

## Research Brief: The Role of Procedural Justice for Formerly Armed Actor (Re)integration

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Procedural justice in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) principally refers to the fairness of the [mechanisms or procedures](#) involved in allocating goods, services, and other provisions among participating formerly armed actors (FAAs). FAAs' satisfaction with these programmes is crucial to building the [necessary trust](#) and engagement with the authorities and processes that help them transition to civilian life. The underlying fairness, transparency, and accountability in the treatment of these individuals are principles of procedural justice that still receive relatively little attention in DDR research and practice compared to outcome-oriented provisions. Yet, the potential consequences of procedural dissatisfaction are grave, as these frustrations can alienate FAAs from the DDR process, leading to distrust in the state and suboptimal social and economic (re)integration. This, in turn, heightens the risk of recidivism, and continued insecurity. Moreover, procedural justice is relevant to the recipient communities which need to be supportive of the DDR process for a sustainable (re)integration of FAAs into them. This Research Brief thus presents **some of the crucial benefits of a well-designed procedural justice framework and issues recommendations for its incorporation into DDR policy and practice**. While procedural justice may be relevant to different stages of DDR, we focus on the (re)integration component where the need for it is most apparent.

Fair procedures are at the heart of individual perceptions of [institutional legitimacy](#), which form the basis for **compliance and engagement** with a DDR programme. These perceptions extend beyond the realm of DDR and are projected onto the government and post-conflict society as a whole. Procedural justice mechanisms are meant to facilitate an FAA's identification with the trajectory toward civilian life and the [role he or she assumes](#) within it, which prevents a return to violence and illicit activities. As DDR institutions are often the FAA's first point of institutional contact with civilian life, it is an especially critical moment for establishing a sense of legitimate authority for this system of post-conflict governance and social order.

One fundamental step toward procedural justice is a **well-managed and impartial programme delivery**. Given the close nature of interactions among programme participants, there is generally a heightened level of awareness about the differential treatment of FAAs by the administration. For instance, Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC) soldiers settling in the U.S. have disclosed to Trust After Betrayal researchers their frustration with the perceived unequal distribution of financial resources and expedited access to medical and social healthcare services by their supporting authorities. The reasons behind differential treatment can lie in a variety of institutional failures, such as corruption, structural biases, mismanagement, and, on the less self-inflicted side, material and personal capacity limits.

DDR programme designers and leaders can ensure adequate programme delivery by enforcing **transparency standards** for its management procedures. One measure to avoid DDR funding being misappropriated or preferentially allocated is the inclusion of nonpartisan [international oversight](#) at the organisational level. Moreover, uniform and regular [reporting standards](#), guidelines, and checklists used by responsible staff can help establish better oversight over the process of programme delivery.

Additionally, staff should be educated **on subconscious and pre-conceived biases** based on personal FAA characteristics that could impact equitable treatment in the (re)integration program. Similarly, in the administrative dimension, biases inherent to the procedural framework upon which the program and/or policy agenda is based should be critically assessed.

Another factor relevant to procedural justice are **clear protocols** for the sometimes intricate **classification and verification of individuals who are eligible programme candidates** with benefits and obligations based on a particular armed group experience. Inadequate screening for ineligible program participants, may encourage freeriding and [undermine peer-to-peer social cohesion](#) within the programme and hence the credibility of its processes. DDR programmes established following Sudan's comprehensive peace agreement in 2005 have been the target of [rampant fraud in the admission](#) of women associated with armed forces and groups (WAAFGs). In response, the responsible DDR commission in South Sudan and the UN DDR Unit agreed on a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the identification and verification of WAAFGs, which led to a successful disqualification of fraudulent candidates. SOPs are a valuable tool in situations where [organisational ambiguity](#) could compromise procedural justice and integrity.

Another cornerstone in a procedural justice-sensitive DDR implementation is the role of **effective communication**. A productive relationship between FAAs and DDR staff and bureaucrats relies on [social capital](#) that is positively impacted by institutionally meeting their expectations and complying with fairness principles. However, an equally crucial determinant is the quality of interpersonal encounters with FAAs. DDR personnel give the whole process its "[human face](#)": their empathy and understanding may fundamentally shape the perception of commitment and care of the reintegration institution(s), and, by extension, of government and (civil) society.

It is therefore vital to sensitize staff to empathetic and engaged communication with FAAs, which also includes active listening practices and signaling responsiveness to their wishes, grievances, and concerns. Systematically collecting [participant feedback](#) to continuously adjust programme design contributes to procedural rather than outcome-centred forms of participatory measurement and evaluation. This [improves accountability](#) not only toward FAAs but also the public and (inter)national donor agencies. Extending awareness raising from staff to programme participants can positively inform perceptions of the programme's leadership, support and dedication to [governance accountability](#) amidst existing procedural imperfections.

Lastly, the success of DDR programmes is often intimately connected with the [acceptance of the community](#) in which they are embedded, suggesting the need for a **comprehensive scope in framing concerns around procedural justice**. From an early stage, reintegration should be [community-based](#), built on the premise that DDR is in the interest of general welfare, justice, and security. It is therefore important to limit DDR financial support for FAAs to attain the community's living standard, thereby alleviating tensions over resource distribution. This legitimacy can also be gained by aligning the interests of FAAs and community members through, for instance, the promotion of joint business ventures or incorporating FAAs into the security sector. In many contexts, further trust in FAAs and the DDR process can be fostered via traditional institutions and authorities: In Liberia, for instance, the [Palava Hut](#), a pre-colonial dispute settlement and conflict transformation system convened by elders, has [assisted the country's DDR practice](#) as a conducive environment for truth-telling about war-related human rights violations and interchange between civilians and formerly armed actors.

# Mechanisms and Effects of Procedural Justice in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Programmes

The graphic below demonstrates the impact of four mechanisms relevant for procedural justice in DDR programmes on the **satisfaction of formerly armed actors and the acceptance toward the process** and formerly armed actors by receiving communities. The visualisation is based on this [procedural justice model](#) and this [procedural justice assessment framework](#).

