

Rumours of Peace, Whispers of War

Assessment of the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study sought to

- assess the processes of the socio-economic reintegration of former combatants into civilian life,
- analyze the causes and dynamics of the current security situation in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri and the implications for current and future disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes, and
- evaluate the extent to which demobilized former combatants have been re-recruited into armed groups, including motivating and resilience factors.

In addition to a literature review and an assessment of published research and data on the subject matter, the study is based on qualitative analysis methods (individual interviews and focus groups with ex-combatants and members of host communities) to capture the determinants of the reintegration into civilian life, the dynamics taking place and the lessons to be drawn.

Post-independence conflicts and peace building

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has a prolonged history of repression and armed conflict dating back to the era of European occupation. After independence, government authority was not exercised over vast tracts of territory, particularly in the east. Government armed forces in the Mobutu era were routinely unpaid, and therefore soldiers often resorted to raiding and looting rural communities to sustain themselves. Affected communities responded to such predatory behavior and other insecurities by creating militias. These armed groups proliferated in the mid-1990s.

Instability was further heightened by movements of population and armed groups following the Rwanda

conflict. Local tensions led to a rebellion movement in 1996 which overthrew Mobutu. From 1999, another rebellion with foreign support threatened the new Kabila regime. All these tensions and wars were formally stopped through a series of peace agreements between 1999 and 2002. Despite these, as of now, sizeable areas in the east of the country continue to be unstable, with an assortment of armed and militia groups remaining active, particularly in mining areas.

Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration in DRC

The DDR process that unfolded in the DRC has possibly been the most complex and multi-faceted program ever implemented in Africa. It included –inter alia– a national program, programs to disarm and repatriate foreign combatants and their dependants, processes for special needs groups (women, disabled ex-combatants and children), and projects to disarm members of militia groups and reintegrate them into civilian life. The World Bank and the United Nations were the main facilitators of the DDR process, along with the Government.

The DRC DDR program was the most significant component of the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program, representing 50 percent of its entire budget. MDRP activities concluded in the greater Great Lakes region in 2009. At that time, 102,014 former combatants had received both demobilization and reinsertion support in DRC, and 52,172 had received reintegration support. However, if demilitarization affected many ex-combatants in the eastern region, the results were mixed in terms of reintegration. Indeed, reinstatement kits were often sold and reallocated to other projects; there were defections among ex-combatants returning to their original groups; women were often excluded from reintegration because they could not fulfill criteria for access to demobilization.

Security and insecurity in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu

The level of human security in Ituri, North and South Kivu improved marginally in 2010 and 2011 compared to the period 2008-2009. Nonetheless, there were variations in conditions of security between communities. In addition, recorded levels of violence and human rights abuse were exceedingly high, especially rape, assault, murder, looting and abduction.

The main perpetrators were members of armed groups and militias, as well as FARDC (Armed Forces of DRC) soldiers. Tensions existed within the Congolese armed forces which contributed to instability in the region. FARDC were often joined by rebels and other foreign groups for whom the plunder of gold mining became both a means of survival and a way to establish their supremacy. Faced with the illicit exploitation of mineral resources by some members of the FARDC, and the rise in violence in the eastern part of Congo, a military reform was undertaken to stabilize the area and reduce the levels of violence. In 2011, military contingents were withdrawn from key areas, leaving communities vulnerable to attacks from other armed groups. In addition, some former members of armed groups, dissatisfied with conditions and benefits within the FARDC, deserted the government military. Some individuals reportedly rejoined armed groups, or established new ones.

Reintegration of former combatants

Many demobilized combatants are now pursuing stable civilian livelihoods, relative to the majority of DRC's economically active population and are involved in financially viable activities that do not require formal training, specific networks or high investment capital such as:

- Small businesses: market stalls and cross-border trading of goods imported from neighboring countries;
- Artisanal and small-scale mining that involves strong presence of demobilized ex-combatants, especially in Ituri where half of all demobilized ex-combatants are artisanal miners;
- Transportation: driving a motorcycle taxi is a very popular activity among ex-combatants as it does

not require any specific qualification or workplace skills. Water transportation (transporting timber, minerals and other goods by boat) also generates income;

- Fishing is a very lucrative activity when ex-combatants work in associations and have experience in this sector;
- Agriculture: it is not highly profitable except for former farmers who have enough experience to survive with their agricultural kits. Access to land is also a major constraint, making subsistence agriculture and hunting for bush meat the most prevalent forms.
- Forestry involves ex-combatants, especially in the timber industry both operating in domestic and exports market.
- Criminal/smuggling and illicit activities such as trafficking minerals, drugs and armed criminality, which become an option for ex-combatants when there are few economic opportunities for them.
- Recruitment into armed groups, which can be explained by some push factors such as the feeling of discrimination within the FARDC regarding allocations of benefits, grades, etc; the loss of access to lucrative mining sites by FARDC factions; the legal transformation of mining areas through the government mining ban; the flawed security sector reform process; and the allure of armed groups that gave a sense of belonging and income opportunities.

The research suggests that the livelihood choices of individual ex-combatants were directly informed by their personal circumstances, experiences, family responsibilities, skills and livelihoods/income generating experience. The accessibility to individual networks for economic purposes (such as accessing loans, business partners, investors and markets) was a key ingredient to securing sustainable livelihoods. Many ex-combatants entered into business arrangements with individuals and networks with no military backgrounds. In some cases, ex-combatants from armed groups that were previously at war appeared to be able to work alongside each other relatively peacefully in a range of professions, including

artisanal mining, motorcycle taxi driving, small business and fishing.

The manner in which ex-combatants used the reinsertion/reintegration kits provided to them varied. Some used them directly for income generating activities. A significant number sold the kits, with some using the proceeds for short-term consumption, while others invested the funds in an economic venture which they determined as being more appropriate to their personal circumstances. Ex-combatants often undertook a variety of income generating activities in order to save funds and provide for themselves and their families. In some cases ex-combatants were running multiple small businesses, usually employing family members to assist. In many cases, ex-combatants had sought to improve their socio-economic status by changing and adapting the manner in which they generated an income. For example, some ex-combatants started working in menial jobs, accumulated savings and then invested in more profitable ventures. There was often a positive, upward spiral process. Given these positive dynamics, it may be possible to advocate that ex-combatants are increasingly becoming implicit agents of peace.

Recommendations

On the military side:

- Investigate the crimes committed by regular armed forces against the populations, including human rights abuses, and pursue appropriate disciplinary measures
- Completed the military reform urgently to provide better protection to populations currently vulnerable to armed groups' attacks.
- Continue the disarmament process

On the reintegration side:

- Evaluate the most appropriate type of benefits to give to ex-combatants
- Adapt reintegration support to local market conditions
- Encourage artisanal miners to work in demilitarized areas
- Advocate for tax relief and access to credit to support small business development.