo embraced a Marxist-Leninist ideology and received support from the Soviet Union; Renamo was supported by Mozambique's neighbors – Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and South Africa – which were led by white minorities who viewed the creation of a socialist state as a threat.⁴ The civil war ended in 1992 when the internationally mediated General Peace Accord (GPA) was signed in Rome.

The GPA provided for the disarmament of both parties and the integration of reduced Frelimo and Renamo forces into a single, national army. The UN played a central role in implementing the GPA through a peacekeeping mission, the UN's Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ). UNOMOZ was mandated to monitor and support the ceasefire, cantonment, disarmament, and demobilization of nearly 110,000 combatants on both sides, as well as the creation of the new army, the resettlement of millions of refugees and displaced people, and the holding of national elections. At the end of the war, Renamo provided a list of about 32,000 combatants for demobilization that included just a few hundred women. Protocol IV of the GPA

contained references to DDR but not with regard to women. By 1994, approximately 92,000 soldiers – 71,000 Frelimo and 21,000 Renamo – had been demobilized (Vines 2021: 327). That same year, the first multiparty election was held, and Frelimo won.

According to Vines (2013), UNOMOZ's priorities were to dismantle Renamo's command and control structures and to disperse ex-combatants. Disarmament was not prioritized because of the perception that it would undermine the peace process. ONUMOZ collected just over 200,000 weapons during and after the demobilization, but none were destroyed (Vines 2013: 381). The lack of comprehensive disarmament meant that Renamo maintained a significant supply of arms and ammunition and it often threatened to return to armed conflict. A subsequent operation to uncover hidden weapons located over 50,000 small arms and over 31 million rounds of ammunition (Littlejohn 2015).

While the lack of large-scale conflict recurrence meant that Mozambique appeared to be a successful case of war to peace transition, unaddressed grievances persisted after 1992. In 2013, violence resumed between Frelimo and Renamo after years of relatively stable, albeit negative peace, after Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama announced the end of the GPA. A year later, the two parties declared the cessation of military hostilities but did not sign a formal peace agreement. In 2015, armed violence resumed and persisted until late December 2016.

On 6 August 2019, after more than 116 negotiation rounds (2012–2019), the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation was announced between Frelimo, represented by President Filipe Nyusi, and Renamo, represented by their new leader, Ossufo Momade. This peace accord aimed to eliminate the political and military hostilities and to remedy all shortcomings related to the GPA. It consists of the Agreement on the Definitive Cessation of Military Hostilities, the DDR process, political reforms related to decentralization, and the reform of the security sector. The Maputo Agreement provides for the complete disarmament of Renamo's armed wing, a process managed by the Military Affairs Commission, composed of government and Renamo forces. It addresses the integration of senior Renamo forces into the Mozambican Armed and Defence Forces (FADM) and the police, a condition

previously set by Renamo. Since the agreement was reached, the Renamo Military Junta – a splinter faction of Renamo – has engaged in violence against both state forces and civilians.

Women in Peace and Conflict in Mozambique

During the civil war (1976–1992), women and girls were involved in both the Renamo and Frelimo fighting forces, but their presence and contributions were largely unaddressed in the peace process.⁵ Importantly, women’s experiences were not homogenous. Some experienced varying degrees of empowerment, whereas others became marginalized. These different experiences are strongly connected to the various roles – both violent and non-violent – that women performed during the conflict. Within the military camps, some women were used as sex slaves and some were exposed to forced marriages, while others cooked and provided shelter and education. Some women assumed strategic positions as informants and messengers for the armed groups.

The post-1992, UNOMOZ-led DDR process prioritized male fighters, even though, according to some reports, girls constituted up to 40% of the minors within Renamo (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 31). The patterns of recruitment (forced versus voluntary) of women and girls changed over the course of the conflict, reflecting political and military needs of Renamo and Frelimo. There is no reliable data on how many men and women participated as soldiers and combatants in the two groups, with estimates ranging from 90,000 to 150,000 (Barth 2022: 5). In the UNOMUZ-led demobilization process, women only accounted for a small share of those recognized as combatants (1,380 out of 92,881) (Schafer 1998: 216). Several female ex-combatants either never showed up at all or left the demobilization camps due to a lack of information about the process and overall insecurity within the camps. The reintegration process after the 1992 peace agreement failed to address the specific needs of girls and female ex-combatants. Although some female combatants gained actual decision-making power during the war, they rarely maintained it in the aftermath of the conflict. Given the lack of attention to female ex-combatants, girls and women often reintegrated individually and spontaneously. They thus remained largely hidden and received no financial or psychosocial support. Female ex-combatants

were often stigmatized upon return and faced specific reintegration challenges. Spiritual and religious rituals were used to assist some girls in reintegrating into their communities (McKay & Mazurana 2004).

Women assumed important roles in arms collection initiatives too. One of our interviewees explained that, during the seminars, called People Preparation for Peace, a women participant expressed concerns about the presence of weapons and their potential detriment to peace.⁶ In response, the Transforming Weapons into Hoes (TAE) initiative was launched by the Christian Council of Mozambique. Over a 20-year period, TAE collected over a million weapons and rounds of ammunition from the civilian population and exchanged them for goods, such as sewing machines, that promote livelihoods.

Women in the 2019 DDR Process

In the Maputo peace negotiations only one woman, Arsénia Massingue, currently Mozambique’s Minister of the Interior, participated. Although the official website for the Maputo peace process states that “it is crucial that the current DDR process is gender sensitive, and that preventive and mitigation measures are adequately taken,” the 2019 DDR process pays inadequate attention to female ex-combatants.⁷ The implementation of the peace process is ongoing and thus several details are classified, making data collection difficult. The Maputo agreement’s DDR process expected 5,221 ex-combatants – 4,964 men and 257 women – to disarm. Between 2020 and 2021, 63% of the DDR beneficiaries (156 of 257 women and 3,111 of 4,964 men) were demobilized.⁸ This figure only includes women who used arms, however. Women who performed other roles and participated indirectly in the conflict were not eligible to receive direct reintegration support.

Our interviews with representatives from the Peace Process Support Secretariat revealed that the current DDR program is based on three pillars: the individual, the family, and the community. This is a substantially different structure from that of the 1992 DDR program, which focused exclusively on ex-combatants. The individual pillar seeks to identify opportunities for the beneficiary (ex-combatant) according to the individual’s desires or available opportunities. The family pillar seeks to identify educational and employment opportunities for the beneficiary’s

direct dependents, such as children, grandchildren, and others, to help ensure that each ex-combatant has at least one income source. Finally, the community pillar seeks to integrate ex-combatants and community members into partner projects so that the peace funds support the entire community.⁹ Importantly, although female ex-combatants who did not possess weapons are not directly addressed in the Maputo agreement, the three-pillar approach makes it possible for a larger group of women to benefit from the DDR program than was the case in 1992.

Conclusions

In this brief, we examined the 1992 and 2019 DDR processes in Mozambique with a focus on women’s involvement. The 1992 DDR program largely failed to address the specific needs of women and girls. Women were involved neither in the negotiations nor in the implementation of the DDR program despite having been involved in both the state and the non-state armed forces. The 2019 DDR program remedied some of the shortcomings of 1992. The 2019 program includes family and community pillars in addition to an individual one and hence provides opportunities for some women to benefit from the socio-economic support that the DDR program provides. Although this is a welcome development, we argue that women are still inadequately represented in the DDR process because no female combatants were involved in the DDR negotiations and planning. This means that they currently are seen *as recipients of support* and *not as agents* with decision-making capacity to shape the DDR program and potential outcomes. We argue that the exclusion of female ex-combatants from both negotiations and implementation undermines the transformative potential of the DDR process. It may make communities less resilient, exacerbate existing gender inequalities within them, and reduce opportunities for women and girls to generate income. Under such conditions, excluded and marginalized women could be quickly reintegrated into armed groups.

Female ex-combatants can help provide valuable insights into community perceptions and expectations regarding DDR, weapons stockpiles, logistical supply routes, and other key issues. Women who participated in the conflict, both directly and indirectly, were in some cases able to break free of traditional patriarchal structures

and become empowered. However, such positive results can easily be reversed in the post-conflict environment, especially if DDR employment opportunities for women are limited to work traditionally done by females.

It is time for the international community to engage with women as agents of violence and to design adequate frameworks that can be tailored to local contexts. This should be a bottom-up endeavor and should include female combatants in peace negotiations from their outset. Ensuring that female combatants are represented and their specific needs spelled out in the peace agreement is the first step to ensuring inclusive reintegration outcomes.

Recommendations for mediators and DDR implementers

- Increase the participation of female ex-combatants and civilian women and girls in the peace negotiations and in the DDR design.
- Ensure that the text of the peace agreement contains specific references to female ex-combatants and women who were indirectly involved in the conflict.
- Consult female ex-combatants to understand their perceptions of the potential positive impact of their combatant role.
- Design vocational and employment opportunities that make use of the skills that female ex-combatants acquired during the conflict to facilitate their post-conflict economic independence. ■

Notes

1. Loken, Meredith & Hilary Matfess (Forthcoming) Introducing the Women's Activities in Armed Rebellion (WAAR) Project 1946–2015. *Journal of Peace Research*.

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2. The UN IDDRS differentiates between female combatants, females associated with armed forces and groups (FAAFGs), and female dependents.
3. In 2018, an Islamist insurgency launched by Ansar al-Sunnah became active in Cabo Delgado province in northern Mozambique.
4. Renamo members initially included demobilized soldiers from the colonial army and Frelimo dissidents.
5. Women were an active part of Frelimo's liberation war against the Portuguese colonial power. In 1967, Frelimo established the Destacamento Feminino (DF), composed of girls and young women who were given military training (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 11).
6. Interview in Maputo. 30 March 2022.
7. Maputo Accord official website, gender mainstreaming. Available at: maputoaccord.org/gender-mainstreaming. Accessed: 27 September 2022.
8. Maputo Accord official website. Available at: maputoaccord.org/en/home. Accessed: 27 September 2022.
9. Interview with Peace Process Support Secretariat member. Maputo. 30 March 2022.

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THE PROJECT

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