



**Implementing Evidence-Based Design into Practice:
Recommendations to the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group
on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration**

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I. INTRODUCTION

In January 2011, the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) adopted the goal of developing an evidence-based approach for reintegration programming as a Strategic Priority area for the group's joint strategic workplan for 2012–2014¹. This created an opportunity to advance long-time discussions between the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and numerous UN and partner agencies with whom it had engaged for the previous five years on matters of community security and the application of cultural research to programme design (including but not limited to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organization for Migration).²

In response to this strategic priority area—and developed from the basis of an on-going research agenda into programme design matters more generally—UNIDIR created and implemented a multi-phase, multi-year project to develop a new tool that would assist field teams to design better, evidence-based reintegration projects for complex, dynamic, and volatile regions.³

Specifically, UNIDIR's research and development (R&D) efforts resulted in two primary outputs:

1. A Conceptual Framework for an approach to evidence-based programming on reintegration (2012)⁴
2. A Prototype tool resulting from the application of that framework for use by UN field staff responsible for the design and implementation of reintegration programmes, projects, and policies (2013)⁵

Our criteria for success of the final Prototype was that it:

- will contribute to the creation of more effective programming;
- can facilitate results-based management (RBM) processes for the benefit of greater accountability, transparency, and effectiveness; and
- may facilitate interagency cooperation on reintegration.

Throughout the R&D process, UNIDIR regularly presented findings, draft material for consideration, and formal presentations to both the IAWG itself and to the UN more broadly (including the running of

1 IAWG Joint Programme Strategy, 2012–2014: *Bridging Policy with Practice and Strengthening Capacity in Integrated DDR*, unpublished document on file with authors.

2 Between 2006 and 2010, UNIDIR ran an innovation initiative to explore new ways of developing sociocultural knowledge in conflict settings crucial to the design of effective projects and programmes, and then moving that knowledge to action through new design processes. The work of SNAP (The Security Needs Assessment Protocol) can be found on UNIDIR's website at www.unidir.org/programmes/process-and-practice/security-needs-assessment-protocol-snap-project-phase-ii

3 The Evidence-Based Design project was supported by generous contributions from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (both were supporters of UNIDIR's earlier SNAP initiative).

4 www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/a-framework-document-for-evidence-based-programme-design-on-reintegration-396.pdf

5 www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/a-prototype-for-evidence-based-programme-design-for-reintegration-en-610.pdf

a design workshop at UNIDIR and close collaboration with UN agencies and field teams in Somalia). The formal launch of the Prototype took place on 13 December 2013 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva.⁶

This document concludes UNIDIR's project on EBD by providing recommendations to the IAWG and its member organizations for next steps that may be taken to make EBD available for use by reintegration practitioners, and to foster integration into existing tools and practices.

While the EBD approach presented here was developed specifically in response to the task of creating an evidence-based approach for reintegration programming, it is worthwhile to note that consultations with partner agencies on matters unrelated to reintegration is demonstrating the broad applicability of EBD to project and programme design challenges generally, especially when they are characterized by:

- A complex socio-political environment;
- A dearth of best practices directly applicable to project or programme design in context;
- Constrained resources; and
- A need to maximize project impact.

In the following pages we briefly reintroduce the Evidence-Based Design Prototype; explain why evidence-based design approaches to programme design are needed in the context of changing DDR contexts and challenges; describe how the UNIDIR approach can be put to use in addressing or solving some of those challenges; and develop specific recommendations for how EBD can be integrated into existing practices in order to build capacity among practitioners for meeting the demands new problems, actors, and conditions.

II. WHAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN?

Evidence-Based Design (EBD) is a process that can guide field teams (including international and national staff, as well as collaborating agencies as appropriate) in crafting new solutions to a wide range of context-specific challenges through the explicit and transparent use of information and evidence. A primary goal of the EBD process is to help teams arrive at project and programme designs that are more locally effective, and lead to improved local impact.⁷

The EBD Prototype for reintegration programming consists of a series of modules and activities that constitute the EBD process, and the supporting tools, techniques, workshop materials, templates and visual aids designed to animate it. When the modules and activities that constitute the EBD process are carried out according to the Conceptual Framework for EBD on Reintegration, and through use of the supporting materials, we refer to this as Evidence-Based Design on Reintegration.

The EBD Prototype was designed to provide staff having a wide range of educational, professional, and experiential backgrounds, with a systematic, teachable process for working through a central challenge for practitioners working in DDR contexts with a special focus on reintegration, rehabilitation, and related matters: that is, taking broad policy guidance (e.g. a UN Security Council resolution; a UN Development Assistance Framework or UNDAF; a Country Team directive, etc.), and translating this

6 See www.unidir.org/programmes/process-and-practice/research-and-development-for-an-evidence-based-design-tool-for-reintegration-programming-phase-iii/designing-for-impact-creating-more-effective-programming-in-complex-environments

7 EBD is applicable to other areas of security-related concerns. For example, UNIDIR has pursued evidence-based policymaking approaches to improve dialogue and decision-making on matters of cyber stability (see www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/cyber-index-2014-en-625.pdf).

into locally relevant means for achieving better social impact “by design” (e.g. through local projects and programmes).

Through making use of the EBD Prototype, staff not only create materials that support the administrative requirements for the implementation of projects and programmes; they also cultivate a set of skills and capacities for identifying the kinds of information critical for achieving effectiveness in a particular place, and for making explicit use of it not only in the development of new plans for action, but also in the evaluation and course-correction of plans already underway.⁸

EBD represents a unique conceptual shift away from the “best practice approach” to project planning—which relies on evidence of past performance to direct future action—and towards a new “best process approach” that supports teams in the design of context-specific propositions for present or future action. A central characteristic of this approach is the explicit and transparent use of information and knowledge in order to create plans that are:

- strategically directed;
- rigorously (and locally) informed; and
- pragmatically applied within organizational and administrative practice, as well as in operational implementation.

EBD was developed with careful attention to the use of RBM systems within DDR planning, including review of the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) and the DDR Planning course taught at the Norwegian Defence International Centre (NODEFIC). UNIDIR’s intention was to ensure that EBD represents value added to the use of RBM systems in programme development and implementation, rather than redundancy or disruption to progress in that administrative area. In other words, in the effort to improve the capacity to create programmes that can be locally effective as well as administratively accountable, EBD was developed to work with, and not compete against, the purposes and functions of RBM.

III. WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE OF EBD?

The IAWG on DDR was established in March 2005 by the Executive Committee on Peace and Security (ECPS) of the United Nations, with a mandate to improve the Organization’s performance in the area of DDR. The group’s activities are therefore organized around three core objectives to fulfil this mandate:

- To develop and maintain cutting-edge policies and resources on DDR;
- To provide timely advice and support to programmes in the field at both the strategic and technical levels; and
- To monitor developments and evaluate results in the strategic environment of DDR in order to support the adaptation of structures and procedures as needed.

One of the group’s chief contributions towards its mandate has been the development of the IDDRS—a common UN approach to DDR programming. Presently comprised of 5 modules and over 300 pages of text, the standards represent guidance on the range of issues and topics seen as central for the planning and implementation of successful DDR operations in the field.

⁸ All details concerning method can be found in D. Miller and L. Rudnick, 2014, “A Prototype for Evidence-Based Design for Reintegration”, UNIDIR, op. cit.

Recent years have seen significant changes in the contexts in which DDR operations are taking place, the kinds of actors involved, and conditions under which DDR support is now being requested. All these factors put new strains on present approaches. This has created novel pressures on DDR practice in the field. In turn, this has resulted in greater attention to both the value and limitations of the IDDRS themselves, and the UN training systems that use them for guidance and curricular development.

While the IDDRS remain a useful and necessary starting point, practitioners appreciate that, especially given changing contexts and conditions, the IDDRS can neither anticipate nor attend to all problems all the time. Indeed, there is widespread recognition that, in order for DDR to be a relevant response to contemporary challenges, its practices and solutions must find a way to become more responsive to rapidly changing contexts and emerging conflict dynamics that diverge so radically from those from which DDR emerged as a response over the past 25 years. But answers to how to make these adaptations have been elusive.

An observation from a recent gathering of key DDR actors pointedly illustrates this state of affairs. In April 2014, with the support of NODFIC, the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (DDR Section) brought together DDR practitioners at Akershus Fortress in Oslo, Norway for the purpose of developing new training materials for the DDR Planners Course. The workshop report (*Evolving Operational Perspectives on Armed Group Management and Violence Reduction*) states that:

... it had been recognized for some years previous [to the meeting] that there was a need to retool DDR training, beyond what was prescribed in the International DDR Standards (IDDRS), to prepare staff to better meet some of the new challenges that they were facing in the field. Beyond this, however, the actual outputs of the workshop reflected a consensus on the overarching need for a careful re-think of the Organisation's approach to DDR in order to make it more in line with some of the present realities concerning armed groups in the field.⁹

Indeed, the more complex the issues and relationships involved, the more unfamiliar the contexts of DDR become, and the greater speed with which conditions change, the less it is likely it is that an approach to establishing "best practices" suitable for diffusion across diverse contexts and cases will be appropriate or effective.

It is by now widely accepted that, in order to be effective, reintegration programming must be tailored or customized to local conflict dynamics, socio-cultural systems, and needs. Practitioners and academics alike stress the need for local-level interventions to be shaped and guided by local contexts in order to arrive at the more sustainable outcomes we seek—such as durable, rather than merely symbolic, reintegration. Such observations about the value of and need for locally adapted approaches are not new. But demands for local adaptation to be put into practice in programming design and implementation is becoming increasingly emphatic as we struggle to keep pace with the changing nature of conflict and violence in the most protracted and entrenched conflicts around the world.

In UNIDIR's research with UN field staff, we have seen examples of many individuals doing their best to adapt tools and practices to local contexts in order to ensure that reintegration programming is not just a replication of best practices from the last place, but effective approaches for achieving impact in the place they are presently in. But these efforts more often than not occur in the absence of established techniques, guidance, and sometimes organizational support for undertaking this crucial, complicated, and consequential task.

⁹ *Evolving Operational Perspectives on Armed Group Management and Violence Reduction: Workshop Report*, Oslo, 2-4 April 2014, p. 1, section A, para. 3 (unpublished document, on file with authors).

The comments of the United Nations Development Programme's Chief Administrator, Jordan Ryan, recorded in the Meeting Report of the May 2014 high-level IAWG-DDR Principal's Meeting illustrate this state of affairs. Speaking about the need for new DDR options that are responsive to changing conflict dynamics and local contexts, he stated:

... [A] large variety of such new options have spontaneously emerged in the field in response to the changed conflict dynamics and context-specific needs of the moment. They offer useful examples of DDR's natural tendency to adapt and should be properly recorded for possible future use in other contexts. Effective global monitoring and evaluation and complementary knowledge management strategies should therefore be put in place to assess, capture and replicate these new approaches in other countries.

These comments underscore how urgent and crucial it is that DDR be implemented in locally relevant ways. But they also beg a pressing set of questions that, if left unanswered, will only perpetuate the UN's tendency towards improvisation when faced with complexity. If DDR must be adaptive in order to be effective, then we must have ways of addressing on what basis adaptation can and should take place. We must have ways of responding to critical questions, such as:

- What is the process of assessment or diagnosis for determining *when* adaptation is needed in a given case or context?
- What are the methods or techniques for determining *what* needs to be adapted, and figuring out *how*?
- How is such adaptation carried out, practically and procedurally, by project teams?
- How do we know if an adaptation is a good one (e.g. will likely improve impact) in a given context?
- What criteria should be applied for evaluating proposed action in a given context, and through what techniques or methods?
- And critically, how do we know, in advance of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation whether a new adaptation or innovation is a good idea or not for the situation at hand?

If these questions are not addressed, then we undermine our own efforts to become more locally effective. There is a crucial tension between the need to standardize UN practice on the one hand, whilst also finding a way to create customized solutions on the other. But it is no longer viable to resort to approaches that rely on prior examples of ad hoc adaptation as our primary method for determining solutions to increasingly challenging cases.

DDR as a range of activities, standards, and policies framed by an orientation to "best practices" do not themselves exhibit a natural tendency to adapt; rather, it is *individuals*, faced with the realities of different situations, who are adapting the static frameworks, structures, best practices, and conventional wisdom about DDR when these begin to falter in the face of their actual day-to-day challenges.

The task now is to introduce new methods for adaptation and innovation that raise the bar on mere improvisation by introducing methods that are:

- accountable to RBM frameworks;
- are **transparent** in their means of generating and evaluating propositions for local action; and
- are **responsible** to not only international but local and national stakeholders.

IV. HOW DOES EBD WORK?

EBD is a process for explicitly using knowledge and information to create solutions to specific, unique, and particular problems by:

- Identifying and gathering the information needed for creating impact in specific contexts;
- Using this information to design propositions for action (i.e. solutions); and
- Using this same information for challenging or “falsifying” those propositions in order to establish confidence or doubt as a responsible, accountable and transparent means of achieving impact in specific contexts.

But EBD is more than an evidence-based approach. It is a design approach. There is a distinction between design and planning, which is often lost in the programming lexicon. If planning focuses on the allocation and management of resources, design creates solutions to problems. Field staff report an ever-growing checklist of issues to take into account, conditions to be aware of, and assessments to consider. But so far, there has been no process developed, or practical guidance provided, to help guide staff in prioritizing among an expanding universe of information and issues to consider in an effort to develop effective programming from the point of view of impact.

To be successful, programming must have a clear sense of purpose, and have identified viable and locally legitimate and relevant ways of both achieving that purpose, and evaluating impact. EBD provides the means for considering available information resources—including existing guidance on practices and information about contexts—identifying those best aligned with both strategic objectives and impact goals, and gaps that need to be addressed.

Further, as design approaches become increasingly popular, EBD’s value added over other design methods (often inspired by “design thinking” or efforts to support innovation) is that it works explicitly and transparently with knowledge as a design resource for the building of evidence-based solutions. This is an explicit step in helping project teams learn how to model with interpretive data (where people need to make sense of complex phenomena), which is a vital skill when adapting to local contexts and emergent conflict scenarios is the central task of practitioners.

Using evidence in this way helps ensure that teams have the best possible grounds (i.e. theories) for estimating whether the approaches or actions proposed may lead to the preferred social conditions in the particular contexts faced.¹⁰ Importantly, this approach does not encourage field teams to select or choose among abstract “theories of change”. Rather, it helps them pragmatically build a theory *for* change in a local context, i.e. the local grounds upon which we have confidence that our actions will lead to the intended impacts, in a particular place.

Project teams use the EBD Prototype to advance through the design process via facilitated meetings held at key design junctures in the project or programme cycle. In this way, teams can use EBD materials to help them make the most out of the meetings that are typically held as part of existing practices, to advance towards programme goals and objectives.¹¹

¹⁰ In the EBD approach, the term evidence refers to information from the local context that can help one evaluate whether a proposed course of action is a good idea (e.g. likely to help us create improved conditions) in that particular context. This is different from creating evidence of need to justify interventions, and it is different from using evidence of past impact (often from other places) to help determine which among existing options is the recommended option for the challenge at hand.

¹¹ For example, in the development of Project Documents, impact objectives, and social impact indicators; identifying information needs and conducting gap analysis; designing activities and beneficiary engagements;

This process is supported by materials that structure it and also tools that facilitate it.

The materials UNIDIR has developed include:

- Facilitation Tools, which are the hands-on and user-centred materials used to run the workshops and include posters, card games, worksheets and other materials.
- Capture Tools, which allow project teams to document, as easily and faithfully as possible, that which has been learned, questioned, or decided from a session or from a task. Examples include proposition cards, user journey maps, blueprint sheets, and output posters.

These materials and tools are all used in an guided and iterative learning process that is highly adaptable to various levels of design—from designing programme components to achieve a strategic objective as in an UNDAF, to designing specific beneficiary-focused activities to accommodate socio-cultural and political realities. They are also suitable to working with teams with a diverse range of educational, experiential, and professional backgrounds.

The tangible outputs created by this process create the elements of an evidence-based programme design, and can be used to support key programming tasks. They represent a set of tools complementary to RBM systems and requirements, such as monitoring and evaluation.

In these ways, the new Evidence-Based Design Prototype provides project teams with both a method and tools, rather than providing lists of new themes to address or creating admonitions to “consider the context” without providing means of doing so. The Prototype also provides both a means and mechanism for applying findings from evaluations and assessment reports to programme designs themselves, and creates grounds upon which to build meaningful local impact indicators.¹²

V. HOW CAN EBD BE SHARED AND INTEGRATED? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Integrating new processes and tools (such as EBD) into existing systems and practices (like UN programming and planning) requires attention at different levels. On the one hand, there is the matter of making EBD available to practitioners, in terms of skills, materials, and support. On the other, however, is the matter of creating the conditions for uptake within organizations.

In large organizations such as the member agencies of the IAWG-DDR, it is essential to engage the system of incentives and requirements around programme and project design and planning. Otherwise, while interest and goodwill for new approaches may be engendered on the part of individuals, organizational constraints may end up representing insurmountable obstacles to broad-based change.

Therefore, we focus this initial set of recommendations on the practical steps that would need to be taken in order to make EBD available to practitioners. In particular we address those steps that can be taken in order to share materials, raise awareness, and develop skills.

assessing project designs for local fit and effectiveness; evaluation and adaptation of approaches and activities, etc.

12 It is one thing to require that indicators be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound and/or Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted and Communicable, Cross-checked and Compared, Empowering, Diverse and Disaggregated, and quite another to work teams through the process of actually determining what these should be in local context in order to give meaningful indications of change from a local point of view.

Making sure that managers have the space and support to cultivate EBD skills in their teams, conduct EBD processes, and make use of these skills and processes in the context of existing work practices will require additional discussion and attention within and among IAWG member agencies.

To Share Materials

- What to do: Refine the EBD Prototype materials for wider distribution
- How to do it: Create an EBD Facilitator's Handbook

UNIDIR's EBD project has resulted in both a new process and set of materials that are used to conduct that process. UNIDIR's work this far focused resources on the R&D required to create a new approach and tools to support it. To share the process more widely, a facilitator's handbook needs to be developed, as one step towards enabling others beyond UNIDIR's project team to conduct EBD processes.

While the exact form and specific contents of the facilitator's handbook must be designed, such an output would need to detail each of the modules, indicating the goals and functions of each as well as exercises and steps to take in order to achieve those functions, and the tangible outputs to aim for in each session in order to advance teams through the EBD process, towards tangible outputs to support their project cycle.

To Raise Awareness

- What to do: Link EBD with the IDDRS
- How to do it: Provide a reference to EBD in the IDDRS; Provide a link on the DDR Resource Centre website to UNIDIR's EBD materials.

As discussed above, key finding from the IAWG Principal's Meeting is that additional guidance is needed alongside the IDDRS in order to keep pace with the emerging challenges of changing DDR contexts. Indeed, as the IDDRS is a thematic-driven document, it will continue to grow and expand to take into account new knowledge, changing contexts and actors, and emerging challenges.

EBD provides a much-needed way of helping practitioners to select, in a locally relevant, evidence based, and strategic manner, what aspects of guidance provided in the IDDRS are the most applicable and important for a specific programming situation. As a design approach, EBD neither replaces nor competes with the guidance given in the IDDRS, nor the information generated through the range of assessments recommended within the IDDRS. Rather, EBD is offered as way of helping practitioners put such guidance from the IDDRS and the range of information resources (either available or to be produced) to use. EBD provides a way to:

- Make use of the information generated in response to these guiding questions and the various assessments indicated;
- Employ the principles outlined in the IDDRS, both in the design of programmes as well as in their evaluations; and
- Guide how such crucial local adaptation can or should be carried out (and on what basis).

In other words, if the IDDRS indicate "what" to pay attention to, EBD can be used in order to determine the "how" for a specific situation.

Therefore, we recommend signalling that such design support exists for making use of the guidance in the IDDRS in two ways:

1. *As a reference in the Reintegration Module:* In the 2014 revision of the Operational Guide, the Reintegration Module (OG 4.30) includes a section on *Reintegration planning and programmes*, but it includes no guidance on design processes that can be of use. Through inclusion of a note, readers could be made aware of the EBD materials that can be used to assist them in the tasks described in Module OR 4.30; and/or
2. *As a link, or resource, on the DDR Resource Centre website:* UNIDIR proposes that the IAWG-DDR review the EBD materials for inclusion on the DDR Resource Centre website, either as a link to the UNIDIR resources, or for inclusion on the Tools page.

References provided in these two locations will help raise awareness of the existence of EBD among practitioners seeking support through DDR guidance materials.

To Develop Skills

- What to do: Integrate EBD into DDR trainings
- How to do it: Develop an agenda of collaboration; Create EBD training modules for integration into DDR training courses

One of the primary ways that DDR practitioners (especially those working for the member agencies of the IAWG) learn about DDR and develop a professional basis for conducting such work in the field is through the DDR trainings conducted by members of the Integrated DDR Training Group (IDDRTG), including NODEFIC, the Folke Bernadotte Academy, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre.

Through these trainings, the basic techniques, processes, and skills involved in DDR planning and design are presented to participants in both lectures and hands-on training modules.

Therefore, including EBD in the context of such trainings would be an important way of presenting the approach to new practitioners, and introducing some of the basic techniques and skills involved.

As an initial step, UNIDIR has collaborated with NODEFIC on an introductory lecture in the April 2015 DDR training course in order to introduce participants to the basic principles for designing with evidence for the benefit of more locally effective reintegration programming. A next step would be to build on this introduction to develop modules for teaching EBD techniques to participants that may be applied in both group settings (such as working as part of a team) or independently.

We recommend that an agenda for coordination be developed to determine how to best bring EBD into the DDR training curriculum at the point in the curriculum where it can yield the most benefit for participants. UNIDIR has detailed how to bring EBD into DDR training in *Recommendations for Incorporating Evidence-Based Design into the IAWG's Training Programme on DDR*. An essential part of such an agenda is a plan of action for the development of instructional materials that can be effectively integrated into DDR courses.

VI. CONCLUSION

The changing conditions of violence and conflict mean practitioners can no longer conduct business as usual. Further, we can no longer rely on the insights and talents of exceptional individuals as a primary source of new approaches to DDR that we then diffuse as best practices. Reliance on individuals is not a sustainable or scalable solution to systemic challenges. EBD represents a new approach to help

practitioners adapt to changing dynamics, actors, and contexts, and to do so on the basis of information and evidence.

This initial set of recommendations outlines three basic steps that, if taken, will not only help to share EBD with the broader community of reintegration practitioners for whom it was created to support, but also to begin to integrate the EBD approach into their existing practices. By ensuring that practitioners are aware of EBD, can access and make use of EBD materials, and are trained in the techniques and skills of EBD practice, we can begin to develop a way of adapting to the changing conditions that challenge present approaches. But EBD also helps ensure that we can do so in a way that is systematic, teachable, transparent, and, importantly, based on information and evidence.

The IAWG-DDR now has an opportunity to move forward in addressing some of the very concerns that feature not only in its mandate, but that have been recognized in various retreats and meetings as central strategic concerns. The recommendations presented here represent a basis for an agenda of work designed by UNIDIR to address those concerns. If it is to advance, it will require the cooperation and support of the IAWG, or a partnerships with an implementing agency.

ABBREVIATIONS

DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPKO	Department for Peacekeeping Operations
EBD	Evidence-Based Design
ECPS	Executive Committee on Peace and Security
IAWG	Inter-Agency Working Group
IDDRS	Integrated DDR Standards
IDDRTG	Integrated DDR Training Group
NODEFIC	Norwegian Defence International Centre
R&D	research and development
RBM	results-based management
SNAP	The Security Needs Assessment Protocol
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

