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Frustrated and Confused: Mapping the Socio-political Struggles of Female Ex-combatants in Nepal¹

By Bishnu Raj Upreti², Sharmila Shivakoti³, Kohinoor Bharati⁴

Abstract

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) declared an armed insurrection against the State in February 1996; they began to attack police posts and gradually the insurrection was sparked all over the country, lasting for ten years. Consequently, it caused 17,886 deaths, 79,571 displacements, 1,530 disappearances, 3,142 abductions, 8,935 disabilities, and left 620 children orphaned (MoPR 2016). In the armed conflict 20 percent of Maoist combatants were women. After several rounds of negotiations, the armed conflict ended in November 2006, with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Nepal and the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) that demanded disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of the Maoist ex-combatants. Among the ex-combatants the DDR process for reintegrating female ex-combatants was more complicated. This paper examines the DDR process with a specific focus on ex-combatants. Focus group interviews, key informant interviews, roundtable discussions, and direct interviews with the female- ex-combatants were the methods used in collecting data, in addition to secondary sources. This paper argues that the DDR was not only contested, but also procedurally flawed, and therefore not able to produce the desired result. Because the DDR was a complex, socio-psychological and politico-economic process and required sensitive handling, key Nepali actors and international supporters failed to properly deal with the DDR. The DDR process was largely gender-blind and therefore, the female ex-combatants suffered more in terms of their social relations, specific needs and achieving livelihood security. The approach of United Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) was one of the reasons; consequently, its engagement was terminated without completing the DDR process mainly because it failed to internalize gender sensitivity and local complexity.

Keywords: Armed-conflict, Disarmament, Demobilization, Ex-combatants, Maoist, Peace, Reintegration, Nepal armed conflict

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The Context

As we recall this history, the period of February 1996 to November 2006 in Nepal is noted as one of the most severe crises brought by the armed insurrection, waged by the Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (CPNM) against the State. The armed insurgency was popularized with the phrase “People’s War” with the aim of establishing a ‘People’s Republic’ (Timalsina, 2014; Upreti 2090). Before waging the bloody armed conflict, the CPNM submitted a list of 40 Points of demands to the Prime Minister with the ultimatum of 15 days. However, the CPNM started the insurgency by attacking police stations in different districts even before their deadline expired (Subedi, 2013; Upreti 2009; Lamichhane 2015).

One of the vehement claims of the CPNM during the time of insurgency, was to enhance equality and emancipate women from gender-based social and cultural forms of discrimination and violence, and to promote socio-political and economic empowerment of women. Hence, women and girls mainly from rural remote areas and discriminated and marginalized communities were attracted to the CPNM slogans; they joined the insurgency to achieve their emancipation (Upreti *et. al.*, 2017).

Once young girls and women entered into the insurgency mission, they were required to perform new roles as combatants, informers, organizers of cultural events, cooks, logistics suppliers, nurses to treat wounded fighters (Bhatt 2010; Kolas 2017), and even to play the role of girlfriends for the male insurgents (Bhattarai 2016:130; Adhikari 2016:120). Several push and pull factors contributed to women’s participation in the insurgency. Discriminatory behavior in their communities, sexual and other forms of harassment by security forces and local feudal elites and hooligans, poverty and inequality, feelings of retaliation, ideological indoctrination, romanticism to join the war, motivation to join by other women of their communities, and finally, fear from the insurgents—especially when the CPNM declared its “one house one combatant” rule, and asked every household to send their son or daughter, or be ready to bear the Maoist punishments (Murthy and Varma, 2016; Kolas 2017; Khadka, 2012; Ariño, 2008).

When the blaze of conflict began in Rolpa, Rukum and Sindhuli districts, these demands affected large parts of the country and posed challenges for various aspects of social, political, cultural and religious dynamics (Gellner, 2015) including death, displacement, dislocation, migration and disappearances of people, physical and social infrastructure (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016; Bhatt 2010). Table 1 offers an overview.

Table 1: Human cost of the armed conflict

S.N.	Effects	Number
1	Deceased Persons	17,886
2	Disappeared Persons	1,530
3	Displaced Persons	79,571
4	Abducted Persons	3,142
5	Disabled Persons	8,935
6	Widows	9,000
7	Orphans	620

Source: Bhatt and Upreti 2016, adapted from Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction 2016

During this ten-year period, abductions, killings, torture, and threats became rampant, making the country more hollow and anarchical, each day. The ones who suffered the most were children, young girls and women (Macours, 2011). Thousands of people lost their spouses and were displaced internally; family separation rates increased, and substantial male migration took place afterwards (Rodgers, 2015). The insurgency acquired such a hostile form that it can be characterized as a period of one of the most outrageous human rights violations in the history of Nepal. Table 2 shows the damage to infrastructure during the conflict.

Table 2: Loss of infrastructure during conflict

S. N.	Categories	Destruction
1	Schools	2,149
2	VDC Offices	2,072
3	Municipalities/DDC Offices	130
4	Government offices at local level	1,047
5	Government offices at district level	986
6	Suspension bridge	101
7	Others	2,032
Source: Adapted from Bhatt and Upreti 2016		

The CPNM fighters had targeted the army bases, police posts, government officials, and banks, bridges, schools, government offices and many other vital features of the infrastructure during the time of the insurgency. The key actors causing human casualties and damage to the infrastructure were the CPNM combatants (and the retaliation of the security forces). Many analysts were surprised with the courage, brevity and tactics of the Maoist combatants who were neither trained professional fighters, nor experienced in such an insurgency. Even more surprising was the participation of young women fighters, who, many said, constituted up to 40 percent of the combatants, although verification by the United Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) confirmed the number as 20 percent of the total fighters (Upreti 2016). In this paper, we examine the dynamics of the female ex-combatants.

Objectives and Methodology

This study has the following interrelated and complementary objectives:

1. Examine the process of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR).
2. Assess the gender dimensions of the DDR process.
3. Examine the social relations of female ex-combatants.
4. Assess their livelihood strategies and options.
5. Examine the role of international actors.
6. Assess the opinion of female ex-combatants on their engagement in the insurgency and their leaders,

This research was a part of the broader three year research project entitled Gender Equality, Peace and Security in Nepal and Myanmar (here in after referred as WOMENsPEACE), which focuses on the gender dimension of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes in Nepal and Myanmar, and the post-conflict political participation of female and male

ex-combatants with the consequences of DDR processes for post-conflict gender equality, women's and men's social inclusion, and women's rights. However, this paper is limited only to the above stated objectives.

Even though the geographical scope of the study includes the entire country, the in-depth qualitative study was conducted in Chitwan, Kaski and Nawalparasi districts from November 2016 to June 20-17. These sites were particularly important because of dense settlement of the female ex-combatants in these areas.

The research team applied observation, in-depth interviews (with the female ex-combatants), key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and round-table discussions with the multi-stakeholders engaged in the DDR process. Data/information triangulation was done through the round table discussions and cross check methods. While processing the data/information, we have mainly applied the descriptive interpretative approach.

Findings and analysis

Findings of this research are presented based on the objectives of the study by using the descriptive-interpretative approach as follows:

Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Process

Once the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Government of Nepal and CPNM on 21 November 2006, the DDR process was officially initiated. However, the background of the DDR was prepared once the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the CPNM signed an understanding informally sponsored by India in November 2005, as some of the provisions of this 12-point understanding were directly related to the DDR. Immediately after signing the CPA, on 8 December 2006, the Agreement on Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies (AMMAA) was signed by the two parties with the witness of the Chief of the UNMIN (Upreti and Sapkota 2016).

The UNMIN engaged in the peace process for Nepal, in the spirit of the 12-point understanding. The 5622nd meeting of the Security Council held on 23 January 2007, approved the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) by unanimously adopting Resolution 1740. The resolution was submitted by the UK to the Security Council once an informal understanding was reached with India and China. The UNMIN had four mandates:

- (1) Monitor the management of arms and armed personnel of the Nepal Army and the Maoist army, in line with the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement,
- (2) Assist the parties through a Joint Monitoring Coordinating Committee⁵ in implementing their agreement on the management of arms and armed personnel,
- (3) Assist in the monitoring of ceasefire arrangements, and
- (4) Provide technical assistance to the Election Commission in the planning, preparation and conduct of the election of a Constituent Assembly in a free and fair atmosphere.

As per the provisions of the CPA and the AMMAA the UNMIN had to start the verification process, where the agreed criteria by the AMMAA were to apply to identify the right Maoist combatants. Table 3 shows the overview of the ex-combatants in the DDR process.

⁵See the decision (SC/8942) of 5622nd Meeting (PM) of the Security Council of UN for details

Table 3: Number of total combatants during verification, integration and rehabilitation process

Registration Process	Total	Male	Female
Total participation during verification (lined up)	32,250		
Verified by UNMIN	19,602	15,756 (80.37%)	3,846 (19.63%)
Absent during verification	8,640		
Arms stored in containers	3,475		
Disqualified combatants	4,008	2,791	1,217
Minors (below age of 18 on 25 May 2006)	2,973	1,987 (66.85%)	986 (33.16%)
Late Recruits	1,035	804 (77.07%)	231 (22.31%)
Present during categorization for integration, volunteer retirement and rehabilitation	17,052	13,494 (79.13%)	3,558 (20.87%)
Absent during categorization	2550	2,268	282
Dead during cantonment stay	94		
Opted volunteer retirement	15,624	12,170 (77.89%)	3,454 (22.11%)
Opted integration (to join Nepalese Army)	1,422	1,318 (92.69%)	104 (7.31%)
Opted rehabilitation package	6	6	

Source: Adapted from Bhatt and Upreti 2016

Once, the UNMIN was engaged in the verification process, the ex-combatants were to be placed in the seven main cantonments and 21 satellite centres (Colekessian, 2009), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: List of seven cantonments and their satellite centres

SN.	Main Cantonment	District	Satellite cantonments	District
1.	Chulachuli	Ilam	1.1 Biplap-Srijana Smriti at Danabari	Ilam
			1.2 Ratna-Shakuntal Smriti Tandi	Morang
			1.3 Chintang-Sukhani at Yangshila	Morang
2.	Dudhauri	Sindhuli	2.1 Kumar Smriti at Tribeni	Udapur
			2.2 Rambriksha Smriti at Kalijore	Sarlahi
			2.3 Solu-Salleri Jana Kalyan	Sindhuli
3.	Shaktikor	Chitwan	3.1 Basu-Smriti at Tinchowk	Kavre
			3.2 Bethan Smriti at Namobuddha	Kavre
			3.3 Pratap Smriti at Kamidanda	Kavre
4.	Jhaltundada	Nawalparasi	4.1 Paribartan Smriti at Thulokot	Kaski-Tanhu
			4.2 Basanta Smriti at Tingire	Palpa-Arghakhanchi
			4.3 Krishna Sen Smriti at Jhingamara	Rupandehi
5.	Dahaban	Rolpa	5.1 Mangalsen First at Tila	Rolpa
			5.2 Jawahar Smriti at Chaupatta	Dang

SN.	Main Cantonment	District	Satellite cantonments	District
			5.3 Dirgha Smriti at Holleri	Rolpa
6.	Dasrathpur	Surkhet	6.1 Jeet Smriti at Dasrathpur,	Surkhet
			6.2 Ghorahi-Satbariya at Lek Pharsa	Surkhet
			6.3 Pili Smriti at Kalyan	Surkhet
7.	Masuriya	Kailali	7.1 Lisne Gam at Masuriya	Kailali
			7.2 Bahubir Yoddha at Sahajpur	Kailai
			7.3 Lokesh Smriti at Chisapani	Kailali

After the AMMAA was signed, the government established the Cantonment Management Central Coordinator's Office (CMCCO) and started developing basic facilities such as access roads, temporary shelters, health and drinking water supply, electricity, communications in the cantonments with their own resources and support of the international community (Bhatt, 2010; Timalisina, 2014). The Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) was created for peace building support and one of the major tasks of the NTFP was to fund/support (essential infrastructure and logistics) the seven main cantonments and 21 satellite cantonments to house the combatants 2009; 2012).

Once UNMIN asked the CPNM to register its combatants, CPNM put forward the lists of 32,250 from which the UNMIN verified only 19,602 as qualified combatants that were comprised of 15,756 men and 3,846 women (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016). The registration and verification process took five years (2007 to January 2011), which according to the CPA, was supposed to be completed within six months. As per the provisions of AMMAA, the UNMIN was assigned to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel of the Nepal Army and the Maoist insurgents. In accordance to AMMAA, all the arms, weapons and ammunition of the insurgents and an equal amount from the Nepal Army were to be stored in the double locked containers at the cantonment sites and the Nepal Army Barracks under the monitoring of the UN (Upreti, 2012; Bhandari, 2015).

Among the AMMAA provisions, one, which came out of the Joint Monitoring Coordination Committee (JMCC) at the central level, representing the Nepal Army, CPNM ex-commanders and UN monitors, was formed for monitoring, reporting, and facilitating the cessation of hostilities. The JMCC established the Joint Monitoring Teams (JMT) to monitor the cantonment levels.

The verification process and residence in the cantonment, especially for women, was not easy. During their cantonment stay, female ex-combatants faced many problems and difficulties. Since the Cantonment Management Office worked under conditions of uncertainty that at any time they might be closed down, the cantonment sites were characterized by inadequate space for accommodations, lack of adequate dining and kitchen spaces, lack of proper water supply and sanitation facilities, lack of electrification and communication capacities, and lack of infrastructure for providing effective health services in the earlier days (Timalisina, 2014). And female ex-combatants suffered in particular without proper water, hygiene and sanitation facilities. Access to such infrastructure was comparatively better for combatants residing in urban areas, even if these services were relatively expensive (Shrestha and Upreti 2017; Subedi, 2014; 2013).

Many of the women ex-combatants had married and given birth in the cantonments. While their husbands opted for integration into the Nepal army, they had to stay back to take care of their children. They were not able to attend relevant training and maternity leave. As a result, they lost

many promotion opportunities. Similarly, the ones whose husbands had been severely injured needed regular care, so they too couldn't opt for integration. In addition, some of the women had to leave the cantonments to give birth, and therefore they remained absent during the verification process. Moreover, work divisions did not enable women to opt for integration into the national army. If a husband were to choose integration, his wife would generally opt for voluntary retirement (Bogati, 2014).

Contestations

As per the provisions of the AMMAA, all the Maoist combatants were to be camped and arms were to be kept in the double locked containers; the ex-combatants had to be integrated, reintegrated and rehabilitated as per the negotiated procedures. However, because of internal conflicts within the Maoist party and lack of common understanding among the major political parties, the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process became too complicated, took far longer than planned and only was completed in 2011, after the UNMIN engagement was terminated by the government, once its role was highly contested by favouring the Maoists and blaming the government (Upreti and Sapkota 2016).

As the process of the DDR became prolonged, the combatants were confronted with a dilemma and a sense of frustration. The main reasons for the length of the DDR process were: a) political parties failed to negotiate the process and outcomes of DDR, and b) the UNMIN was not able amicably to deliver its mandate and fell into controversy. Hence, the meaningful DDR process after the verification was only started following the termination of the UNMIN, because the Special Committee for Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Army Combatants (SCSIRMAC) provided three options to the ex-combatants. These were: a) reintegration into the Nepal Army under the standard set by the SCSIRMAC, b) voluntary retirement of the combatants with a golden handshake package (cash package), and c) rehabilitation into society with skill-related training and seed money (Timalsina, 2014).

All 17,052 combatants participated in the final regrouping process because 94 people were reported death between 2007 and 2011. Out of 17052 updated numbers of the combatants, 7344 ex-combatants had opted for voluntary retirement whereas 9702 chose integration into Nepal Army option and only 6 people opted for rehabilitation. Interestingly, 2456 combatants were missing during the process (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016; Bhandari, 2015).

Though there was a heightened sense of scepticism and disagreement from international donors on the cash payment for voluntary retirement, the offer of cash packages between 500-800 thousands rupees, based on the rank and position of ex-combatants, became most popular. The main concern raised by the international community, the gap between the ex-combatants and the local communities (Jackson, 2015), became irrelevant but posed new issues, including extra veget expenses and forced donations to their mother party. However, one structural defect of this process was the discrimination between the ex-combatants residing in the cantonment and the so called 'disqualified' 4,008 ex-combatants from the UN verification process—mostly minors (2,973 of which 1,988 were males, and 985 females) and late recruitments (1,035 of which 804 were males and 231 females) (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016). The 'disqualified' did not get money even when they were ex-combatants because of the AMMAA provision, which stated that the "disqualified combatants" should be discharged from the cantonments as soon as possible. However, due to protection from the CPNM the majority of the 4,008 disqualified combatants stayed inside cantonments for more than two years instead of discharging them immediately. It was only in 2009

an Action Plan was signed between the Government of Nepal, the UN agencies and the UCPN (Maoist) to release Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLR). Thus, the process of VMLRS discharge took place only in January 2010. At that time, only 2,394 (60 percent) of the VMLRs were present (Robins, 2016). However, the VLMRs did not get the money allocated for voluntary retirement package that created perennial conflict and tension between the VLMR and the CPNM (Bhatt and Upreti 2016). The disagreement among the major political parties on the modality of reintegration not only created complications for a long time but also contributed to create political distrust and lack of credibility (Upreti and Thapa 2017; Jackson, 2015; Bleie and Shrestha 2010).

Originally, the cantonment period was supposed to be for six months but stretched out for five long years. The paradox, was that those who were verified as minors had become adults by the time of their departure from the cantonment: at the time of the farewell ceremony for the minors on 8 February 2010, there were only about 400 combatants under age of 18. As a result, these combatants at first refused to accept the option of reintegration coordinated by the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MOPR) (Bhatt, 2016). They also vehemently opposed the negative connotation attached to the term “disqualified” (“*ayogya*” in Nepali). They argued that the VMLRs had equally participated and invested their youth and energy on the armed insurrection, but they were label as “disqualified”, which brought severe frustration, strong feeling of neglect and a deep sense of humiliation (Upreti and Shrestha 2017; Shrestha and Upreti 2017, Shrestha, 2012).

Once the involvement of the UNMIN was terminated in 2011, despite its efforts to continue, the Secretariat for Special Committee on the Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Army Combatants (SSCSIRMAC) was assigned by the government of Nepal, as per the understanding between the major political parties, to carry over the DDR process. The SSCSIRMAC then initiated a process to address the concerns of the 17,052 ex-combatants in the cantonments. Consequently, in 2012 all the cantonments came under the direct control of the government of Nepal, which previously had been under joint monitoring and control (Timalsina, 2014; Subedi, 2014).

Cost of the DDR

It is extremely difficult to find the actual cost of the DDR process because of a) direct and indirect costs associated with the DDR, and b) investments by so many government agencies, donors, INGOs and NGOs. In this section we present some examples of costs incurred in various activities related to the DDR.

According to expenditure details submitted by the Ministry of Peace and Rehabilitation (MOPR) to the Special Committee, altogether NRs 15.02 billion were spent for the management of former Maoist combatants who started living in the cantonments after December 2006. The Central Cantonment Management Coordination Committee office expenditures on food, monthly allowances and miscellaneous was NRs 9,091,162,899 in November 2011. The Peace Building Support Office (PBSO) approved \$10 million in July 2008. The United Nation’s Peace Fund for Nepal (UNFPN) has received a total of \$36.4 million in contributions from the governments of the UK, Norway, Denmark, Canada and Switzerland, as well as the global UN Peace Building Fund, and this amount was utilized in the areas of jobs for peace, reparations support, minors, and for the empowerment of female ex-combatants (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016). Moreover, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction was established in 2007 to look into the cases of conflict, gather data on conflict-affected people and provide state support to the victims respectively.

To define how the severity of the conflict affected people, four categories were created, including fully disabled, severely disabled, moderately disabled and mildly disabled. A person recognized to be fully disabled (100% disabled) was provided NRs 200,000. Similarly, a person recognized to have impairments of 75% severity was given 75% of the full amount. Subsequently, if a person recognized to be 50%, 40% or 20% impaired, s/he was provided with 50%, 40% and 20% of the amount respectively. In the same way, provision of free medical treatment was made available through the Ministry of Health and Population, under the recommendation of the District Administrative Offices. Under this recommendation, only those whose impairments had been categorized to be of at least 50% severity, were entitled to this facility (Peace and Reconstruction Ministry, 2012). Additionally, scholarship provision for the children of people whose impairments were recognized to be of at least 50% severity, were also available. Similarly, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction had also decided to provide a life-long monthly allowance of NRs 10,000 to people who have acquired impairments through the conflict (Lamichhane, 2015:295).

Among the 4,008 disqualified, even though 2,400 of the disqualified (VMLR) were formally discharged in February 2010, 1,615 of those did not come forward to participate in the process, including a large fraction of women who were married and pregnant. And the ones who came forth for the process received a cash payment of just NRs 22,000, around US\$ 285. Similarly, three options were provided that included integration into the Nepal Army, rehabilitation, and voluntary retirement with a cash package. According to the first option, out of 19,602 combatants, a maximum of 6,500 ex-combatants would be eligible to integrate into the Nepal Army (NA) on an individual basis under the standard set by the Nepal Army. The second option of a rehabilitation package, was worth a minimum of NRs 600,000 to a maximum NRs 800,000, and included a provision for educational support and vocational training opportunities. The third option offered a cash package categorized into four levels: those ex-combatants falling in the lowest rank received NRs 500,000 while the three remaining higher categories received NRs 600,000, NRs 700,000, and NRs 800,000 respectively (Subedi, 2014:241).

Out of 17,052 ex-combatants, 15,624 opted for voluntary retirement with a 'golden handshake' support; 1,422 opted for integration into the Nepal Army, and only 6 ex-combatants opted for the rehabilitation package. This amount (cash packages between 500-800,000 rupees provided on the basis of rank and position of ex-combatants) was used to purchase land, build houses; or mainly toward the education and health of their families (Bhandari, 2015). Likewise, the cash was utilized in many sub-sectors and areas including micro-agro-enterprises inclusive of poultry farming, vegetable farming, goat farming, dairy farming, vegetable shops, and non-agricultural micro-enterprises such as tea shops, retail shops, internet cafe's, brick manufacturing, soap manufacturing, beauty parlours, foreign employment, and savings in respective banks (Subedi, 2014).

Nonetheless, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process lacked a focus on overcoming the stigma that female ex-combatants faced and continue to face, during the reintegration process. This stigma has hindered their socio-political engagement and advancement (Colekessian, 2009). In fact, the focus of the reintegration program, was exclusively on providing economic support and allowances, and the concern for the stability, psycho-social counselling, awareness raising, and political and social awareness and integration remained very latent. The reintegration approach was unable to mobilize either men or women ex-combatants as change actors (Khadka, 2012). It was apparent that the process of demobilizing the PLA was the highest priority of political leaders, rather than coping with the specific interests and needs of the ex-combatants themselves (Gautam, 2011).

Assessing the gender dimensions of the DDR process

In this post-conflict scenario, men and women have unequal access to resources and men tend to benefit in the DDR process as they tend to be better educated and visible, and have higher mobility (Jackson, 2015). Therefore, special attention towards women and children ought to have been given to make sure that they were not marginalized or excluded. However, in the context of Nepal, the DDR process didn't address gender specific issues and concerns such as motherhood and child care provisions, stigma and ethos attached to the female ex-combatants. Moreover, their psychosocial dilemmas and frustrations were not addressed, nor did the process provide for a follow up on their livelihoods. In many cases, female ex-combatants failed to pursue their general education and vocational training, due to household commitments. Consequently, community perceptions, and community ownership which are inseparable components of gender dynamics and rehabilitation, were left unaddressed in the reintegration process (Colekessian, 2009).

One of the common concerns expressed by all the FDGs during our data collection process, was that the differential needs of men and women were not taken into serious account in the modality of reintegration. When three options of benefit packages were offered, there was no gender sensitive approach adopted and no monitoring of gender aspects of the DDR. Hence, reintegration took place in a very general way, without considering the gender specific needs of female ex-combatants. The reintegration of female ex-combatants into their communities should have been looked after meticulously; however, the DDR approach largely ignored it (Khanal, 2012; Khadka, 2012).

Thus, there was significant stigma attached to the female ex-combatants upon their return to their communities, because of patriarchal domination, a reality that has faced women ex-combatants globally. Nepalese society does not easily accept inter-caste marriages, widowhood, or the divorced status of the women ex-combatants. Moreover, they were the ones who were blamed for breaking social norms and values. The stress and trauma they experienced in their communities as a result, ultimately led many to explore new options (Robins, 2016).

Furthermore, the disqualified VMLRs were even worse off, because they returned almost empty handed. On top of that, their communities were not welcoming because of their past violent and coercive activities. Because the insurgency did not fulfil the political, social and economic transformations they had promised, community members were held accountable (Upreti and Shrestha 2017b; Khadka, 2012). Livelihood security, good governance, and gender-sensitive politics were not achieved by the insurrection. Instead, the war time rebel leaders were reported to be engaged in corruption, malpractice, nepotism, red-tape, and favouritism. In this context one of the respondents said:

“Our leaders gave a false dream to us saying that they will change the society for the betterment of poor marginalized, excluded and discriminated Nepali people. However, they exchanged the core objective with their new power and position. Once they held power, they forgot every commitment they made to us and betrayed Nepali people. We are now thrown away and struggling for survival”⁶.

During the period of our data collection, most of the respondents we interacted with expressed the insecurity in their livelihoods and lack of adherence by their political leaders to their

⁶ Ms Geeta Sharma (name changed for security reason), interview to the lead author on 14 February 2017 at Hotel Century, Bharatpur, Chitwan.

commitments. Often the female ex-combatants were angry with their leaders and the key actors of DDR process, frustrated with the difficulties they faced and regretful for spending their productive lives in a war that did not produce the desired results. Facing livelihood insecurity, one of the frustrated female ex-combatant said,

“My husband and I were both combatants and later we stayed at the Shaktikhor cantonment. While staying at the cantonment we did not get skills training, useful after the reintegration. But we got only training related to the military. Once we left the cantonment with the option of voluntary retirement, we faced many problems. We got eleven hundred thousand (five hundred thousand of wife and six hundred thousand of husband), but this amount was not sufficient to build a good house in an appropriate place. Hence, we have purchased land and constructed a small house by taking a personal loan, to add in the voluntary retirement package. So, we started a small shop. However, we are not able to earn a good income from the shop as we had to sell most of the goods in credit to poor people residing in the area. We spent our productive lives in the war with the hope for change but nothing happened. I am very frustrated, angry and regretful, while I recall what our leaders said during that time, and what they are doing now. Now I am not interested even in talking about this issue and want to detach from politics”⁷.

One of the main reasons for the frustration of the ex-combatants was the political and personal behaviour of the CPNM senior leaders, as they were completely absorbed in power politics forgetting to their cadres who committed themselves to what they thought was a hopeful ideology, only for them to grab power.

Social integration of female ex-combatants and their relations with the community

During the insurgency, female combatants were actively engaged in all combat and guerrilla units active in militancy operations. They held responsibilities equal to male combatants (Bhandari, 2015). However, their post-conflict scenario stands in stark contrast to that of the male ex-combatants. Because of biological differences, such as pregnancy and associated reproductive activities, Nepalese society attributes different socio-cultural expectations to women, assigning them nurturing and care work. Moreover, their biological needs were neglected: pregnant and nursing women did not receive gender friendly facilities. Nor were they eligible for reintegration raining while in the cantonments. They were unable to obtain proper childcare, and the cantonments lacked even the minimum facilities (e.g., separate toilets, breast feeding spaces, etc.). Even after the cantonment period, the DDR program failed to acknowledge specific gender needs and the security issues related to community affirmation of traditional roles and stigmatization of women (Upreti and Shrestha 2017a; Colekessian, 2009). The integration of female ex-combatants into society became increasingly complicated, facing numerous difficulties such as resistance to inter-caste marriages, widow-marriage, and love marriage. Women were ostracized far more than men for these forms of marriage.

One of the conclusions of the FGDs was that the female ex-combatants faced the most difficult situations when they returned to their communities of origin, or their husbands’

⁷ Ms Pramila Parajuli (name changed due to security reason), former combatant currently staying at Padampur-8, Simalbasti Chitwan. The interview was taken on 14 February 2017 at Bharatpur.

communities of origin. In many cases they were unable to cope with the situations, and had to leave, moving to urban centres or other towns. The most difficult and stressful situation for female ex-combatants was created by the social rejection of inter-caste marriage, as compared to their male partners. However, even in moving to new areas, this was not so easy to overcome; therefore, they often ended up living nearby the cantonments where they had spent five years. Previous research findings also show that the rejection rate of female ex-combatants was higher than their male counterparts (Bhatarai, 2016).

In addition to the difficulty of social reintegration, women ex-combatants also faced challenges in terms of income generation activities. These were mainly nominal financially, because their major priority became caring for and rearing their children, given the lack of social support networks. Essentially, women ex-combatants returned to a condition of domestic servitude. In addition, the highly masculinised institution of armed combat contributed to the myth that female combatants are highly aggressive or highly sexual. In this case, when women and girls lack community or family support and have limited financial opportunities in post-conflict situations, they are more vulnerable to human trafficking and pursue commercial sex work (Fajardo, 2010; Falch, 2010; Colekessian, 2009); this in turn reinforces the stereotype.

Without decent qualifications, many of the ex-male PLA members went abroad, leaving their spouses alone. Left alone, in conditions of social marginalization, contributed to the disintegration of their families and their own despondency. During the war, women experienced greater flexibility in terms of sexual relations, marriage, and divorce (Gautam, 2011). The CPNM negotiated and organized marriages, allowing for flexibility; however, after the conflict and the cantonment period, these conditions reverted to previous practices. In addition, during our fieldwork, we learned that gender-based and sexual violence were common both during the war and subsequently. As is well-known, survivors of rape and sexual assault experience fear, anger, distress, stress, weakness, aggression, guilt, shame, agitation and recurring nightmares for a relatively long time. Yet these were latent and remained underreported and unaddressed. And to their dismay, none of the government after-relief programs or packages included assistance for victims of sexual violence (Fajardo, 2010). In fact, social problems that erupted during the course of the conflict have still not been addressed. Issues of transitional justice, gross human rights violations, merciless killings, disappearances, impunity, rape and torture were neglected, and hardly discussed (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016). All of these factors negatively contributed to the difficulty of female ex-combatants as they sought to re-integrate into society.

The post-conflict reintegration process has, in fact led to the disempowerment of women ex-combatants, except for those 104 (7.31%) women who selected to integrate into the Nepal Army. The Nepal Army has implemented the Directive on Gender Conduct, 2014, and although the experience of the 1.91% of army members who are women—still a far cry from the 20% mandated under the agreement—has not yet been studied from their perspectives, women soldiers are legally accepted as equals to men (Bogati, 2014, 11). Moreover, for those who did not obtain the skills related trainings, in accordance with their skill need, age, education, interest and suitability to their local conditions, unemployment became the norm. First they aren't eligible enough in this competitive job market and the second; they have their family responsibility with most of their husbands abroad, so this has restricted their mobility (Shrestha and Upreti, 2017; Subedi, 2014).

It was reported in both the in-depth interviews and the FGD that the self-esteem of female ex-combatants was demolished in part by socially levelling them as vulnerable, fragile, weak and incompetent, based on their engagement in the armed conflict. Instead, some of the local elites

from opposition parties deliberately humiliated them. In this context, one of the respondents said, “I was frequently humiliated by the feudal elites against whom we fought earlier. Once I return back to my home village, they started humiliating us as revenge strategy. So, I did not feel comfortable staying in the village.”⁸ Another respondent said, “Often people in my community, especially the elderly, looked at me with an eye of awe and sympathy, undermining my inner strengths, and making me feel rebellious and angry. But I have to be calm as the situation is not in my favour”. Political leaders is also expressed similar views toward female ex-combatants. The evidence of such a masculinist perspective is indicated in the exclusion of women from the peace negotiations and the DDR process (Shrestha and Upreti 2017; Hauge, 2015).

Transformational and liberatory gender roles have the potential to create positive change in post-conflict societies. However, because Nepali society is patriarchal, and the mind-set of the political leaders is both feudal and gender-blind, they are unable to envision such transformations. In short, the frequent inter-caste, inter-ethnic and widow-marriage between ex-combatants encouraged by the CPNM during the war, to demonstrate their radical agenda and to manage the sexual need of the fighters, became a severe social burden and barrier in post-conflict social reintegration for women (Upreti and Shrestha, 2017b). The respondents to the key informant interviews also confirmed that the vast majority of such marriages did not survive because of non-acceptance and resistance from the community. Extra-marital affairs were also common, while partners were separated, when men went to work abroad, creating additional suffering on the part of the female ex-combatants.

Livelihood Strategies and options of female ex-combatants

Livelihood security was one of the major concerns for the ex-combatants in general and female ex-combatants in particular (Upreti, 2009). Most of the ex-combatants have used the financial packages they received while opting for voluntary retirement. Many have selected to use their money to purchase land, to build houses and for the upbringing and education of their children. They have also started small businesses such as retail shops, and transportation businesses (Robins, 2016). Previous studies (Bhandari 2015, Shresth and Upreti, 20017) confirm livelihoods acquired through small businesses including retail shops, small hotels, tea-shops and stationary shops. Some female ex-combatants have collectively invested in vegetable, fish and mushroom farming; rearing cows, goats and buffalo; and some male ex-combatants have migrated to Malaysia, the Gulf countries and India (Bhandari, 2014). Surprisingly, ex-combatants were reluctant to engage in agriculture. Their reluctance to do so and to reject the training packages in the agricultural sector were the result of both the Maoist leaders’ and combatants’ feelings that such work would undermine their status and morale as brave fighters of the ‘Peoples Liberation Army’.

Additionally, the CPNM and its leaders, as well as the senior ex-combatants (in charge of cantonments) also vehemently opposed vocational training for similar reasons. They felt that such training undermined their contributions as fighters, and that sewing or goat farming training were not appropriate for them. (Subedi, 2013). Hence, institutionally organized skills training was not an option. However, once large number of ex-combatants left the cantonments and began their normal civilian lives, they encountered a need for such training and some of the donor organisations capitalised on this situation, and began to mobilize NGOs as facilitators.

⁸ Interview with Ms Gita Parajuli (name changed due to security reason) in Chitawan in February 2017 by the author.

The DDR process practically ignored the job creation and employment aspects of ex-combatants. Even when there were some cosmetic activities, they were of poor quality (Subedi, 2013) and opposed by the ex-combatants. There were neither concrete plans for skills training, nor proper mapping of jobs and their availability in the job market, resulting in a struggle to find suitable livelihood options. An earlier study of livelihood patterns (Robins, 2016) demonstrates that the most common livelihood (40%) was small business. Further, 20% of ex-combatants worked either on their own or rented land, while 14% were engaged in daily labour; 17% received support from a spouse working abroad, or in Nepal, while 10% assert that they have not acquired any stable source of income.

This scenario created greater stress for women, largely because of childrearing responsibilities and their dependence on spouses working abroad. They shouldered a triple burden of reproductive, productive, and communal work roles. One of the respondents of the in-depth interviews said of her situation:

“I am facing a very difficult situation because I have to perform three roles: bearing and rearing of children, managing household chores and generating earnings to sustain my family as well as contributing to the community as a member of the committee. My husband is physically weak due to his war time injuries, and therefore not able to generate an income. Our party has abandoned us and the reactionary government has not supported us. In this circumstances, I am helpless, hopeless and regretful for joining the insurgency”⁹.

As a survival strategy some of the ex-combatants have engaged in cooperatives, users group, VDC activities, Community Forestry Groups, Mother’s Groups and Clubs, Community Based Organizations, School Management Committees, Ward Citizen Forums and Youth Clubs., although the participation especially is relatively low particularly among the women (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016). For those who have joined such groups, their networking has provided them with feelings of security and offered greater awareness of their options for livelihoods.

The Role of UNMIN and other international actors

Many international actors were engaged in Nepal’s peace process including India, the USA, the UK, and some European countries--Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Germany (Upreti and Sapkota 2016). A number of United Nations agencies (UNMIN, UNDP, UNHCHR, UNOCHA); however, the UN became directly engaged at a later stage. The roles of these actors were unclear, contested and confusing as we examined the DDR process.

The 5622nd Meeting of the UN Security Council approved the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) by unanimously adopting Resolution 1740 (23 January 2007). The Resolution was presented to the Security Council, by the UK, after reaching an informal agreement with India and China. The UNMIN contained the following four mandates (Upreti and Sapkota 2016):

- Monitor the management of arms and armed personnel of the Nepal Army and the Maoist army, in line with the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement,

⁹ Interview with Ms Pramila KC (name changed due to security reason) at Chitwan on 13 February 2017 by one of the authors.

- Assist the parties through a Joint Monitoring Coordinating Committee¹⁰ in implementing their agreement on the management of arms and armed personnel,
- Assist in the monitoring of ceasefire arrangements,
- Provide technical assistance to the Election Commission in the planning, preparation and conduct of the election of a Constituent Assembly in a free and fair atmosphere.

However, once the UNMIN started work in Nepal it fell into numerous controversies especially on the issues of the management of cantonments dealing with the Maoist ex-combatants. Commenting on this, the Leader of the Nepali Congress Party and former Foreign Minister, one of the key members of the DDR decision-making process, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat said in an interview: *“There were issues with the integration and rehabilitation of the Maoist combatants too, and it was not handled well. Even the United Nation’s Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) role was not that satisfactory towards the end”* (Upreti and Sapkota, 2016:71).

Likewise, in this context, Kul Chandra Gautam, former Assistant Secretary General of the UN wrote in his recent book¹¹

“In September 2010, UNMIN had prepared a report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (S/2010/453) on the status of Nepal’s peace process recommending further extension of UNMIN’s mandate This report was so unbalanced and objectionable that four former Foreign Ministers of Nepal coming from different political parties –KP Sharma Oli, Chakra Bastola, Ram Sharan Mahat and Prakash Chandra Lohani –wrote a joint letter of protest to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. As former foreign ministers, and strong supporters of the United Nations, they registered their objection to the tone and content of the whole report and pointed out several specific paragraphs which were against the letter and spirit of Nepal’s Comprehensive Peace Accord and related agreements. They objected the report’s treatment of Nepal’s national army on par with the former rebel force, whose members were in temporary cantonments awaiting integration and rehabilitation. They also objected the report essentially treating the Government of Nepal on par with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)”.

According to Jha (2013), the UNMIN was criticized on three fronts: 1) for allowing Maoists to get away with not registering all the weapons in the cantonments; 2) verifying thousands of combatants who had never been part of the PLA, and 3) failing in its tasks of supervising the cantonments. However, Maoists were more positive towards the UNMIN. In this context, Mr. Dina Nath Sharma, one of the negotiators from the Maoists, who was actively engaged in the formal and informal dialogue process said: *“The flexibility and trust between top leaders of the major political party was the strength of our process. Also, the support of the international community especially that of the UNMIN, was positive too”*¹². The major sources of their trust were their frequent and intimate engagements in settling many contentious issues and frequent private visits and meetings. For example, the close relationship between late Prime Minister Girija Prasad

¹⁰ See the decision (SC/8942) of 5622nd Meeting (PM) of the Security Council of UN for details

¹¹ Gautam Kul Chandra (2015), *Lost in Transition: Rebuilding Nepal from the Maoist mayhem and mega earthquake*. Kathmandu: nepa~laya.

¹² Interview with Mr. Daman Nath Dhungana on Feb 7, 2016 at Kathmandu by the main author of this article.

Koirala and Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal was significant in reaching crucial decisions (e.g. holding of CA elections).

Right from the start, UNMIN faced deep mistrust and vehement criticisms on several fronts: its interests and engagement in dealing with Terai agitation beyond its mandate, favouring CPNM against other parties, a slow and bureaucratic in response and the ill-intention of prolonging the mission by not settling the process in time¹³. Finally the government did not further extend its 4th renewed tenure on 15 January 2011 and it had to go without completing the main task (Upreti and Sapkota, 2016; Bhandari, 2015).

There was also strong of the UN creating parallel structure. For example the UNDP had created a spate United Nation's Peace Fund for Nepal (UNPFN) even when there was a government led multi-donor Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) to support Nepal's peace and DDR processes. By the year 2011, the UNFPN had spent almost \$35 million through its own 19 projects to be implemented by 12 UN agencies. This large sum of money used in the name of support to the discharged minors and female combatants, created jobs for peace and helped to develop truth and reconciliation and disappearance commissions (Bhatt and Upreti, 2016). However, the key informants shared that not even 10 percent of the allocated money reached its actual targets. They believed that the extremely expensive UN operation and its power-centric approach was focused on maintaining contentment at the top levels of the bureaucracy. They claimed this was one of the several reasons for the failure of the UNMIN.

Once, the UNMIN's request for an extension was approved by the government and its engagement was terminated, the Secretariat for Special Committee on the Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of Maoist Army Combatants began a fresh DDR process by categorizing and re-verifying the 17,052 ex-combatants who stayed in the seven cantonments and the 21 satellite centres (Timalsina, 2014).

Since donors were active in different dimensions of the DDR, the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu was able to financially support ex-combatants in their School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations inside the cantonments. This enabled many ex-combatants to complete a high school education and obtain a SLC degree. Nonetheless, high school graduations were not sufficient for these ex-combatants participate in a competitive job market. Ex-combatants still lacked vocational and skill-based curriculum and opportunities (Subedi, 2014). Donors were in a hurry to show that they had provided skills training to the ex-combatants: they reported that 6,000 combatants were provided with vocational training in cooking, tailoring, mobile repairing, and driving. They even reported that about 12,000 ex-combatants had completed basic and advanced English language training, and over 6,000 graduated in computer courses (Subedi, 2014). However, in our study none of the respondents were satisfied with such a claim.

Shrestha (2012) has argued that the donor-funded projects were not comprehensive, and therefore unable to produce the desired results. The UNIRP had focused on economic rehabilitation through its training and education, but it had not analyzed the labour market and

¹³ For example, the contestation between the Nepali Congress and UNMIN was on the perceived biases of the UNMIN towards Maoists. Mr. Rajan Pokharel writing in the Himalayan Times (August 26, 2009) entitled "UNMIN again bails out erring PLA fighters" wrote: "Time and again the PLA combatants violated the law and breached the political agreements, but UNMIN always comes to their rescue, preventing the law enforcement agencies to perform their duty, alleged Nepali Congress leader Dr Ram Sharan Mahat. 'UNMIN has not been effective in monitoring arms and combatants, 'Dr Mahat alleged, questioning the UNMIN's mandate'" (see <http://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/unmin-again-bails-out-erring-pla-fighters/> for details).

livelihood opportunities, nor had it conducted a social-reintegration analysis. Because it ignored social reintegration desired results were not obtained.

Retrospective opinion on their engagement in the armed insurgency

While examining public opinion about the changes observed in the CPNM after the peace agreement, and once they came in power, we learned that public perception was hugely negative. The media had covered their lavish lifestyle and connections with the upper class people/businessmen and the power elites. They also documented the ignorant behavior of the Maoist leaders with their cadres and fighting forces. When asked about their retrospective assessment of the party, one woman stated:

“Once the peace agreement was signed and we were kept in the cantonment, there was no proper discussion among the ex-combatants on the issues of verification, modality, rank and the packages. Hence, the reintegration ended up with 1,422 ex-combatants entering the Nepal Army out of which only 104 (7.31%) were female and a large number of ex-combatants (15,624) had to choose voluntary retirement—in which 3,454 (22.11%) were female. This was a grand failure of our leadership as they were not able to accommodate as many as possible into the Army. Originally, I was planning to join the Nepal Army but later they posed such difficult criteria and humiliating conditions, preventing a huge number of interested female ex-combatants from joining. So the reactionary forces wanted to prevent us from joining the army. I opted for voluntary retirement, but I firmly believe that the reintegration process was not only superficial and inappropriate but also blind to the special needs of women, lactating mothers, pregnant women and wounded women. The State abandoned us and they became successful because of our leaders. So I very much regret my decision to join the armed insurgency and hate the misleading leaders who gave us a false dream when they obtained power. When I joined the insurgency, I dreamed I would be able to dismantle the socio-political hierarchies, change religious and cultural exclusion, and end the vicious circle of poverty and inequality to create an equitable society. Our leaders took these issues very seriously during war time. However, over time, our dream shattered and our leaders totally abandoned us once they obtained power.”

From our focus group discussions, one to one informal conversation and in-depth interviews, we found the same level of frustration among the female ex-combatants. They were angry, frustrated, and annoyed with their rebel leaders. Their shared complaint was that the leaders forgot everything once they reached power. The reaction of the following respondent is also worth-noting. Reflecting the past, she said:

“The Maoist ideology was so progressive; therefore, I reckoned that this would bring social and political transformations to our society. I was from the excluded, marginalised caste group and my family was facing brutal discrimination. Hence, I joined the armed conflict to change the situation. There were thousands of women like me who joined the insurgency. But regrettably, our dedication, devotion and contributions were abused by the leaders so that they could acquire

power—to be prime minister, vice president, finance minister, speaker of House of Representatives, and so on. Now they forgot the poor people neglecting to provide us with shelter, food and information about the enemy's plans. Many people sent their sons and daughters to the war when our party asked to send at least one person from each house to fight the regressive state forces. But once our leaders signed the CPA and AMMAA, and once they led the successive government they betrayed those people who were the foundation of our war. They betrayed us while they make the feudal, regressive forces of Nepal happy. I am so angry witnessing all these activities of our leaders¹⁴.”

Conclusion

This study has identified several weaknesses, complications and consequent suffering of the ex-combatants in general and female ex-combatants in particular. The study examined five interrelated features of the DDR process: a) the process of what happened, how it happened and what were the results; b) the gender dimensions of the DDR; c) social relations of female ex-combatants; d) livelihood strategies and options for female ex-combatants; e) the role of international actors; and finally f) the opinions of female ex-combatants on their engagement in the insurgency and their leaders. We conclude that the DDR process was largely gender blind; top-down; highly contested, with mounting tension between the key stakeholders, ultimately marginalising the female ex-combatants. While examining the gender dimension of the DDR process, we came to the conclusions that neither the DR process, the peace process, nor the political process had taken gender issues seriously throughout the entire period. Although the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and provisions of the UNSCR 1325 and 1820 offered a strong framework for gender sensitive approaches, including increasing the participation of women in peace negotiations and peace building processes, by keeping account of the different needs of women, women's perspectives were nonetheless lacking in demobilization and reintegration.

Even though the Constitution of Nepal 2015 required at least 33% female participation in State structures, the major political parties and the government failed to ensure this baseline participation. Though three of the five top posts of the State (the President, the Chief Justice and the Speaker of the Parliament) were women in the past three years, as a matter of pride for Nepal, gender sensitivity was not reflected in the DDR process.

Regarding the relationship between the female ex-combatants and the wider society after their integration, we conclude that the result are mixed. In many cases, social relations of female ex-combatants were affected by their behaviour during wartime, their marriages with other castes and ethnic groups and their personal skills. However, social attitudes were unfavourable toward their decisions, particularly in their native communities of those of their husbands. Hence, they often moved to new areas and city centres, fleeing from social ignorance, discrimination or criticism.

Based on our findings regarding the livelihood strategies and options for female ex-combatants, we conclude that their livelihoods are largely insecure, with very limited options because of faulty DDR procedures neglecting to properly train them in skill development and entrepreneurship. Instead, the whole focus was to get them out of cantonments. Hence, no sincere efforts were been made to ensure their livelihoods after they integrated into the community. Some

¹⁴ Interview with Sharada (name changed for security reason).

donors supported some activities, but these were few in number, neither appropriate nor sustainable and implemented in very isolated ways.

Regarding the role of international actors, especially the mandated agency for supporting peace and the DDR process, the UN was highly controversial and contested. It was viewed by Nepali people and other political parties (except the CPNM) as biased, wanting to extend its tenure and therefore not driven to complete the DDR on time. Thus the Government did not further extend its 4th term. The role of international non-governmental organisations and bilateral donors was also sharply criticised, regarding engagement in sensitive political agendas such as federalism, radicalization in Terai, and ethnic divisions.

Regarding the opinions of female ex-combatants related to their engagement in the insurgency and their feelings toward their party leaders, most of our interviewees were regretful; they felt they had wasted their productive lives in the war, without accomplishing any achievements. Even with the advent of a Republic overthrowing the monarchy and the arrival of a secular state and federalism, they were nonetheless unable to secure a livelihood for poor and marginalised people. Most of the respondents opine that though the civil war was for a good cause the Maoist leaders created a crisis. Ultimately, they remain frustrated with the Maoist leaders, as if they were disposed of, without proper care.

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