

Social Integration of Ex-Combatants after Civil War

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Introduction

Civil war is commonly viewed as the result of a fracturing of society resulting in social disintegration. As such, post-conflict reconstruction programs often aim at social integration in order to rebuild the social fabric that existed prior to the conflict, including special programs to re-integrate ex-combatants following their disarmament and demobilisation. Yet this perception of civil war as disintegration and the post-conflict phase as integration (or re-integration) obfuscates the reality of civil war. Civil war is not purely the disintegration of society. Instead, it is more accurate to describe it as the disintegration of the broad social community, and the social integration of certain members of the community into a new social fabric: the war family. In other words, civil war is both a destructive and constructive process; disintegrating broader social bonds, while constructing smaller more exclusive ones. Social integration is not only a positive process with a peaceful outcome, but can also provide a foundation for the formation of competing group identities. The challenge after war is not only to reintegrate combatants into society, but also to address the social bonds of the war family and combatant society. This paper argues that social disintegration must take place once again at the end of war to eliminate these combatant bonds before positive reintegration aimed at strengthening norms of non-violence and peaceful co-existence, building social relations, and sustaining the peace process can occur.

Social integration has often been the aim of post-conflict programs in developing countries emerging from civil war. Unfortunately, there is no clear consensus on how exactly to define social integration or how to achieve it in practice. Social integration can mean the establishment of equal opportunity for all; the harmonization or conformity of individuals; or, the established pattern of interaction in a community.¹ In this paper, social integration refers to the situation in which members of a community share common norms, beliefs, and goals that are structured and enforced through social institutions and a common dialogue. Using this definition, post-conflict reintegration aims to rebuild these norms and social structures in order to re-establish the social, economic, and political structures destroyed during the war. One key element of this process is the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, often referred to by practitioners as the DDR program. This paper identifies the challenges of reintegrating combatants after war by highlighting the patterns of social disintegration and integration during war, how these processes pose obstacles to successful reintegration, and what this means for social integration efforts. Social integration is a necessary part of the reconciliation and reconstruction process in any post-war country. However, while social integration should be encouraged, care should be taken to avoid the reestablishment of past structures of dominance and inequality that led to war in the first place.

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¹ See "Social Integration: Approaches and Issues," UNRISD Briefing Paper No. 1, World Summit for Social Development, March 1994; and, Werner Levi, "The Concept of Integration in Research on Peace," *Background* Vol. 9, No. 2 (August 1965): 111-126.

Patterns of Social Disintegration During Civil War

During war social disintegration takes place on various fronts: social, economic, and political. Social disintegration, as discussed here, is the breaking of community bonds between individuals and the disassociation of the individual from community beliefs, norms, laws, structures, and goals. Social disintegration worsens with time and with higher levels of violence, especially when this violence targets civilians. Social disintegration involves the fragmentation of society, the exclusion of groups from power and access to economic goods, and the polarization of communities as individuals take sides in the war. The following briefly highlights some common patterns of social disintegration during civil war.

First, there is the disintegration of community ties leading to fragmentation. There is the clear break between combatant and non-combatant groups, in terms of who belongs or is considered a member of each community. Social disintegration affects all members of a community during wartime. Community members are forced to choose which faction they support and whether they will fight or not. Men often join the ranks of one fighting faction or another. This leads to the loss of fathers, husbands, and community leaders in many villages. Individuals may choose to break these social ties by joining a warring faction, or they may be forced to break these ties through forced recruitment into armed factions. The end result is the same: alienation from the community and the inability to look to the community for help. Combatants who commit atrocities against members of their communities strike the most violent blow to social unity, and these combatants are quickly ostracized from their communities. These forces divide communities along chosen allegiances.

War also divides society according to ethnic group, religious affiliation, or political party. War provides a venue for inflammatory rhetoric and the politically motivated use of racial and ethnic language aimed at dividing loyalties, gaining supporters, and polarizing society. This generation of an 'us' versus 'them' mentality creates social divisions and hardens attitudes towards the "other." The "other" is often depicted as the enemy, as evil, and dehumanised to the point of making it acceptable, and even necessary, to kill any member of the "other" group. Emphasizing and exacerbating these social divisions rearranges group-identifying characteristics and further deteriorates social ties. Under such conditions the goals of fighting factions often evolve, changing from such lofty aims as political reform, to a focus on destroying the "other."

Second, war diminishes economic ties. There is great economic destruction during war. Normal economic activities become difficult, purchasing power is lost and trade is often greatly reduced or suspended. Agricultural activities often become difficult to continue as war and insecurity spread throughout the countryside. This is especially true where landmines are used, as in Angola, Bosnia and Cambodia. Given that agriculture is the primary income-producing activity in many developing countries, war reduces the workforce that can till the land, the ability to cultivate land, the ability to move goods to markets, and the ability of the population to purchase goods. This leads to high levels of unemployment, displacement, and poverty. This exacerbates the division between the rich and the poor, and the majority is excluded from available economic opportunities. Such economic devastation ignites the survival instinct, and self-preservation often supersedes community preservation. Competition for scarce resources divides rather than unites communities. Another consequence of war is the development of war

economies based on natural resource extraction. These activities provide riches to a few and add fuel to the war effort, but rarely produce integrative economic forces. The forced labour, competition for wealth, and unequal distribution of benefits exacerbates social tensions, even within the war family. Participation in war economies requires identification with a fighting faction and acting to ensure the survival of that faction.

Third, war leads to the disintegration of law and order. Norms and laws become difficult to uphold during civil war. Governments often lose control over at least part of their territory, and governance becomes difficult even in those areas the Government does control because efforts are focused on fighting the enemy, not on providing routine security or enforcing law and order. During war, police often have little power to enforce the laws and legal courts cease to function outside of the capital city. Without law enforcement, law becomes the function of any group with the power to impose its will. Social norms weaken as survival becomes paramount, exacerbating the social fragmentation that has already occurred. Actions heretofore seen as immoral or illegal become justified under the circumstances. Sustained violence can produce a numbing effect on social action, whereby violence is seen as the norm and thereby accepted by the population, which feels powerless to stop it. Under these conditions, resistance to violence is difficult to sustain, and social bonds weaken under the strain of communities being unable to provide protection to their members.

Fourth, war enhances political divisions. Decision-making during wartime becomes concentrated in the hands of the few. Democratic principles, if they existed before, rarely operate during wartime. Presidents decree martial law and presidential prerogative, while rebel factions rarely operate democratically. Citizens lose their voice in government. Divisions are deepened by the use of politically motivated ethnic or otherwise derogatory rhetoric. This loss of voice, loss of participation, loss of control, and heightened feelings of insecurity, force individuals to seek security from an authority other than the state. This results in the joining of factions, or the creation of small groups of militia or local defence forces. As this occurs, social groups become smaller, more exclusive, and more focused on survival and security.

Patterns of Social Integration During War

During war, social integration also takes place within certain segments of the population, namely the combatants. Although perhaps incongruous with the imagery of war as destruction, social integration does and must take place in order for the fighting factions to be able to recruit combatants, prevent them from deserting, and create a cohesive fighting force. It is a similar process to what happens in national militaries wherein recruits enter a new culture and are trained and educated into a set of beliefs and practices that must be followed. However, most find it difficult to imagine such a process happening among non-governmental fighting factions. Instead, rebel factions are often viewed as violent criminals, greedy delinquents, or crazy savages. Although rebel factions have violent and greedy elements in them, there is also a culture and institutional structure that guides behaviour and indoctrinates new recruits into a set of beliefs and norms effective for fighting a war.

There are two paths to integration in a warring faction. The first is voluntary, by the combatant choosing to join the faction. Of course, the voluntary nature of such a choice can be

disputed by pointing out the perceived lack of options, but the choice is nevertheless made by the combatant. The second path is through coercion. This is a common path for both women and children who do not make the choice to join a fighting faction but are forcibly recruited through violence and abduction.

Those who join willingly are easier to convert and easier to integrate into the social structure of the fighting faction. Recruits must do nothing more than oppose the enemy, fight willingly, adhere to the command and control structure, and follow orders. Voluntary recruits choose to do so for a number of reasons. They join because membership offers security, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, a rise in social status, and opportunities for economic gain. Recruits also join because they believe in the cause of the fighting faction; they believe the rhetoric that war will change the inequality that existed prior to the war; that war will bring about a better social condition. For those who join voluntarily, membership offers access to those goods that were not attainable in peacetime or by remaining outside of the war family. Thus, there are strong incentives to join and to fight.

Those who are forcefully recruited face a far more difficult period of adjustment. Indoctrination through speeches and exercises is common. Speeches emphasizing the fatherly nature of the faction leader and the use of “papa” or other such endearing terms for the faction leader contribute to the socialization of new recruits into the war family. Drugs are often used to reduce the fears of new combatants, especially children, and to make them more compliant and more willing to follow orders. Women are often forced into submission through physical violence and rape. Children and young recruits have been forced to kill family or village members in order to break their ties to their home village. Once such an act is committed, faction leaders reinforce the feelings of alienation by often reminding the perpetrator that he can no longer return home because he will no longer be accepted after the egregious acts he committed. This, in effect, severs all social ties between the combatant and his community.

After years of war, the differences between those forcefully recruited and those who voluntarily joined begin to blur. This does not mean that those who were forced to join now enjoy their membership. Instead, whether by choice or violence, integration into the war family has generated recognizable and familiar patterns of behaviour that act as a cohesive force. Membership in the war family has become the norm. Combatants have assimilated into the war family, the practices and beliefs of the fighting faction, and violence and struggle have become what is normal. Combatants come to see themselves as part of a new social unit, one that accepts them as soldiers, gives them an important title, such as general, gives them social status and a voice, and provides them with the means to earn a living. The idea of leaving this familiar setting is both threatening and scary to combatants, even those who would prefer to stop fighting, because the “war family” is seen as a source of security. There are numerous reports of disarmed and demobilized combatants returning to the fighting factions out of a sense of family, loyalty, and security. Even women who were raped and abused and kept as “war wives” return to their “war husbands.” This runs counter to rationality, at least for those on the outside looking in and judging these actions. Instead of viewing such acts as irrational, the question must be posed as to why combatants are unwilling to break their bonds with their war family and why they fear reintegration into their home communities.

When civil wars end there are two main challenges for positive social integration of combatants back into the broader social fabric of the country. First, there is the challenge of breaking the social bonds of the war family and encouraging combatants to voluntarily leave their war family. Second, there is the challenge of how to reintegrate, in practice, these ex-combatants into their communities and into society at large. One important key to addressing these challenges is to understand the dynamics of the processes involved: integration into the war family, disintegration of the war family, and reintegration into society. Without an understanding of the first two processes, achieving social reintegration will be extremely difficult. The failure to ensure the disintegration of the war family and enable the combatant to choose to return to his/her community, poses great obstacles to successful reintegration.

Challenges to Social Integration After Civil War

Once the guns have fallen silent, a peace deal is in place, and disarmament has been completed, two of the biggest tasks a country faces are the repairs to the social fabric wrought during the war and the need to re-integrate thousands of former combatants. Social integration in this context becomes paramount to the rebuilding of not only smaller communities, but the larger economic, social, and political networks of the country. There are a number of challenges to overcome in the process of integration, including the disintegration of the bonds holding together the war family, the reintegration of combatants into weak economies and wary communities, and the need to address the specific concerns of special groups, such as women, the disabled, and youths.

Disintegration of the War Family

The main purpose of a DDR program is to take the guns out of the hands of combatants and return them to their communities to begin life as civilians. In theory, this sounds logical. In practice, there is more to the DDR process than collecting weapons and sending soldiers back to their communities. The demilitarisation and demobilisation processes are extremely threatening to combatants and generate anxiety, fear, and insecurity because the process destroys the social network on which the combatant has relied for many years. The loss of this social network, the war family, creates a tremendous sense of insecurity for ex-combatants. Through the DDR process, combatants lose their social status, their sense of belonging, their sense of importance, their income or access to basic goods, their support network, and their identity. While the DDR process is an important transition phase from war to peace, and therefore must be undertaken, the impact on the combatants should not be underestimated or ignored. These combatants must face once again the disintegration of their social network and the insecurity this generates. Ex-combatant insecurity is heightened by reluctance of communities to accept the return of ex-combatants, the lack of employment opportunities, the stigma of troublemakers, and the end of the feelings of empowerment experienced during the war.

As already described, war involves the social integration of combatants into a war family. This process not only indoctrinates combatants into the norms and goals of the fighting faction, but also provides a support network to the combatants. This support network provides a sense of identity and purpose, but it also provides security and access to basic goods. When combatants enter the DDR process, they lose this support network. During demobilisation, some combatants

will try to return to whatever is left of this support network by reconnecting with other ex-combatants, living together in the areas where they were demilitarised, and refusing to return to their home communities. While the return of ex-combatants to their home communities may appear to outsiders to be a great relief and reward, for ex-combatants it can be a traumatic experience because it requires giving up the support network of the war family and returning, often alone, to their home community where they may not be accepted, are not immediately integrated into a support network, and therefore are left to fend for themselves.

For ex-combatants, it is difficult to lose the feelings of empowerment that often come with being a combatant, even if such feelings were generated through the barrel of a gun or the receipt of unearned titles such as “commander” and “general.” In war, ex-combatants believe they can control their actions and their choices. They are the ones in charge. They are the ones who have a voice and can generate change. Such sentiments are especially strong in countries that do not provide such widespread opportunities for political and economic involvement during peacetime. Thus, to choose to give up one’s weapon, also involves the choice to lose this sense of purpose, prestige and control with little guarantee that it can be regained in civilian life.

Leaving the war family also produces insecurity over access to income and to basic goods. Although few fighting factions are wealthy or able to pay salaries to their fighters, most combatants are able to meet their basic needs. They do this through the development of war economies, looting, and local bartering of stolen goods. In wartime, in a warrior society, these are acceptable means of earning a living or gaining access to necessary and desirable goods. In peacetime, these activities are forbidden and punished. Thus, to leave the war family and enter civilian society means combatants no longer have access to goods, nor do they have the skills to obtain these goods through socially acceptable means. In other words, the skills they learned during war are no longer viable in civilian society. While the provision of resettlement payments and reintegration programs can soften the blow of leaving the war family and offer positive incentives to return to their communities, these are often only short-term salves. Without broader economic development, the creation of employment opportunities, and the acquisition of useful skills, ex-combatants face the bleak prospects of unemployment and poverty.

Reintegration into the Broader Social Fabric

Ex-combatants face a number of challenges when reintegrating into civilian society. Ex-combatants lack the necessary skills and education to secure jobs. Thus, they have no source of income, no accommodations, and no guarantee of securing basic necessities such as food and water. Ex-combatants face the after effects of the physical and psychological trauma sustained during the war and require psychosocial counselling. In order for ex-combatants to reintegrate, they must acclimatise to the new social structure, including the norms, beliefs, and laws of the community. Such acclimatisation requires an un-learning of violent behaviour and learning how to face difficulties and social conflict in a non-violent manner. Communities are not always willing to allow the return of ex-combatants. Ex-combatants confront disapproval, alienation, being marginalized and being used as scapegoats for the community’s ills. Under such conditions, ex-combatants face exclusion from mainstream society.

Part of reintegration involves the return of the ex-combatant to the economic workforce of the community. Ex-combatants are expected to contribute to the economic well being of the community, not to become dependants on the already weakened social safety nets. However, ex-combatants rarely possess the education or skills necessary to successfully enter the workforce. Many ex-combatants were youths when they entered the war, and thus have no skills or education. The skills they do possess relate to fighting, and are rarely of use, or accepted, in civilian society. Without skills, ex-combatants cannot find jobs; without jobs they are unable to find adequate housing; and without housing they are unable to provide for themselves or their families. The poverty, lack of economic development, and lack of employment opportunities common to post-war countries compound these difficulties. Reintegration programs aim to provide ex-combatants with a set of skills that enables them to find employment. However, these programs are often too short in duration to effectively train ex-combatants, and the skill set obtained is not always relevant to the limited economic opportunities available in the country. Thus, ex-combatants risk being seen as economic burdens and a drain on community resources, thereby exacerbating the tensions between ex-combatants and their home communities.

In addition, communities often see ex-combatants as social and economic burdens because they lack skills and education, and therefore require assistance in the provision of food, clothing, and housing. Community members may also protect their own jobs and be reluctant to encourage employment of ex-combatants over “good” community members. Hard feelings also arise when ex-combatants are seen to be given economic assistance through resettlement and reintegration programs, when the community receives nothing. The community sees this as rewarding the perpetrators and punishing the victims. In reality, communities do receive funding for community programs, but because this funding is aimed at projects, not individuals, and there are no cash payments, as in the resettlement program, communities do not perceive of these programs as directly beneficial to their well-being, at least not in the same way as the programs for ex-combatants pay and train ex-combatants.

The physical and psychological trauma sustained during war contributes to the alienation of ex-combatants, youths, and women from society. Trauma is sustained through the loss of loved ones, witnessing atrocities, physical and psychological abuse, rape, and torture. For ex-combatants in particular, trauma is also sustained through being forced to kill and commit atrocities and being forced to take drugs. These acts contribute to the normalization of violence. The normalisation of violence is often accompanied by numbness toward violent acts, and feelings of anger, hate, hurt, loss and helplessness, all of which contribute to a detachment from the community. Drug addiction, health problems, and disease, mark individuals as outsiders and further hinder reintegration.

Thru the normalization of violence, ex-combatants learn violent behaviour. Violence becomes normal, not wrong; it becomes the mode of achieving survival. It is also a means of achieving social status and economic gains, things that may not be available in peacetime. Violence becomes the accepted practice of resolving differences. These learned behaviours are unacceptable outside of the war context. Part of the reintegration challenges is for these former soldiers to unlearn this behaviour and replace it with norms of non-violent behaviour acceptable to society and conducive to peaceful social relationships. Ex-combatants must learn new rules of behaviour through socialization in order to return to their communities. This is more difficult in

places where there is no agreement on these acceptable patterns or no means of teaching ex-combatants what the social norms, beliefs, and expectations of the community are. Even where there is agreement, socialization is a lengthy process and requires a sustained dialogue open to all members of the community.

One of the largest challenges to reintegration is for communities to willingly accept the return of ex-combatants. There are a number of reasons why communities are unwilling to accept their return. Social divisions have been hardened during the war. The most prominent is often the division between combatant and non-combatant, or between winning faction and losing faction. Divisions also exist between ethnic groups, especially when ethnic rhetoric has been used as a battle call during the war. These divisions do not end when the war does. Feelings of insecurity, hatred, and difference, continue and pose a direct challenge to reintegration. Even in communities previously diverse and intermixed, war marks clearly the distinction between “us” and “them,” and this distinction usually persists in the post-conflict environment.

Communities hold grudges for the atrocities committed, and are unwilling to trust those who have committed these acts. In some cases, communities openly dispute the return of a particular ex-combatant; in other cases they are allowed to return but are given no support to reintegrate. In both situations, whether through intent or neglect, the result is the same: a lack of reintegration. Ex-combatants are blamed for all the ills of the community, regardless of their role, or whether they had one, in the problems facing the community. As the logic goes, because they participated in the war, the ex-combatants are responsible. There is often a strange mix of a desire for justice and the prosecution of war crimes juxtaposed to the desire to forget the past and move on. There is often little capacity to prosecute large numbers of ex-combatants, and even less political will if the ex-combatants involve government forces, and thus it often ends being a matter of forgive and forget without the proper forgiveness mechanisms in place. Unfortunately, this does little to resolve grievances or grudges, but rather attempts to sweep them under the carpet, where they continue to simmer just below the surface.

Unique Challenges and Special Groups

There are the unique challenges and particular difficulties faced by women due to their treatment during war. Many women are raped, physically and psychologically abused, forcefully abducted and held hostage, and forced into sexual slavery as war wives. In addition to the trauma caused by such acts and circumstances, women also face the health risks of AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies. Although often the victims, women receive the negative labels of being unclean, tainted, and impure due to their treatment during the war, and held responsible for what happened. It is rare to see prosecution for crimes against women. In addition, women often receive inadequate psychosocial counselling, health care, and reintegration support because they are not actual combatants, and therefore are unable to enter the DDR program.

There are unique challenges faced by those disabled by the war. Land mines and amputations often leave a legacy of limbless victims. In some cases, the disability sustained is manageable and the individual is able to return to a life that resembles normalcy. In some cases, the injuries sustained are so severe as to make the individual dependent on other members of

society. In some societies, disabled victims are shunned because they are different. For example, those receiving artificial limbs or medical interventions to alter stumps left by amputation are seen as abnormal by the population, even though such interventions enable the disabled to function more easily and more independently. This leads to the creation of amputee or disabled camps and villages separate from the rest of society. Although in some ways this generates a special support network for the disabled, it also alienates them and separates them from society at large. When resources dwindle for special programs for the disabled, which often happens as donor money declines, this population faces poverty and marginalization.

Youth also face unique challenges during reintegration. While they suffer the same trauma and insecurities as those of adults, they lack the learned coping skills to handle trauma or to seek social assistance. In many cases, youths have been involved in the conflict, some as combatants, and others as porters, cooks, and scouts. Those who fought in the war, require special counselling and socialization back into accepted behavioural patterns. Many will require drug rehabilitation programs. For those who are lucky enough to enter the DDR program, they will receive some assistance. Those without weapons, however, are unable to enter the DDR program and therefore fail to receive any assistance. While children often receive special assistance for reintegration, youths do not. They fall into a grey area between children and adults, and often fall through the cracks. They are expected to be absorbed by communities, but oftentimes are not. Youths, whether ex-combatant or not, face challenges similar to ex-combatants. They lack the necessary education and skills to obtain jobs. Schooling and training opportunities are often limited after war. For those that have grown too old during the war to attend school, there are few special programs to address this gap. The number of orphans and youths living on the streets is often high after war with few social programs available for these youths. Youths face a dire situation of poverty and few prospects to overcome their situation.

Broader Considerations for Successful Integration

Reintegration is more than return, resettlement, and employment. Reintegration involves a number of social, economic, and political activities that produce a pattern of peaceful community relations, reinforce positive social norms, and rebuild social structures that provide security and stability. Successful social integration is a lengthy process that requires financial support and community effort.

An important element of social integration is the sustainability of the efforts and processes of reintegration programs. DDR programs are too short-termed to sufficiently achieve reintegration. They are also targeted solely at those ex-combatants who were able to enter the DDR program, i.e., those who were able to turn in weapons. Ex-combatants who do not turn in a weapon are often left out of the program. This means that a number of children, women, and lower ranking combatants are excluded from the process. This creates not only grievances within the ex-combatant population, but also fails to address the many needs of ex-combatants. Given the structure of reintegration programs, which are often afterthoughts to disarmament and demobilisation and often lack the necessary funding, these programs do not meet the long-term needs of communities. In some cases, they fail to meet even the short-term needs. Instead of conceiving of reintegration as the third stage of a DDR program, reintegration needs to be seen

as a much broader effort to rebuild social norms and social structures for long-term stability and development.

Reintegration programs are often funded by international donors. This dependence on external funding for reintegration programs raises a number of problems. Funding is not always available for reintegration training of ex-combatants. Many donors focus on the disarmament phase of DDR programs aimed at removing weapons from the hands of combatants. Donors are less willing to fund programs that are perceived of by the community as rewarding violence. This leads to long delays between demobilisation and entrance into reintegration programs, and to the shortening of the actual reintegration training program. In some cases, training programs last only six months or less, which is usually too short of a time to properly train ex-combatants in any vocational skill. Without additional training, ex-combatants cannot find jobs in their chosen vocation, and often sell their tool kits and look for employment in other areas. Dependence on donors also means that reintegration programs tend to end when donors leave or donor funds dry up, leaving reintegration only halfway finished. Sustainability is a key concern, and one that needs to be addressed in the design and implementation of reintegration efforts.

There is often a desire to stop using the moniker “ex-combatant” after the reintegration process. There are good reasons for this. The use of such a term can lead to negative stigmatisation of ex-combatants, and further hinder their reintegration into a community. It can also lead to the use of ex-combatants as scapegoats for the community’s ills. However, there are important reasons to keep the “ex-combatant” label in the early stage of the reintegration process when the ex-combatant returns to the community in order to encourage a healing and forgiveness process. It is the rare case where an ex-combatant returns to a community and the community does not know that the person was a former combatant. Thus to ignore such a history can encourage distrust and the holding of grudges. Instead, the acknowledgement of the return of a combatant can begin a process of reconciliation. This process can be difficult and painful, but holds the potential of enabling reintegration. Without community acceptance, which often depends on the former combatant demonstrating contrition and a willingness to contribute to the rebuilding and growth of the community, there can be no social reintegration. Once this reconciliation process has begun, the focus should be on what the returning community member can contribute to the community and what he or she needs in terms of education or training in order to make a valuable contribution. When this shift has occurred, the “combatant” label is no longer necessary, nor useful, and a change in dialogue, a change in vocabulary, is necessary.

Social integration assists in the reestablishment of acceptable social norms of behaviour. Such norms often include the pacific settlement of disputes, or the use of arbitration mechanisms to resolve disputes without resorting to violence. Other norms include the humane treatment of individuals, respect of human rights, respect for the principles of democracy, and the establishment of what is right and wrong behaviour. The establishment of these norms and the education of ex-combatants and youths into this set of norms and patterns of behaviour beneficial to the community are essential for social integration. This reconditioning of ex-combatants away from violence and toward a respect for human rights, a rejection of violent means of conflict resolution, and the pursuit of more constructive means of achieving status, wealth, and security, reduces the likelihood of a return to violence. This is extremely important with regard to youth, especially those who have grown up knowing little more than war. If youth, the future

generation, the future leaders of developing countries, continue to view violence as the norm, as the primary means of gaining economic and social status, then the risk of future conflict elevates precipitously.

The capacity of society and of government to carry out necessary reforms to sustain the peace process and reinforce positive social norms and build supportive social structures is often weak or non-existent in post-war contexts. In some cases, this capacity never existed. Thus, an important element of social integration is building the capacity of society and government to address the root causes of the conflict and build these norms and structures. Unfortunately, capacity building is a vague and general term that is often thrown about by those hoping to be seen to be achieving something. It is a worthy goal, but when it is ill-defined and lacks specific policies and measurable achievements it is often more talk than results. Capacity-building during the early stages of reintegration when donor assistance is still available can provide the foundation for continuing reintegration programs once the donors leave.

Most important to any reintegration effort is preventing the re-establishment of the conditions that led to war in the first place. Oftentimes a short-cut to reintegration is the reestablishment of the norms and structures that existed prior to the war. In other words, programs aim to put Humpty-Dumpty back together again in the same fashion he sat before the war without questioning whether he should be put back together at all. Such a strategy is short-sighted. While this may provide a temporary salve to the common perception of anarchy in post-war situations, in the medium- to long-term it only generates popular discontent and grievances. It does little to address the underlying causes of the war, and in fact sets up the conditions for a reoccurrence of war in the future. Thus, reintegration, and the ensuing social integration, must address not only the underlying causes of the war, but also the fragmentation, polarization, and exclusion developed over the course of the war.

Conclusion

Reintegration is better understood as a long-term process, rather than a short-term employment program. Reintegration efforts should begin the broader processes of economic development, democratisation and government reform, and as such should include not only ex-combatants but also society at large. Special programs should target ex-combatants, children, women, and the disabled, because these groups have specific needs and face particular challenges. However, these efforts should not be separate from the broader social integration process. Reintegration should be viewed as the first stepping-stone on the road to social integration, political reform and economic development.