

DISCUSSION NOTE BASED ON THE TDRP DDRNET SEMINARS ON

Sustainable Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Shadow Economies and Cross-Border Trade

May 2012

Foreword

This note draws on a variety of studies, in particular the work produced for the seminar series on reintegration sustainability in the context of shadow economies that the TDRP organized.¹

The debate around disarmament/demobilization/reintegration (DDR) and shadow economies originates in an interrogation of the mixed results of DDR reintegration initiatives.² The point of departure for the discussion of shadow economies and the nature of ex-combatant unrecorded economic activity has been that fragile environments (which include fragmented economies) are characterized by unregulated, illicit activities, in which formal governance is weak.3 In this context formal employment and income generating activities are limited, thus presenting one of the many challenges to the efficacy of reintegration initiatives: how to stimulate legitimate economic activity within the informal or unrecorded economy, which is geared towards the promotion of peace and human development.4

The analysis presented in this paper includes:

- i. the taxonomy of war economies,
- ii. the networks of exchange and actors that constitute war economies, and
- iii. the resultant challenges to DDR.

The note exercises some freedom when building on the previous analyses to suggest that fundamentally DDR practitioners

and architects require more accurate and nuanced information on the political economy at the local, national and regional levels in order to tailor the Reintegration⁵ response to the needs of ex-combatants. It also suggests that, as a fundamental principle, DDR should acknowledge the rationality, functionality and resilience⁶ of shadow economies, and the welfare aspects of shadow economies for conflict dependents,⁷ including ex-combatants.

What is fundamental to how DDR best engages with ex-combatants in shadow economies and how it exists within the broad range of transformative strategies in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS) is that DDR avoids and counters the representation of shadow economies as abnormal or illegal.8 Shadow economies are rational, functional and resilient. The problems they present to peace building are not the remit of DDR alone. However understanding the role of shadow economies for communities enduring the pathology of underdevelopment9 is crucial for any development of DDR's transformative agenda and the implementation of comprehensive Reintegration.

Key concepts: Defining shadow economies

The most fundamental concept to this analysis is the definition of the economic realities being discussed. The definition

of "shadow" or "unrecorded" economy is not just an exercise in semantics; it has significance in so far as it informs a typology of local, national, regional and global economies, ascribes roles to the diverse actors in shadow economies and defines functions of the economies and networks of exchange and support that constitute how people (including excombatants) engage with informal trade.

Defining shadow economy does not necessitate presenting again theories of the economic dimensions of conflict such as greed and grievance¹⁰ or theories that go beyond greed and grievance11 (they are well explored elsewhere¹²). Rather it is an opportunity to ground the analysis (including the one presented during the DDRnet seminars) in the realities of shadow economies; that is, in the rationality, functionality and resilience of shadow economies. By doing so the main deficits in our knowledge can begin to be addressed. This exercise thus becomes a fundamental starting point for how transformative strategies including DDR can be conceptualized to support conflict dependents¹³ including ex-combatants.

This paper proposes using the terminology defined by Pugh et al (2004) and then deepening the analysis to examine the complexity of the environment in which conflict-related economic activity occurs, in particular:

the geography of shadow economies,

- the actors in shadow economies, and
- the organizing principles or networks that are part of shadow economies and constitute how economic activity happens.

Reasoning that there is a tendency to dismiss "criminality" as an abnormality in war economies and post-conflict transformations employing the following three terms avoids such normative loading and assists in distinguishing the kinds of economic behavior that occur in war torn settings. War economy is considered a catch-all term that includes the following three sub-sets: combat, shadow and coping economies. These are the three signifiers that suggest varied motives for, and dynamics in, waging war, profiteering and coping. 14

Combat economies include both (1) the capture control over production and economic resources to sustain conflict and (2) economic strategies of war aimed at disempowerment of specific groups ... The central economic agents are combatant parties (whether state militaries or nonstate armed groups), and their political backers who endeavour to exercise economic power on behalf of their constituencies. The term "shadow economy" refers to economic activities that are conducted outside state regulated frameworks and are not audited by the state institutions. The key economic agents are those whose objectives may be economic rather than military but whose rationales depend on economic problems and opportunities brought about by the erosion of state authority ... The shadow economy may incorporate the "coping economy". This latter term refers to economic activity undertaken by population groups that are using their asset-base to more or less maintain basic living standards or survive by utilizing a dwindling asset-base to maintain minimum or below-minimum living standards.15

Unless otherwise stated in this paper "shadow economy" includes "coping economy".

The complexity of the environment

Understood in a broad sense, the environment of war economies is hugely complex. This is also the case for shadow and coping economies. This section examines shadow and coping economies first by geographical scope and second through a high level taxonomy of actors.

Fundamentally there are two key structures that connect geographic spaces and actors:

- i. border regions that connect national and regional geographies, and
- ii. networks (social, political, and economic) that connect actors to local and global spaces where the flows of the various currencies and commodities of shadow and coping economies occur.

In fragile and conflict-affected states, border areas are often neglected and the historical loci of conflict. However they are also the *neuralgia spots*¹⁶, where, due to weak allegiance with national governments and weak enforcement and governance by the national government, they become spaces where cross-border activities occur, undermining the sovereignty of more than one state. They are regions paradoxically empowered by their centrality to trade in shadow economies.

For ex-combatants, reintegration involves crossing physical borders of return and the apparently less tangible boundaries of kin and community. Boundaries are the symbolic borders that separate individuals or groups who appear to be "on the same side" and can be part of the kinship, economic or social networks into which ex-combatants try to reintegrate on returning from conflict. They are complicated systems of economic and social inclusion and exclusion. They are part of the networks that facilitate or prevent ex-combatants from engaging with the economic reality they encounter on their return, be it through the shadow economy in general or the coping economy in particular.

For ex-combatants and communities affected by conflict, networks can be limited to one or two people, extend through families and communities, and can reach across official borders. Where networks span national borders (as with access to cross-border markets or productive agricultural lands), access to family and community can be under the control or influence of border officials. As is evident in petty cross-border trade in the Great Lakes Region and in particular in the Democratic Republic of Congo, border officials can be enmeshed in the shadow economy and engaged in taking and/or extorting bribes while controlling the flow of people and goods.17

Governance plays an important role in shadow economies. In some analysis governance is the central issue: borderlands are characterized by a pervasive dark side of globalization where there is a governance gap with no coherent means of enforcement, no system for technical governments collaboration between and no consensus and limited interstate agreements on the enforcement of claims to jurisdiction by national governments.¹⁸ The governance level at the border can be interpreted as a benchmark for the rest of a country. As such the implementation of transparency and predictability of policy regime at the border as well as other governance reforms can begin a process to improve the economic reality for border communities including ex-combatants, and reduce the pervasiveness of bribery and unofficial taxes¹⁹ that reflects wider governance challenges of a state or states.

In so far as a comprehensive understanding of the realities of borderlands can lead to reform and the development and implementation of a strategy to integrate shadow economy entrepreneurs into the formal economy, a comprehensive understanding of kin, social and economic networks into which ex-combatants reintegrate can greatly enhance the effectiveness of Reintegration. These programs can then target assistance to ex-combatants to gain economic parity with non-combatants and address the specific challenges of vulnerable groups of ex-combatants including women and children.20 It should be noted that in a situation of chronic

underdevelopment and high dependency on shadow economies, there is often little clear distinctions between *conflict entre- preneurs* who exploit subordinate positions in their economies, and *conflict dependents* who subsist precariously within them.²¹

From the perspective of Reintegration, the importance of geographies includes knowing the local context in which DDR must be implemented and have impact, but also knowing the larger environment of local, national and regional strategies by governments and donors to address any aspects of war economies that impact upon the goals of DDR. Similarly from the perspective of Reintegration programming, it is important to know how ex-combatants use social networks including kinship, command and communal networks and formal economic structures such as economic associations when understanding how Reintegration can be successful in specific geographies.

Fundamentally, understanding the geography and the agency of war economies means that specific programming in conflict recovery, including DDR, can clearly manage expectations about its potential interface with war economies and can be cognizant of the other drivers of war economies, including regional actors, state complicity, globalization, and the potential impact of donor interventions in fragile and conflict-affected states.

The Global Lens

A starting point for understanding the extent of the geography of war economies is the principle that war economies exist somewhere in the juncture of economic globalization, the pathologies of underdevelopment,²² and the legacy of some policies of international finance institutions and trade politics.²³ Beneath this global lens are complex regional, national and sub-national war economies including the shadow economies of the Great Lakes Region. These regional, national and subnational economies are not layered one on top of the other but rather overlap and are criss-crossed by networks, borderlands, border crossings and neuralgia spots.

The global dimensions of war economies are relevant to this analysis because trade

in commodities from war economies is international, linking local and global economies. There has been emphasis on the role of international trade and war economies in the greater Great Lakes Region.²⁴ The international dimension of war economies can be summarized as the extent to which the political economies or armed conflict reflect the negative impact of globalization and the negative impact of some of the most liberal economic aspects of international aid intervention in transforming conflict to peace25 and the peace conditionality26 often linked to aid interventions. The linkages between local war economies and global markets in commodities, arms, finance, people and narcotics are extensive. The creation and enforcement of robust international regulatory frameworks can contribute to mitigating war economies but they must be developed and used in correspondence and in parallel with regional and national control strategies characterized by strong local ownership. That said, the threat of actors in control strategies at all levels being complicit in the war economies they are supposed to be addressing is a risk to be carefully monitored and managed.27

The Regional Dimension

The regional dimension is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the geographies of war economies. War economies have significant regional dimensions that are directly linked to how conflict develops within regional conflict complexes28 and thrives on cross border trade networks, arms traffickers, even legal commercial entities that may have vested interest in continuation of conflict.29 The knowledge of the political economies of regional conflict coupled with an in-depth understanding of the local sub-national contexts are two key pillars on which more effective Reintegration programs are likely to be evolved. The Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) and the TDRP are two initiatives that have engaged in DDR from a regional basis but with an understanding of national contexts. The learning from the MDRP and TDRP, particularly the national reintegration and

community dynamics surveys conducted for the TDRP in the Great Lakes region, are likely to point to the importance of an indepth understanding of local contexts, but one which is situated within the political economy of the region.³⁰

Applying a regional filter to the understanding of war economies identifies where some of the opportunities are for acquiring a greater understanding of the regional political economy and the local economic and social conditions into which ex-combatants must be reintegrated. It also illuminates the potency of borderlands (including in the extent to which transiting goods across borders in conflict and fragile states where there is embedded war economy activity can hugely inflate the price of even everyday goods, not just commodities directly linked to conflict such as arms or commodities obtained through militia or illicit army-owned extractive industries³¹), and the legacy of governance gaps around national borders.

Regional data collection and regionally focused interventions in DDR and other peace-building initiatives are part of the package to be used to gain insight into regional political economies of conflict and the extent to which ex-combatants are active in regional war economies. A regional focus also suggests a means through which data and insight might be obtained; through the cooperation of regional civil society and peace building initiatives. Civil society often plays a strong role in the Reintegration work of the national DDR commissions. The contributions of civil society to peace building, including protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialization and promoting social cohesion,³² all illustrate the potential of national and regional civil society networks to contribute to the knowledge of the extent and functionality of war economies and the involvement of ex-combatants.

Consequently it would appear that there is much value in a regional DDR initiative such as the TDRP involving regional civil society networks in the *good enough coalitions*,³³ which should inform, assist, and implement peace building and recovery in fragile and conflict affected states.

The National, Sub-National and Local Levels

For many ex-combatants in the shadow economy, the rationality of the economy is limited to the borderlands, and the focus of the coping economy is more sub-national or local. Local economic realities into which ex-combatants are supposed to reintegrate are often so underdeveloped that there are few options but to become part of the coping economy, the pervasive economic reality of many conflict-affected communities. In such contexts the coping economy exceeds the recorded or formal economy. In places the risks of re-recruitment into rebel groups is increased as a result of the potential earnings in more sophisticated war economies such as those throughout the DRC and in particular in the borderlands in eastern DRC districts.34 The psychological, social and economic stressors of the coping economy could also be considered drivers of re-recruitment, particularly given how chronic underdevelopment and fragility severely limit opportunities for even the most fundamental employment or livelihood activities, and where resulting threats to human, income and food security are endemic.

In the Great Lakes Region the usual economic activities of ex-combatants have been collated35 and the dominant characteristic is that ex-combatants tend to engage in multiple low level income-generating activities. The results of Reintegration programs on the economic reintegration of ex-combatants, in particularly in the Great Lakes Region, is mixed. Studies in Uganda have identified that ex-combatants have returned to communities with limited skills and education as a direct consequence of time spent in conflict. The mix of spontaneous self-demobilization and formal demobilization has complicated the situation for communities that need to absorb these returning ex-combatants economically and socially. Moreover in many communities the situation is further complicated by the low level of economic development and by the income and food security challenges.36

The economic reality for many is that the coping economy is the main functional economy. Somewhat different from war economies (but there are no easy lines to be drawn), the shadow economy has a de facto role in economic recovery and development. Hence there are risks associated with neglecting the welfare benefits of shadow economies and using enforcement (or control interventions including as conditionality to aid) that are not accompanied by viable alternatives for civilian livelihoods. The effect is to increase the vulnerability of not just ex-combatants but also ordinary civilians.

Reintegration faces daunting challenges posed by the economic realities of life for reinserted ex-combatants. Reintegration components of national DDR programs (as well as initiatives derived from some national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) often target ex-combatants with economic training from a "one-sizefits-all" perspective that is intended to provide a starting point for their new income generation and economic stability. In reality ex-combatants are denied the opportunity to utilize newly acquired skills as the economic opportunities are simply not there in local economies. Vocational training received during reintegration does not match available opportunities or micro-finance or microlevel start-up capital is unavailable or difficult to access.³⁷ In other words the kind of reintegration support given does not account for the local political economy, information about which is often difficult to come by and often not in the possession of DDR architects or practitioners.

The result is that ex-combatants can have their ability to diversify livelihood strategies restricted and so must endure enforced dependency upon subsistence agriculture and activities in the coping economy. In many cases for those who have the opportunity to transition from the coping economy to the formal economy (usually through small business ventures and trading), the administrative and cost barriers to entering the formal economy (business registration procedures, official fees, etc.) are often prohibitive; so they remain in the shadow economy where their activity goes unrecorded.³⁸ It should be noted that

sufficient data on economic dynamics in fragile and conflict affected areas where DDR is implemented is often unavailable at the time a DDR program is designed.

The Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing Shadow Economies as Networks

There are various vantage points from which war economies can be viewed, taxonomized and analyzed including: (i) the geographic (local, national, regional and global), and (ii) the actors (mainly shadow economy entrepreneurs and dependents but also the huge variety of individuals and enterprises active in war economies). Combining the two themes (as above) gives some indication as to the depth and complexity of war economies.

However the dynamic nature of war economies, the interrelation of geographies and actors, and the mobility of war economies whereby economic activity can shift from country to country, region to region or indeed from market (subnational and international) to market, can be captured through using the concept of "networks". The mobility of shadow economies and the flexibility of routes of exchange (of commodities and cash) illustrate the usefulness of applying a holistic approach to macro-level regulation. On the other hand it also leads to understanding shadow economies as being embedded in the social and economic networks of excombatants and their families.

Regarding regulation, it is important for peace builders to be aware that concentration on economic reconstruction within the state, transformation to a market economy, and disciplinary regulation often has the effect of shifting shadow economic activities to a neighboring territory or alternative routes. By tackling controls at regional as well as the global and national levels, a holistic approach to regulation is possible, and evasion and adaptation through relocation becomes more difficult for the entrepreneurs of shadow trade.³⁹

At the level of national, regional or transnational regulation, networks of informal and formal trade constitute the war economy and the networks within which the diverse mix of entrepreneurs of the shadow trade operate: rebel groups, state armies, national and international business and finance, smugglers, pirates, politicians and consumers.40 While not immune from being entrepreneurs of the shadow trade, ex-combatants, their families and their communities constitute a large portion of dependents of the shadow trade: those benefiting from the welfare aspects of the coping economy but also often locked within it.

Ex-combatants, particularly those returning from rebellion, navigate, integrate, exploit and survive in coping economies through their social and economic networks: the networks of the immediate family, of the extended family, of their community, of their comrades (factional aspect of reintegration).41 These social networks are often the source of income generating activities (both shadow and formal) as well as means of accessing credit, particularly when gaining credit through microfinance institutions is not an available option for ex-combatants. These networks constitute the social and economic pathways to reintegration for many ex-combatants and are often enmeshed in the coping economy. The challenge to DDR architects and peacemakers is to be aware of the functionality of these networks, the local economic and social conditions facing ex-combatants, and the important welfare functions of the local coping economy, and accordingly to tailor DDR and Reintegration to this reality.

The Governance Deficit

The governance deficit is a common finding in the analysis of war economies. It generally refers to the lack of governance in locations where war economies are present. Like networks, the governance deficit is a complex phenomenon found at transnational, regional, national and local levels. As seen above, borderlands have been identified as hotspots that could be targeted in order to provide a (hopefully) steadily increasing benchmark for an

improved national policy environment. This in turn may begin a process to improve the economic reality for border communities, including ex-combatants.⁴²

But the governance deficit also has global dimensions and stretches to include multinational corporations, global financing instruments, such as the IMF and the economic policies of donors, that can marginalize economically vulnerable countries, exacerbate social stresses and contribute to the risk of violent conflict.⁴³ An outcome of this is that a context is created in which participation in shadow economic activities becomes a means by which those excluded from or relegated to the periphery of the global economy can reincorporate themselves into its workings.44 Other aspects such as the liberalization of global financial markets and technology penetration contribute to this interpenetration of local, regional and global markets45 and so trickle-down to inform the fundamental economic realities of life in the coping economy.

Conclusion: DDR, Reintegration and War Economies

In so far as ex-combatants are faced with a complex economic reality, similarly DDR must encounter the complex, multilayered reality of war economies. War economies encompass complex networks of exchange that span local markets and global financial and commodity exchanges, and within which there is a diversity of actors, entrepreneurs, opportunists and dependents.

Structural factors characterize the environment in which DDR architecture must be devised and Reintegration implemented, including: often chronic underdevelopment; state weaknesses; horizontal inequalities; deficiencies in revenue transparency; regional inequalities; neuralgia spots; resource predation; difficult international financing mechanisms and conflict. In other words: the environment is complex. From this arise two questions: how do peacemakers and DDR architects understand the environment? And, how in this environment, does DDR best achieve its transformative purpose?

In the first question, the knowledge deficit that challenges DDR is one that challenges other transformative strategies in fragile and conflict-affected states. There are guidelines, research and thinking, but arguably limited progress in addressing the gaps in knowledge of political economy from regional to local levels. A possible avenue for making DDR context-specific is employing good enough coalitions in security sector reform and DDR, which include actors from civil society to support aspects of the transition of states from conflict to development. The potential of civil society to contribute to peacebuilding, including knowledge acquisition, is evident.46 But many factors might enable or disable civil society, including non-state actors engaging in DDR and peace-building so the process is not clear-cut.⁴⁷ The role of regional networks, and international expert groups (as well as the exchange of information within and between these groups) is also identified as a means to address the knowledge gap. The challenges to DDR include identifying how it can compensate for the risk of re-recruitment into war economies and ensure its own implementation is such that there is equal access to tailored reintegration.48 Where integration into the army is part of the DDR process, the challenge is to ensure that there are no complaints of unequal access to reintegration and unequal treatment after reintegration. Also, DDR needs to ensure that it does not contribute to the continuation of militarized economies. 49

The knowledge deficit encompasses not just the local and regional economic and social contexts in which reintegration must take place, but it also challenges DDR architects in areas such as the socioeconomic profiling of ex-combatants; the compilation of evidence based on the effectiveness of Reintegration; and whether and how Reintegration best complements longer-term reconstruction and development.

In the second question, DDR practitioners must be conscious of the degree to which post conflict peace building must include good governance programs that target transparent and equitable resource management.⁵⁰ They must also know the extent (and duration) of the assistance

to ex-combatants to obtain alternative livelihood activities or to gradually transition out of the coping and shadow economies (and/or avoid re-enlistment into the war economy).

A fundamental construct for DDR to engage with ex-combatants in shadow econo-

mies and to exist within the broad range of transformative strategies in fragile and conflict-affected states is for it to avoid and counter the representation of shadow economies as *abnormal or illegal.*⁵¹ Shadow economies are (as was seen above) rational, functional and resilient.The problems they present to peace building are not the

remit of DDR alone. However, for DDR to maximize its transformative effect, it must be informed by a holistic understanding of the role played by shadow economies in the economic survival of communities in fragile and conflict affected states and areas.

- 1 The first DDRnet expert seminar took place in Washington DC on December 16, 2010 and the second in Addis Ababa on February 23, 2012.
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- 3 Ibid: 2.
- 4 lbid: 2.
- 5 "Reintegration" (upper case 'R') is used to denote Reintegration programming as part of DDR as opposed to "reintegration" (lower case "r") which is used to denote the social, economic and political realities of reintegration
- 6 Pugh Michael C et al. War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation.
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- 7 Jackson, Stephen. "Protecting livelihoods in violent economies" in Ballentine, Karen and Heiko Nitzsche (Eds.) Profiting from Peace: Managing the Resource Dimensions of Civil War, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London: 2005: 153: 182, 153.
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- 10 Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War". May, 2000. http://elibrary.worldbank.org/content/workingpaper/10.1596/1813-9450-2355.
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- 12 See for example Lamb, Guy. "Reintegration into the unknown: excombatants and the unrecorded economy", DDRnet discussion paper, December 2010: 2
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- 14 Pugh Michael C et al. War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation.
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- 15 Ibid, 8-9.
- 16 Ibid, 37.
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