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Tobey Berriault, UN volunteer from Canada, served as DDR Officer in Côte d'Ivoire from November 2014 to September 2015. Here she is dancing with beneficiaries of a reinsertion project that focuses on the transformation of cassava in the Bangolo area, west of the country. (UNV, 2015)

Ensuring reintegration of female combatants

In 2014 I was recruited to serve as a UN Volunteer with the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) section of UNOCI, which was an academic dream come true and a great professional experience. One of our main efforts has been to showcase and track the involvement of female beneficiaries in our reinsertion projects. The projects are particularly interesting because the benefits have the potential to extend beyond the livelihoods of the ex-combatants and into those of the communities themselves.

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: As a master student in Canada, I studied Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes in West African countries. While doing my internship with UNDP in Namibia, a colleague who was a UN Volunteer encouraged me to register online. I did not have a clue what the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme was, but I took her advice anyway. About a year later, I was recruited to serve as UN Volunteer DDR Officer, which was an academic dream come true.

I am serving with the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) section of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), and I'm also the gender focal point for DDR. At the Anyama Camp in Abidjan, I help collect weapons, grenades, unexploded ordnances, and munitions; demobilize ex-combatants; generate relevant statistics; and assist the national Authority on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.

Traditional conceptions of a DDR programme tend to favour the reintegration of male armed combatants. While many women also take up arms, there is the risk of side-lining them in the process as the roles they held may have been supportive rather than active combat.

If a DDR process is limited in its ability to cater to these varying roles, it runs the risk of becoming an exclusive process, potentially relegating vulnerable groups to the side, and limiting their ability to sustainably reintegrate into their communities.

My daily responsibilities involve collecting and archiving relevant gender-disaggregated data for all processes of the programme, and to align our programme as much as possible with the United Nations standards for a gender-responsive DDR programme.

One of our main efforts has been to showcase and track the involvement of female beneficiaries in our reinsertion projects. The projects are particularly interesting because the benefits have the potential to extend beyond the livelihoods of the ex-combatants and into those of the communities themselves. It's really tangible and rewarding to see beneficiaries and receiving communities happy.

In many of our projects, our field colleagues are working with the implementing partners to make sure that the projects are conducive to female participation. Some NGOs have put women in key roles within the project boards, for example as president of the organization

or as financial secretary. It is extremely positive for UNOCI to be able to say that our projects place importance on female participation and have, in many cases, enabled women participants to become leaders within the projects and their communities.

Being a UN Volunteer is a great professional experience. One should not let the title UN [Volunteer] deter them from applying and potentially missing out on substantial work. It is a great stepping stone in one's career, and a rare combination of interesting work and global opportunities.



West and Central Africa

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 5: Gender equality](#) [SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions](#)