

From Conflict to Resilience:
Ex-Combatants Trade Associations in Post Conflict
Lessons learnt from the Republic of Congo and
the Democratic Republic of Congo

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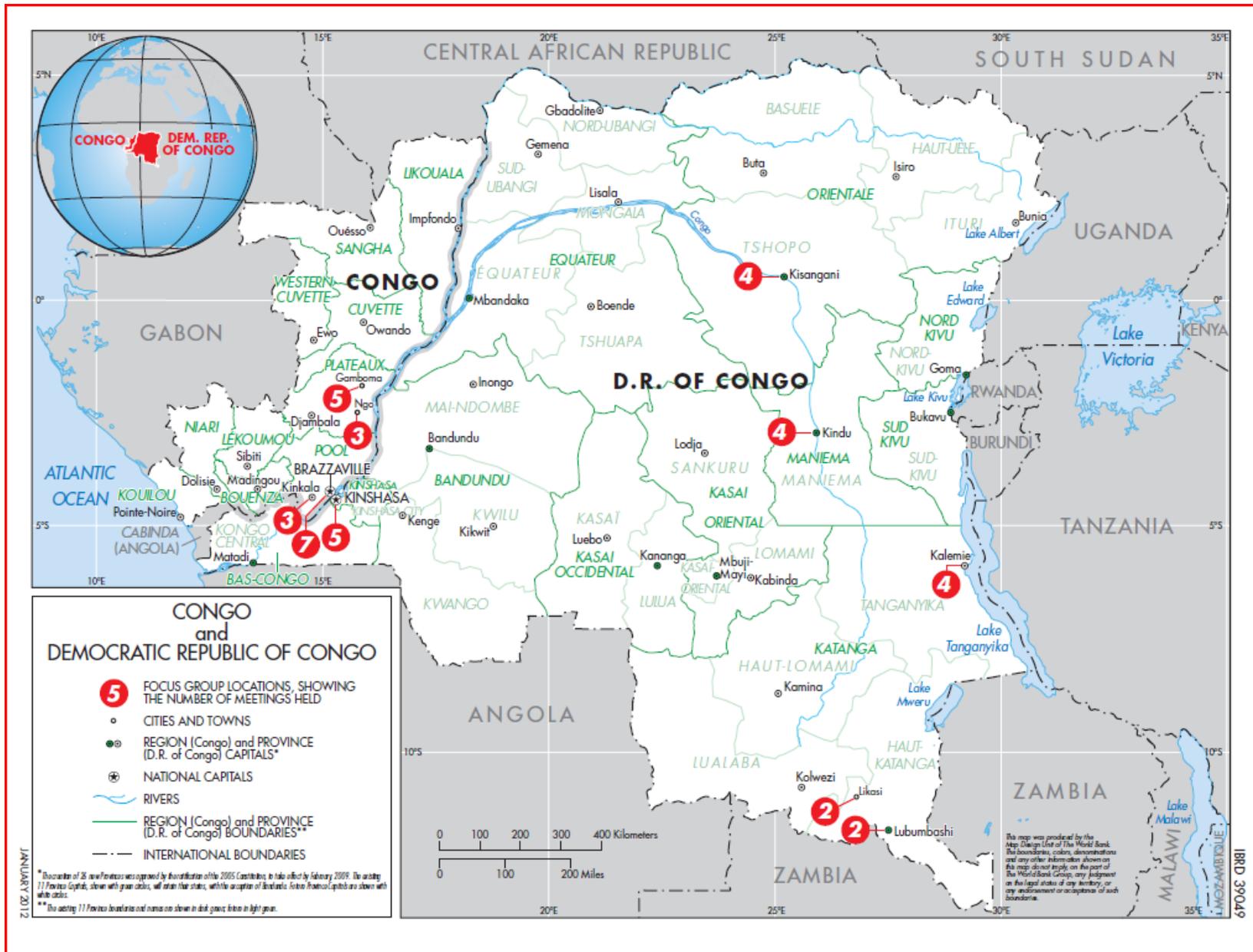
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1. Introduction

Youth unemployment and lack of economic opportunities are often associated with a higher risk of conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001; World Bank, 2011-a). Incentives for taking up arms however are not exclusively of an economic nature, and also include perceptions of social exclusion, low social status, and lack of respect (Keen, 2002; World Bank, 2011-a). Economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants is, for these reasons, widely recognized as a critical condition for sustainable peace (United Nations, 2006).¹

Social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants is however challenging in post-conflict settings where employment opportunities are scarce (World Bank, 2011-a), and ex-combatants tend to be ostracized (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2005; Boersch-Supan, 2009). To address these challenges, the World Bank, the Multi-Donor Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) and later the Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP) have supported innovative approaches to both economic and social reintegration through support to trade associations of ex-combatants, adopting a collective approach to reintegration.

This paper reflects on experiences in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (RoC) that have revealed the economic and social potential as well as limitations of reintegration of ex-combatants through trade associations. This paper formulates and discusses a number of key reintegration issues, asking the questions: Can wartime leadership and informal institutions foster reintegration? Should all ex-combatants be reintegrated through collective processes? Can trade associations foster both economic and social reintegration?

The focus of this analysis is on two central aspects: (i) The reliance of ex-combatants' trade associations on wartime informal institutions and the advantages and limitations of doing so, and (ii) a comparison of associations with open membership versus associations with limited membership, and the potential tradeoff between their respective social and economic advantages. The first section of this paper demonstrates that associations of ex-combatants draw, among other traditions, on informal wartime patronage networks and leadership mechanisms. This paper argues, in the spirit of the World Bank Societal Dynamics and Fragility Flagship Report (World Bank, 2011-b) that these informal institutions offer numerous advantages for the creation and the economic advancement of trade associations, and represent a limited risk to peace sustainability. The second section compares approaches to ex-combatant trade associations in the DRC and the RoC and discusses the advantages and limitations of these associations regarding social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants. Although designed to enhance the economic situation of ex-combatants, their families and all other participants, in DRC, associations with open membership tend to have a limited impact on economic reintegration as they rarely manage to create revenues for their members. However, a series of positive social impacts, including provision of support to the most vulnerable, community inclusion, and access to land and production means derive from this open membership. On the other hand, in the RoC, associations present a restricted membership, with no more than 10 to 15 members, and tend to incorporate few community members. These associations play a limited social role but prove more manageable to govern and foster economic advancement than larger associations. This second section explores the economic and social benefits of each type of framework, and potential ways to access the best of both worlds.

¹ The United Nations Security Council has defined reintegration as part of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs, as “the process that allows ex-combatants and their families to adapt, economically and socially, to productive civilian life”. In particular, it is “the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income”.

1.1. Introducing a collective approach to reintegration in the DRC and the RoC

Although assistance to reintegration has been largely targeted at individuals through the provision of cash or in-kind benefits, training, employment support or income-generating projects, many programs have adopted a collective approach to reintegration, through support to associations of ex-combatants. Such initiatives were in particular implemented in the DRC and in the RoC in cases where a lack of resources prompted practitioners to design new, and possibly less costly, approaches to reintegration.

In the DRC, the World Bank has been supporting demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants since 2004, through the National Commission for DDR (CONADER)² created in December 2003 to implement the National Program for DDR (PNDDR). A first phase, funded by the MDRP, was implemented from 2004 to 2006. A second phase was then implemented between September 2008 and June 2010, and funded by the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Congolese Government. The first two phases conformed to the traditional individual approach to reintegration, offering access to training and tool kits to ex-combatants individually. In 2010, the Congolese Government, supported by the World Bank, envisaged a more collective approach through the creation and support to trade associations of ex-combatants. This approach was implemented within the framework of an extension of the project until September 2011.

In the RoC, the reintegration component of the DDR program was funded by the MDRP under the framework of the Republic of Congo Emergency Reintegration program (MDRP-RCERP) implemented from 2006 to 2009. The program aimed to support the demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration of ex-combatants, with a particular focus on special groups (children, women, and disabled ex-combatants), and included a community component to foster social reintegration through the rehabilitation of infrastructure. The program's objective was to create a sustainable source of income for ex-combatants, with a maximum budget of US\$ 400 per ex-combatant through support to what the program referred to as individual and collective micro-projects. Ex-combatants would then receive financial support in two installments over a one year period, either as a group or as individuals. There was no additional financial incentive for being part of a collective rather than an individual micro-project: the same per capita amount was provided in both cases. However, interviews conducted in the RoC with ex-combatants, PNDDR representatives, and implementing agencies, revealed that, in practice, ex-combatants were strongly encouraged to take part in collective micro-projects, based on the assumption that the limited resources provided would have a more significant impact if pooled.

Ex-combatant associations are referred to as “economic associations” in the DRC and “micro-projects” in the RoC, regardless of size, whether they were created by community members or ex-combatants, are officially registered or not. All these associations however have one characteristic in common: they are all organized around one main trade (for instance carpentry, masonry, tailoring, or vegetable gardening). For this reason, for the purpose of this paper, and in order to encompass all types of associations, they are here referred to as “ex-combatant trade associations”.

Similarly, while recognizing that ex-combatants are full members of the community, in order to address issues of reintegration within communities and operate a distinction between ex-combatants and their peers, this paper refers to “community members” as persons living in a given community and who did not take up arms.

² CONADER later on became the UE-PNDDR (Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de DDR)

1.2. Methodology and potential limitations

Lessons learnt are based on analyses of trade associations in the DRC and the RoC, through research conducted in 2010 and 2011. This paper relies on a qualitative analysis of the perceptions and experiences of members of trade associations, and is based both on focus groups and one-on-one interviews. This study does not measure the sustainability³ of trade associations of ex-combatants in the Congos, nor does it provide a comparative analysis of individual versus collective support to reintegration. In addition, rather than looking at project design and implementation, this paper focuses on the dynamics associated with ex-combatant trade associations in order to draw lessons on the drivers of reintegration, with replicability in mind. This research focuses on the perceptions of members of ex-combatant trade associations and their own evaluation of their reintegration. The study does not measure community perceptions of ex-combatants.

In the DRC, a total of 22 focus groups with 26 associations were conducted, totaling 268 participants. In the RoC, 18 focus groups representing 18 trade associations were held, with a total of 88 participants. Focus group interviews were based on a questionnaire that remained open to adapt to various aspects brought up by association members during the focus groups. They included a wide variety of trade associations, organized around various trades such as masonry, carpentry, soap making, agriculture, fishery, and brick making. In addition, focus groups included associations that were created according to various scenarios: created by community members and later on joined by ex-combatants, created by ex-combatants and later on joined by community members, and gathering exclusively ex-combatants.⁴ In both countries, field research took place in various regions and in both rural and urban areas. In the DRC focus groups were organized in four different regions and six locations: Kinshasa, Kisangani, Kindu, Kalemie, Lubumbashi and Likasi. In the RoC, focus groups were held in two regions and four locations: Brazzaville, Gamboma, Ngo, and Kinkala.

To address more sensitive issues related to leaders' wartime background and internal governance mechanisms, focus group interviews were complimented with one-on-one interviews with association members. In addition, 15 ex-combatants who chose to reintegrate individually were interviewed on a one-on-one basis. In both countries, in order to cross-check information and obtain a more complete picture, representatives of the National Programs for DDR, executing agencies and local leaders were also interviewed. In total, the study included a total of 442 participants in both countries.

Due to logistical constraints, it was not possible to avoid a selection bias. Focus groups were organized by the PNDDR and their executing agencies, which admittedly introduces a bias, considering their incentive to present associations perceived as the most successful. In order to mitigate this bias, only a few of the locations suggested by the PNDDR and their partners in the RoC and the DRC were selected, and additional associations randomly met in the field were added to the list of focus groups. Associations met are however likely to be the ones that have been the most successful and sustainable. In addition, mostly associations that were supported (and sometimes created) by the projects have been met. This study does

³ Anecdotal evidence suggests that associations might face sustainability issues. For instance, in the RoC, an executing agency representative in Gamboma explained that among the five associations he was responsible to follow, only three remained by the end of the project. Another explained that he was in charge of 15 micro-projects, all seven associations failed by the end of the project, while all eight individual projects remained. It is however important to keep in mind that while sustainability is desirable, it is not necessarily an indicator of the success of these associations in supporting ex-combatant reintegration, as even the ones that disappeared might have played a strong transitional role. In addition, ex-combatants are a particularly mobile population (Baxter and Burall, 2011), which is also likely to challenge the durability of associations.

⁴ The majority of trade associations interviewed were created by ex-combatants later on joined by community members; however, all three categories were represented.

not provide an account of associations that were created more spontaneously and that operate without external support.

With the above-mentioned limitations in mind, the sample selected provides information on a diverse range of trade associations of ex-combatants, including a wide variety of creation mechanisms, trades, number and category of members, type of external support provided, and economic and social environment. The sample selected provides highly indicative information on the creation and functioning of economic and social impacts of ex-combatant trade associations. This research sheds light into the potential advantages and limitations of such associations in various types of contexts, and allows to point out the trade offs and choices to be made according to what aspects of reintegration need to be emphasized.

2. Trust and leadership: building on war-inherited informal institutions?

2.1. The Search for trustworthy associates

In both the DRC and the RoC trust was repeatedly mentioned in focus groups as a central pillar of associations. In parallel, lack of trust in potential co-members was the first concern raised by all ex-combatants who had declined to be part of an association.

2.1.1. No trust, no association

The concerns expressed by ex-combatants reflect the general population's perception of associations in the DRC. In a 2005 survey, 46% of respondents explained that lack of trust was the main reason why they declined to join associations: this lack of trust was related to general mistrust (20%), fear of inefficiency and lack of trust in associates to perform (16%), fear of power abuse and mistrust in association leaders (6%).⁵

Such concerns have been voiced by ex-combatants who had declined to join associations in the DRC. Many respondents explained that they chose to create their own businesses, because they did not want to depend on others, or be exposed to the risks of other members not working enough or stealing from the group. Members of associations also declared they had left previous associations because of trust issues. For instance, several respondents⁶ explained that the non-equal share of benefits among members was the main reason for their leaving. In general, during focus groups members of associations were hesitant to mention potential issues related to the internal functioning of their current association. However, one ex-combatant emphasized the fact that by joining an association, one became vulnerable to the others' mistakes. He specifically regretted that one of the members in his mechanics association had misplaced a transformer that all members eventually had to collectively pay for. In many cases association representatives declared they had threatened to expel members for lack of contribution to the collective work of the association. One association for instance explained that five of its members had to be expelled for lack of work.⁷

In the RoC, four-fifths of ex-combatants working individually mentioned the central role of trust issues in their decision to decline to join or to leave an association. One respondent summarized what the majority explained "when money is involved there is no such thing as friends"⁸. He explained that during the DDR process he had been assigned to an association by the PNDDR, but didn't trust the group that gathered former combatants from both armed groups (Ninjas and Cobras). He subsequently went to great lengths to

⁵ Sondage d'Opinion sur la Perception de la Pauvreté par la Population du Congo, 2005

⁶ DRC – FG 12, Kindu; DRC – FG 20, Lubumbashi

⁷ DRC – FG 16, Kalemie

⁸ RoC – FG 3, Brazzaville

leave the association and be able to receive his reintegration benefits as an individual rather than through the association.

2.1.2. Wartime and peacetime trust-building

During focus groups, participants overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of trust as a central pillar of associations. In half of the cases, associations were created around a core of members who trusted each other and had socialized in various ways before, during or even since the end of the war.

In the RoC, in four associations out of five,⁹ a core of at least two to three members declared that the association relied on strong personal ties. Three associations out of five relied on a core of members who had socialized in peacetime, most often before the war. Peacetime ties were particularly significant in rural areas. For instance, in Gamboma and Ngo, four associations out of five relied on a core of members who knew each other since before the war, and had often even gone to school together. Wartime ties were more present in urban areas. For instance in Brazzaville, three associations out of five relied on a core group of ex-combatants who had met and fought together during the war in the RoC. This phenomenon might relate to the trajectory of ex-combatants in rural areas, who generally grew up together, briefly went to fight in Brazzaville during the war, and later returned to their village. As a result, most ex-combatants and community members have known each other since childhood. In urban and semi-urban contexts such as Brazzaville and Kinkala, because of continued insecurity and greater mobility, ex-combatants gathered in associations presented fewer pre-war personal ties. Associations of ex-combatants in Brazzaville relied more heavily on wartime ties.

In the DRC, pre-war personal ties between ex-combatants as well as between ex-combatants and community members belonging to the same association were mentioned in two associations out of five. In the DRC the topic of war experience and wartime socialization was more sensitive than in RoC, in particular in a context where many community members belonged to these associations, and participated in the focus groups. For that reason, no systematic data was collected on this topic. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that wartime socialization played an important role, in particular regarding associations leadership, as explained in the following section. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that pre-war socialization and trust-building was particularly critical to the involvement of civilians in ex-combatant trade associations. For instance, an association's president explained that he was able to create his association thanks to the financial support of his pre-war pastor's wife, who became a member of the association.¹⁰ A community member explained that he decided to join an ex-combatant trade association because he had known its president (an ex-combatant) since childhood.¹¹

Both case studies emphasize the importance of socialization and trust-building in associations and show that a wide range of socialization processes have fostered trust, whether they took place in peacetime or were inherited from the war.

2.1.3. Training as a socialization tool

Training provided in the context of DDR programs also emerged as a key socialization and trust-building tool in both the DRC and the RoC. One association in Brazzaville¹² gathered ex-combatants from opposing former armed groups who had no pre-war or wartime ties, but who had socialized during training. In DRC, one association out of five relied on a core group of members who had socialized during training. Training was provided through private centers also accessible to community members,

⁹ Please note that several types of socialization processes may coexist in one association.

¹⁰ DRC – FG 5, Kinshasa

¹¹ DRC – FG 9, Kisangani

¹² RoC – FG 4, Brazzaville

which offered socialization opportunities for both groups. An association president explained that he met most of the ex-combatant and community members who later joined his association during training, where he identified “those who worked well and did not create conflicts”.¹³ An ex-combatant explained that he found the opportunity to join an association created by community members because one of its leaders was his instructor in the training he attended.¹⁴

While the benefits of training offered as part of DDR programs are sometimes questioned in terms of knowledge and skills acquisition, examples from the DRC and the RoC suggest that their role goes far beyond knowledge and skills. Such training fosters socialization between ex-combatants and between ex-combatants and community members, and contributes to the creation or strengthening of trust, a central pillar of trade associations and of community life.

2.2. Wartime hierarchies and peacetime leadership

Trade associations of ex-combatants draw on a well-established cultural tradition in the Great Lakes region. For instance, in DRC, in a 2005 survey 37% of Congolese declared that there was at least one association in their community, and 58% claimed that at least one member of their household belonged to an association.¹⁵ In the region, gathering in associations has traditionally been a way to cope with vulnerability and everyday life challenges in a context where state institutions remain weak and unable address the needs of citizens. This can for instance be seen in the “tontine” phenomenon, where community members come together and establish an informal loan and savings system (Servet, 1990 ; Lelart, 1989). This section shows that trade associations of ex-combatants derive from this tradition, but also build on wartime leadership.

Testimonies collected in both the DRC and the RoC emphasize the continuity between peacetime and wartime leadership, trust, and patronage that serve as the pillars of ex-combatant associations. Several association presidents¹⁶ explained in one-on-one interviews that their wartime role as commanders conferred them leadership in peacetime and allowed them to gather ex-combatants. Representatives of executing agencies confirmed that many ex-combatants’ trade associations were created and presided by former commanders. They added that often, association members initially continued to call the association’s president by his military grade, which progressively disappeared. Another association president helped refine this statement by explaining that in practice mostly mid-level commanders would hold the status of president of an association. He referred to specific examples of two high ranking officers who had been elected president of associations and who had declined the offer, one considering that this was below him, and the other for fear of stigmatization of the association.

In the RoC, potentially because the war is a more dated event there, focus group participants volunteered more information on wartime leadership. One third of association leaders spontaneously mentioned they had been commanders during the war. In the RoC the collective focus of reintegration indirectly fostered the emergence of commanders as association leaders. The PNDDR gathered ex-combatants, provided them with a seven day training, and asked them to choose a trade. Once grouped around a trade, ex-combatants were asked to constitute small groups of 10 to 15 members, and to designate a “chef de groupement” who would become the main interlocutor of the PNDDR. The chef de groupement would also be the one receiving and responsible for the money allocated to the association. Executing agencies’ representatives in the RoC confirmed that most chefs de groupement were commanders during the war.

¹³ DRC – FG 5, Kinshasa

¹⁴ DRC – FG 2, Kinshasa

¹⁵ Sondage d’Opinion sur la Perception de la Pauvreté par la Population du Congo, 2005

¹⁶ DRC – FG 6, Kisangani ; DRC – FG 14, Kalemie

Association leadership is likely to reflect both ex-commanders' leadership qualities as well as trust and fear they have instigated in their troops as commanders during the war. In many cases former commanders presiding associations appeared to be strong and legitimate leaders in the eyes of association members. As an association president and former commander put it, "there is the train and there is the locomotive".¹⁷ In many cases, the association focused on a trade that was chosen by the commander/leader and corresponded to their area of expertise or pre-war activity.

The continuity of wartime leadership and institutions in peacetime was confirmed in the RoC by associations' reliance on war-inherited informal institutions, such as patronage. As explained by Lemasle (2011), command and control in armed groups rely on patronage and coercion, in a relationship where commanders establish themselves as patrons, and combatants as clients. This informal institution between commanders/presidents of associations and members/former troops continued to manifest itself in peacetime within associations, where the president was feared and respected but also expected to provide for his clients/former troops. For instance, an association president/former commander came to the interview accompanied by his former aide. The president of another association¹⁸ explained that when one member was ill, all members would contribute 5,000 FCFA to his medical expenses, while, as the leader, he would contribute 10,000 FCFA. Another president/commander explained that in case of a medical emergency, he would be the one advancing the necessary amount from his personal funds. In many instances, as confirmed by executing agencies and local leaders in both the DRC and the RoC, the president/former commander was widely recognized as a "big man" in the community.

Evidence from both case studies emphasizes the continuity between wartime and peacetime leadership. Trade associations of ex-combatants illustrate this continuity and demonstrate that such institutions are not by essence conducive to war and that in fact, trust, patronage, and leadership inherited from the war period can be used to foster resilience and reintegration.

2.3. Fostering resilience through peacetime and war-inherited trust and leadership: advantages and limitations

2.3.1. Advantages of war-inherited informal institutions: stability and reliability

The tendency of ex-combatants to rely on wartime informal institutions of armed groups in order to foster economic reintegration in post-conflict has been documented elsewhere in Africa. For instance, Peters (2007) showed that in Sierra Leone, bike riders have "organized themselves as a membership-based trade association drawing some inspiration from modalities associated with former fighting groups." (Peters, 2007: 2). The Makeni Bike Riders Association estimated that about three quarters of the three hundred¹⁹ moto-taxi drivers were former combatants²⁰. Starting such a business requires investments and logistics, a challenge in post-conflict. According to Peters, the emergence of moto-taxi companies was directly linked to wartime networks and loyalties. He explained that "the key factor seem[ed] to be that combat provided fighters with a dense nexus of new connections and ideas about social solidarity"²¹.

¹⁷ RoC – FG 12, Gamboma

¹⁸ RoC – FG 12, Gamboma

¹⁹ A UNDP report estimated that the Bike Riders Association has about 3,000 members country wide. See Kaldor, Mary and Vincent, James, 2006. "Evaluation of UNDP Assistance to Conflict-Affected Countries. Case Study: Sierra Leone". UNDP, Evaluation Office.

²⁰ Richards, Paul, Bah, Kadija, Vincent, James, 2004. "Social Capital and Survival" Prospects for Community Driven Development in Post-conflict Sierra Leone", Social Development Papers: Community Driven Development/ Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction, 12, The World Bank: Washington, DC.

²¹ Peters, Krijn, 2007. "From Weapons to Wheels: Young Sierra Leoneans ex-combatants become taxi-riders", Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development, 10, p. 16.

DDR programs rely on the assumption that in order to achieve sustainable peace, armed groups need to hand over their weapons, scatter, and return to a civilian life that involves finding employment and interacting with other civilians. A central step in this process is the demobilization of armed groups, defined as “the process by which parties to a conflict begin to disband their military structures”²². For Berdal (1996: 39), demobilization also has a psychological component, as it involves, both “the formal disbanding of military formations, and, at the individual level, [...] the process of releasing combatants from a mobilized state.” Disbanding armed groups, according to scholars like Spear (2002), is necessary in order to prevent them from resuming fighting. Experience²³ has however showed that implementing rehabilitation activities in demobilization centers and encouraging ex-combatants to settle far away from their former comrades and commanders, while necessary steps to their demobilization, cannot guarantee the effective breakdown of loyalty and obedience mechanisms between combatants who have relied on each other for survival for years. Furthermore, disbanding armed groups is not a guarantee for peace, as many civil wars²⁴ started with a couple hundred unorganized combatants. In other words, erasing all the social structures that bind ex-combatants is neither fully possible, nor a guarantee for peace. More importantly, echoing the spirit of the World Bank 2011 Societal Dynamics and Fragility Flagship Report (World Bank, 2011-b), this paper argues that war-inherited informal institutions that bind ex-combatants, are in fact neither positive nor negative in essence. While they have been used to create conflict, these dynamics can also serve to foster economic and social reintegration. As explained by Domingo (2010), informal institutions have the ability to create inclusion and resilience as much as they can foster exclusion and fragility. Informal institutions however present the notable advantage of often being more stable and reliable than formal institutions (Domingo, 2010).

2.3.2. Limitations and risks of war-inherited informal institutions: internal governance

While war-inherited leadership and informal institutions have fostered trust, collaboration, and enabled the creation of associations, such mechanisms also represent risks related to potential power-abuse and theft.

While transparency and governance are key concerns of association members, in practice, little to no checks and balances mechanisms are in place to avoid power-abuse. In DRC, three-fifths of associations where it was possible to obtain clear responses regarding responsibility sharing declared having organized internal elections, while two-fifths explained they had assigned roles to members pragmatically, according to each person’s competences. Interestingly, whether elections were organized or not, the founder of the association (and oftentimes former commander) became the association’s president. In addition, internal elections often appear to be a one-time event, where representatives are elected for unlimited mandates. For instance representatives of an association in the DRC²⁵ explained that they had organized elections in 2007, but were not foreseeing any other elections in the future, unless, they claimed, one of the directing committee members would fail to fulfill members’ expectations. They however had not discussed how their work would be evaluated or by whom. In other words, relying on wartime big man leadership, represent the risks of having “big men” taking advantage of “smaller men”. This was summarized in the RoC by an ex-combatant who chose to decline to be part of an association. The president of the association he had been assigned to was a former commander, who “was stronger

²² The United Nations. 2000. Report of the Secretary General, “The role of the United Nations Peacekeeping in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration” (S/2000/101).

²³ See accounts of post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia in: Natacha Lemasle, 2010, *Combatants’ Disarmament. Do Command and Control Matter? A Comparison of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Dissertation available online at: <http://gradworks.umi.com/3433593.pdf>)

²⁴ See Natacha Lemasle, 2010, *Combatants’ Disarmament. Do Command and Control Matter? A Comparison of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Dissertation available online at: <http://gradworks.umi.com/3433593.pdf>)

²⁵ DRC – FG 15, Kalemie

than me, so I was worried he was going to steal the money.”²⁶ This worry expressed by younger and less powerful ex-combatants seems to be reflected in numbers: the average age of ex-combatants in associations met during this study was 38 years old, while ex-combatants in individual micro-projects was only 32 years old.

Even in cases where elections were organized, there was in general only one vote: the person being attributed the most votes became president, the second became vice-president, and so on for the positions of treasurer, secretary, and counselors. While the once-off election might not be optimal, it allows for a simplified and time-saving process, and helps prevent potential conflicts over leadership. In other cases, roles were initially distributed pragmatically, and elections were organized later in time, once the association was consolidated. This was for instance the case of an association²⁷, where elections were organized three years after the creation of the association. One notable outcome was the balanced distribution of responsibilities among community members and ex-combatants.

Informal and simplified mechanisms put in place by many of these associations are not necessarily detrimental to internal governance. However, refined conclusions on this topic would necessitate additional research on how various mechanisms are put in place and affect internal governance and economic performance of associations.

3. Economic versus social reintegration: a necessary trade off?

Findings from the DRC and the RoC suggest that associations with more restricted membership tend to be more manageable and perform better economically. On the other hand, larger and more inclusive associations in DRC have revealed a potential to play a strong integrating role in communities for otherwise ostracized ex-combatants. This section explores the economic and social implications of restricted versus open membership, and discusses potential ways to achieve the best of both worlds.

3.1. Economic performance: Restricted membership for increased manageability

3.1.1. The challenge of assessing economic performance of trade associations

Assessing the economic performance of trade associations is challenging in the absence of verifiable data and considering the potential incentives of association members to exaggerate revenues (to portray a performing image of their association), or, more likely, to downplay performance (to avoid jealousy or predation by outsiders, or request financial or material support). To partially overcome this obstacle, for the purpose of this study, an association is considered economically performing when it represents the main source of revenues for its members.

Admittedly, many factors besides the number of members, such as high registration costs, lack of capacity, or lack of access to loans are likely to affect associations' economic performance²⁸. It is also important to dissociate the economic performance of an association and economic reintegration of ex-combatant members. The DRC presented notable cases where, while an association was not directly generating revenues, it was facilitating access to revenues or employment opportunities for ex-combatants. For instance, most agriculture, fishing, or market gardening associations generated limited revenues on the collective production activities, but because of knowledge sharing and mutual support,

²⁶ RoC – FG 3, Brazzaville

²⁷ DRC – FG 12, Kindu

²⁸ For a detailed account of obstacles to the creation of revenues in DRC, See: Lemasle, Natacha, 2011. *Les Associations de Combattants Démobilisés en Démocratie République du Congo : Dynamiques Locales et Synergies Internes*, World Bank, Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (Available online at: http://www.tdrp.net/PDFs/DRC-Report_fn.pdf)

allowed members to increase their individual production activities. This was for instance the case of a fisherman²⁹ in Kinshasa who explained that the provision of hooks for fishermen who could temporarily not afford them, as well as knowledge sharing on best fishing sites, had allowed each member to increase their individual revenues. In other cases, associations that did not generate direct revenues have facilitated access to employment for their members. This was for instance the strategy adopted by a brick makers' association³⁰ in Kinshasa, who would offer members' individual work as masons when selling bricks to construction businesses.

Preliminary observations on the relation between membership and economic performance however allow to point out tentative tendencies and to formulate hypotheses that would need to be further explored and tested in future research.

3.1.2. Fewer members, more revenues?

Experiences in the DRC and the RoC suggest that larger associations and more open membership make associations more difficult to manage and hinder the creation of revenues. In the DRC, where associations gathered 48 members on average, only one-fifth of associations were able to constitute the main source of revenue of its members. In the RoC, with an average of nine members, one third of the associations encountered represented their members' main source of revenue. This tendency is also confirmed when looking at the most economically performing associations in each country. In the DRC, the average number of members in economically performing association is 18, and 10 in the RoC.

In the DRC, executing agencies explained that for associations of ex-combatants they helped create, they had encouraged a maximum number of members of about 25. In other cases, executing agencies and the PNDDR mostly encouraged ex-combatants to create associations or to join existing associations, in particular emphasizing the importance of inclusion and of working with community members. The smaller size of RoC associations also reflects policies established by executing agencies who recommended not exceeding a maximum of 15 members per association. As summarized by an association member in the RoC: "If we accept everyone [in the association], it can't work."³¹

In a context where association members themselves explain their capacity limitations related to business development and people management, associations including dozens of members seem more difficult to manage, control, and organize. In both countries, illiteracy remains high, with a 33% rate in the DRC³² and a 25% rate in the RoC³³, and members of associations face numerous management challenges. Because monitoring is more challenging in larger associations, risks that members will not individually perform or will steal from the association are admittedly higher. Management difficulties appeared as a central concern of association members in the DRC, where half of associations older than one year old admitted their lack of human and business management capacity. This was confirmed by PNDDR and executing agencies representatives, who explained that they were regularly solicited to provide advice and guidance on management issues.

Experience in the RoC, suggests that restricted membership to about 10 to 15 members allows for increased economic performance. In the RoC many association members acknowledged the advantage of limited membership, so as to be able to control the quantity and quality of work provided by members, and ensure that revenues generated would not be spread too thin between members. However, restricted

²⁹ DRC – FG 1, Kinshasa

³⁰ DRC – FG 5, Kinshasa

³¹ RoC – FG 7, Brazzaville

³² Direction de la Panification et des Statistiques Scolaires, Kinshasa, Aout 2001.

³³ République du Congo (Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire et Secondaire Chargé de l'Alphabétisation), 2004, Rapport National : Le Développement de l'Éducation.

membership in the RoC has also limited the creation of social capital and has kept ex-combatant trade associations separate from the rest of the community (see next section).

3.2. Social support: Open membership for mutual aid and community inclusion

3.2.1. Coping with vulnerability: the more, the stronger (associations-mutuelles³⁴)

In the DRC, only one out of five associations met created significant revenues for their members, but almost all associations met mentioned the provision of social support as the main objective of their association. A respondent summarized the purpose of his association: “A respondent summarized the purpose of his association: “³⁵ Often, in the first months, associations struggled to support their members, but after one year all associations encountered provided social support to their members. The provision of social support was often mentioned as the main success and source of pride of these associations. In the DRC, social support is provided in the form of payment of medical fees or prescription drugs (almost all associations), support to finance funeral expenses (three associations out of five), or access to small loans to help pay for school tuition (two associations out of five).

A 2005 survey on poverty perception in the DRC³⁶ revealed that access to medical and education services has proven challenging for Congolese. 82% of Congolese declared they were unable to afford medical services. In a 2001 education survey, 62.5% answered that school fees were too expensive and represented a major obstacle to access education³⁷. Finally, 91% explained in the 2005 Poverty perception survey that they were not satisfied with their ceremony expenses (wedding, funeral). In a context where the state is often unable to provide services to its citizens, trade associations have emerged as a way of providing coping mechanisms. In that respect, trade associations of ex-combatants in the DRC have a lot in common with “tontines”, informal institutions that gather people from the same community to set up informal savings and loans systems that provide resources to help members cope with poverty (Servet, 1990; Lelart, 1989). In addition, such associations functioned on a model adapted from the “mutuelle” approach: like mutuelles, they relied on a common pot of money that was used to provide support to members in cases defined by members when they created the association. In contrast to mutuelles, the common pot of money did not only rely on monthly contributions, it was also maintained by the benefits generated by a common economic activity. In many cases in the DRC, trade associations organized a collective activity in which members participated on a rotational basis. For instance, a vegetable gardeners’ association in Kinshasa³⁸ gathered gardeners who worked part-time on their private parcels for their own benefits, and who took turn in cultivating the association’s parcel. In cases where a member needed and qualified for the support of the association and the common pot of money proved insufficient, additional money was collected from the members. In the context of the mutuelle approach and the strong emphasis on social support, a large number of members and an open membership prove most adapted, as it provides increased insurance that the common pot of money will be maintained and that the large pool of members allows for the collection of exceptional contributions if one member is facing vulnerability shocks.

³⁴ “Mutuelle” refers to a mutual aid mechanism, in which large groups of citizens put money in common, in order to provide support to members who might need it, in cases defined at the creation of the association. This mechanism functions as an insurance managed by its subscribers.

³⁵ DRC – FG 1, Kinshasa

³⁶ Sondage d’Opinion sur la Perception de la Pauvreté par la Population du Congo, 2005

³⁷ Direction de la Planification des Statistiques Scolaires, Kinshasa, 2001

³⁸ DRC – FG 2, Kinshasa

Mutual aid is also considered as an important part of associations in the RoC, where a yam producer explained: “alone one cannot overcome all the problems.”³⁹ However, in contrast to DRC, the main objective of associations is economic rather than social. Two thirds of associations (compared to all of them in the DRC) provided medical support through the payment of prescription drugs. An association of vegetable gardeners in Brazzaville explained that it restricted its social support to prescription drugs because “it is in the interest in the association to help with medical fees as it helps members to stay healthy and to deliver good work.”⁴⁰ Associations also marginally helped with funeral expenses (one out of three), and in some instances provided small loans to help members overcome particular challenges (one out of four). However, because the emphasis was mostly on the creation of sustainable revenues, associations in the RoC tended to maintain small structures with restricted membership.

3.2.2. The inclusion of community members and the benefits of mixed membership

In the RoC restricted membership has led to the creation of small and manageable associations but has also separated them from the rest of the community. In contrast, in the DRC open membership, with numerous members including civilians, has made associations more difficult to manage, but has also presented many social advantages.

Open membership and an emphasis on inclusion have led many community members to join DRC ex-combatants trade associations⁴¹. As summarized by an ex-combatant and association president: “the others [community members] are suspicious of us, so during vocational training, we were advised to include community members in our associations, to avoid being stigmatized”⁴². Similarly a woman ex-combatant said: “There is a lot of jealousy in the neighborhood, it is better to include women from the community”.⁴³ As a result of this emphasis on inclusion - in particular on inclusion of community members - four out of five trade associations of ex-combatants present a mixed membership of both ex-combatants and community members.

However, anecdotal evidence in the DRC suggests that open membership has facilitated ex-combatant access to land and production means. Access to land was often mentioned by ex-combatants, executing agencies, and the PNDDR as a central social and economic challenge for ex-combatants, in particular those settling in communities they had not previously lived in. In many instances, ex-combatants were able to access land and production means through community members who had joined their association. This was the case in Kisangani, where a community member made her house available once a week for the members of the soap making association she had joined.⁴⁴ In Kindu, ex-combatants in a carpenters’ association explained it was very difficult for them to convince a landlord to rent them a space where they could work. In the end, they were able to secure a space through a community member who joined their association and who was able to convince a landlord to trust the association. He explained that as a community member it was easier for him to secure a plot of land than for ex-combatants who were still stigmatized at the time.⁴⁵ This suggests that, in contexts such as the DRC where ex-combatants tend to be ostracized while highly depending on the community for access land and livelihoods, including community members in their associations is likely to facilitate their social reintegration. This also

³⁹ RoC – FG 12, Gamboma

⁴⁰ RoC – FG 2, Brazzaville

⁴¹ For details on incentives for community members to join ex-combatants’ trade associations, see: Lemasle, Natacha, 2011. *Les Associations de Combattants Démobilisés en République Démocratique du Congo : Dynamiques Locales et Synergies Internes*, World Bank, Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (Available online at: http://www.tdrp.net/PDFs/DRC-Report_fn.pdf)

⁴² DRC – FG 13, Kindu

⁴³ DRC – FG 17, Kindu

⁴⁴ DRC – FG 8, Kisangani

⁴⁵ DRC – FG 11, Kindu

emphasizes the intertwining of economic and social reintegration and demonstrates that the creation of social capital can also help strengthen access to production means, and in turn facilitate economic reintegration.

In contrast, restricted membership in RoC has mostly kept ex-combatant trade associations separate from the rest of the community. While the PNDDR and executing agencies reported that inclusion of community members was encouraged, in practice, testimonies from ex-combatants indicate that in their understanding, these associations were to be restricted to ex-combatants. Many ex-combatants feared that including community members would jeopardize their funding. A respondent summarized many ex-combatants' concerns: "We did not want to include civilians and take the chance to have problems with the law because we were not authorized to do so."⁴⁶ Whether this was due to miscommunication with executing agencies, false rumors, or attempts by executing agencies to lower their workload is unclear. In any case, only one out of five associations included community members. Anecdotal evidence from the RoC suggests that a more clearly open membership would have allowed for greater inclusion of community members, and in particular of spouses of ex-combatants. Several ex-combatants who chose to work alone rather than within an association also indicated that they would have created associations, had they been explicitly allowed to associate with community members.

In the RoC, in particular in rural areas, and because ex-combatants had long returned to their communities of origins, with which they had strong social ties, reintegration challenges were limited. For instance, in a 2009 beneficiaries study conducted by the Congolese Government and the MDRP, 89% of ex-combatants felt that they had an equal or greater opportunity to gain employment, as compared to others in their community)⁴⁷. This was confirmed during field research for this study, where a majority of ex-combatants claimed they were part of a sports/cultural/or religious association in their community. In this context it made sense to focus on their economic reintegration rather than on social aspects of reintegration within communities. It however seems ironic that associations supported in the context of a reintegration program end up being the only institutions differentiating ex-combatants from the rest of the community.

3.3. Building on unexpected social impact of associations

Ex-combatants' trade associations in both the DRC and the RoC face challenges when it comes to generating revenues. However, even when they do not manage to produce regular and significant revenues for their members, these associations still manage to create social capital in particular through conflict prevention, mitigation, and knowledge sharing.

3.3.1. Conflict prevention and mitigation

In the DRC, because of the tendency to gather numerous members, associations relied on complex internal structures that usually included a president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary, and several counselors. Counselors were usually older members of the association, chosen for their wisdom and experience. In the DRC, focus groups revealed the central role played by these counselors in mitigating conflicts within the association, as well as potential conflicts between association members and the rest of the community. In many cases, members reported that counselors had solved potentially violent conflicts regarding the economic activities of members. This was particularly striking in the case of associations of vegetable gardeners or any type of activity involving land delimitation. Focus groups showed that counselors played a central role in mitigating land disputes between members. They also regulated disputes related to use of pirogues or tools. For instance a fisherman explained that he was condemned to

⁴⁶ RoC – FG 10, Gamboma

⁴⁷ République du Congo, Multi-Donor Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), 2009. Sondage sur la Reinsertion des Ex-Combatants Auto-Démobilisés.

pay a fine for using a fellow fisherman's boat for two weeks without his consent⁴⁸. Counselors also surprisingly explained that they intervened in a wide range of more private matters, including related to adultery⁴⁹ or football supporters' disagreements⁵⁰.

While associations' representatives insisted that they would not get involved in conflicts or tensions outside of the association and would let local authorities handle such issues, ex-combatants' associations at times played a key role in mitigating and mediating conflicts between ex-combatants and the rest of the community. This was for instance the case of a platform association in Kisangani, whose president became the informal spokesman of ex-combatants in the area, and was widely recognized by local authorities and ex-combatants alike, as a key mediator in particular when ex-combatants first re-settled.⁵¹

3.3.2. Knowledge sharing

In the RoC, despite the limited membership of ex-combatants' trade associations, knowledge sharing appeared as a central trait in one third of associations encountered. In contrast to the DRC where vocational training was a key benefit of the DDR program, in the RoC, training offered to ex-combatants was often limited to one week. Filling the knowledge gap, associations then often organized internal training for their members, through on the job mentoring and at times apprenticeship-type of training. A woman in a vegetable gardeners' association in Brazzaville explained how empowering this knowledge sharing process had been for her: "Now I have learned the vegetable gardener's trade, even if the association ends, I know how to be a vegetable gardener".⁵²

Conclusion

Experiences in the Congos demonstrate the importance of social capital in the creation and functioning of associations. The DRC and the RoC case studies suggest that both wartime and peacetime trust and leadership constitute central pillars of ex-combatant trade associations. In the perspective of DDR programming, fostering trust and leadership from the top-down is likely to prove challenging. However, experiences from the DRC and the RoC show that it is possible to take advantage of existing social capital. In particular, it seems critical to allow ex-combatants to decide whether they trust anyone enough to join their association, and to choose who they trust most and want to associate with. While trust and cooperation cannot be forced, training provided as part of DDR programs present a high socialization potential, in particular between ex-combatants and community members. In this respect, training gathering both ex-combatants and community members and organized over several months emerges as an interesting trust-building tool. It would be useful to further investigate ways to strengthen the social potential of training, by gathering both community members and ex-combatants, for instance in sessions on association creation and management. Finally, cases in the DRC and in the RoC demonstrate that associations allow for the emergence of peacetime leaders of ex-combatants who are able to become spokesmen, mitigate conflict, and defend the interests of ex-combatants. Additional research on these aspects would help to explore the transformation of leadership from wartime to peacetime, and suggest ways of mitigating potential power abuse or coercion within associations.

A comparison between the DRC and the RoC shows that ex-combatants' trade associations involve a level of trade-off between social and economic performance. Associations with membership restricted to about 10 to 15 members in RoC prove more economically performing, but generate limited social capital.

⁴⁸ DRC – FG 1, Kinshasa

⁴⁹ DRC – FG 1, Kinshasa

⁵⁰ DRC – FG 18, Lubumbashi

⁵¹ DRC – FG 6, Kisangani

⁵² DRC – FG 2, Brazzaville

On the other hand, inclusive and large associations in the DRC facilitate socialization between ex-combatants and between ex-combatants and community members, but complicate management and limit revenue creation. However, social and economic reintegration remain intertwined concepts, and to a certain extent, open membership and inclusiveness in DRC allowed ex-combatants to improve their economic reintegration, as it facilitated access to land and production means owned by community members. With respect to future programming, this comparison reaches two main preliminary findings:

- (i) Getting closest to the best of both worlds would most likely involve limiting membership (this may vary according to the capacity of association leaders in each context) while encouraging mixed membership (community members and ex-combatants);
- (ii) Identifying the priority needs of ex-combatants in each context would help tailor support to associations, and emphasize either economic reintegration (as was most needed in RoC), or social reintegration (as was de facto prioritized in DRC).

Admittedly, further quantitative research would be necessary to refine these findings, and in particular introduce more objective measurement of economic performance of associations through the collection of verifiable data over time, as well as of social reintegration, through the measurement of community perceptions of ex-combatants according to the level of inclusiveness of the association they belong to.

Finally, in order to accurately reflect on the advantages and limitations of ex-combatant trade associations on economic and social reintegration and to provide reliable programming recommendations, further research will need to compare the reintegration of ex-combatants in associations to the reintegration of ex-combatants who did not join an association. This type of research will help to establish the comparative advantages of an individual versus collective approach to reintegration, and explore to what extent they might complement each other.

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