

Part 5 – Past interventions targeting ex-combatants and lessons learned

In the past fifteen years, several programs for disarming and reintegrating ex-combatants were implemented in the RoC. While most reintegration approaches in the Pool region have directly targeted former fighters, the UNDP-funded PRESJAR chose to focus from the start on the community at large (see appendix 1 for a list of these initiatives).

In December 1995, a peace treaty included official provisions for incorporating fighters who had served in the political militias into the gendarmerie and police corps.⁴⁰ In 2000, a national Comité de Suivi de la Convention pour la Paix et la Reconstruction du Congo (Committee to Follow-Up on the Peace Convention and Congo's Reconstruction) was set up to demobilize the bulk of the ex-combatants. However, it lacked sufficient means to have a tangible impact.⁴¹ Between 2000 and 2004, two externally-funded programs were implemented. The first was an IOM/UNDP disarmament and reintegration program, which was implemented between July 2000 and December 2002 and collected 11,000 small arms and provided reintegration assistance to 8,000 ex-combatants. The second was a program carried out by the national institution Haut Commissariat à la Réinsertion des Ex-Combattants (HCREC), with funding from IDA, which eventually provided reintegration assistance to 9,000 ex-combatants between 2002 and early 2005. The HCREC did not address disarmament.

When the Government of Congo approached donors in 2005 for funding for its *Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion* (PNDDR), it was agreed that the reinsertion component would be supported by the multi-donor trust fund MDRP,

funded by both IDA and other donor contributions under the framework of the Republic of Congo Emergency Reintegration program (MDRP-RCERP).⁴²

In the Pool region, 1,679 former recruits who had self-demobilized several years before were assisted. They included not only former Ninjas but also militarized civilians who had assisted the Congolese army during the counterinsurgency. These beneficiaries were generally well settled at the time the program was implemented. Many were coming from the southern districts of Boko and Louingui, two districts that had no violent activity reported since 2003. The districts of Mindouli, Vinza, Kindamba, and Mayama were not reached by the PNDDR teams because they were in the “red zone.” In the Kinkala district, the localities that were chosen did not represent the most potentially explosive situations, such as those in Voula, Madzia, and Matoumbou, which were not included.

It is estimated that about 5,000 recruits continue to keep a close link with Ntumi. However, this number should be taken with caution given the estimative nature of this assessment. It is a reasonable assumption that some recruits remain active in the group and

40 Each political party using a militia was allocated a quota. The Presidential coalition received 2,000 places, the opposition 1,000.

41 It included those who had served in the various political parties' militias (Ninja, Cocoye, and Cobra). The aim was to facilitate the integration of a number of them into the army and to collect small arms in circulation. After discharge, some of these militia members received a financial incentive of 15,000 CFA (US\$ 20) but the committee generally lacked the financial means to go beyond that. Hence, the international community was approached for support.

42 The responsibility of the disarmament component was shared between UNDP and the Congolese government.

were not reached by the MDRP project.

Given the low number of ex-combatants reached in the Pool region during the MDRP program and the persistence of regional instability, the HCREC carried out a cash-for-weapons disarmament operation in the Pool in early 2009. It was only partially executed due to insufficient funding and sensitive electoral deadlines. In the summer of 2011, government funding was released for another cash-for-weapons disarmament operation.⁴³ With regard to these interventions, it would be inaccurate to draw a strict line between disarmament and reintegration, especially since part of the disarmament money was used by ex-combatants for purposes of socioeconomic reintegration. The next sections describe the most recent operations.

1. The most recent disarmament operation (2009)

The most recent government disarmament operation was initially planned as one phase in February 2009. It was eventually complemented by a second phase in June 2009. Even with two phases, the program objectives were only partially fulfilled. The operation was jointly led by the government HCREC and the CNR, and according to the *modus operandi* defined in the document, “Modalités pratiques de désarmement et identification des 5,000 combattants du CNR,”⁴⁴ dated January 31, 2009.

The operation had several objectives:

- To receive and identify combatants who had already returned their weapons;
- To validate the list of combatants not in possession of a weapon (not every single Ninja had a gun);
- To catalog the weapons;
- To pay the incentive, called *prime frictionnelle*, to each combatant who turned in a weapon;
- To deliver certificates of weapon deposit; and
- To organize the destruction of arms and to set-up the necessary written proceedings.

Seventeen locations were chosen in the Pool region to host disarmament centers: eleven along the railroad; five in the northwest of the region in the dis-

tricts of Mindouli, Mayama, and Kindamba; and one in Kinkala. The first operation ran from February 19 until March 2, 2009; 2,878 weapons were gathered, of which 2,058 were PMAK guns.

Each weapon was quoted according to a weapons pricing list. For weapons outside the list, people negotiated directly at the disarmament counter. The amount of cash received therefore varied from one individual to another. A major difficulty in the operation was that there was not enough money to buy all weapons and there were not enough certificates of weapon deposit. These certificates are an important means for individuals to avoid harassment by the military. In the current military Operation KIMIA, for instance, former Ninjas who are apprehended by the FAC on suspected possession of an illegal weapon are released when they provide proof that they already have given a weapon back, unless they are well known for acts of banditry.

While one would have expected that the lack of financial means (which interrupted the weapons collection several times) would pose serious problems for local security, this was not the case. This demonstrates two things: first, that Ntumi had clearly communicated that these events were to be non-violent; and second, that the ex-combatants were keen to show their willingness to cooperate and empty their personal and collective arsenal. Many argue against the effectiveness of disarmament efforts, claiming that many of the weapons collected were rusty and unusable, and that many combatants gave up one weapon but kept another “just in case.”⁴⁵ However, we lack solid empirical grounds to sustain these claims; such allegations therefore must be handled with caution.

The second disarmament phase began in June 2009. It was unfortunately put to an end before completion because of the proximity of an electoral deadline (the

43 The HCREC actually met on May 31, 2011 with representatives of the political movement Conseil National des Républicains (CNR) and with the administrative authorities of the Pool, shortly after the Conseil Départemental gathered in Kinkala. During the meeting, the release of government funding was announced for the disarmament operation. A targeted reintegration component was also planned and a goal was set to provide reintegration support to 5,000 ex-combatants. The Pool is the only region that benefited from this operation.

44 Practical modalities for the disarmament and identification of 5,000 CNR combatants

45 Informal talks with local administrative authorities and key informants, May 2011, between UNDP and the Congolese government.

Presidential elections were held in July 2009) and the end of the government funding. It has been reported that PNDDR staff at the disarmament centers were sending ex-combatants away with the weapon they had come to deliver because of insufficient funds to buy them back.

HRCEC staff reported that during the PNDDR disarmament operation of 2009, the teams took advantage of the operation to identify former Ninjas, with the aim of implementing another reintegration program in the near future. In all, 13,000 ex-combatants in the Pool region were listed.

Most ex-combatants interviewed for this study had handed over a gun. The ex-combatants used the cash received in various ways: some used it to rent a plot to start a field of cassava; others invested in their small business; others still bought a residential parcel of land to settle down. One ex-combatant even bought a music amplifier to start a traveling music business that provides musical equipment for funerals and end-of-year village parties.

The two military operations that followed in 2010, KINZOUNOU and KIMIA, complemented the disarmament process. These also collected weapons from ex-combatants, although this was not their primary objective, and remuneration was not provided in exchange for the weapons. Understandably, this was seen by some ex-combatants and community members as breaking with past disarmament efforts. The persons interviewed for this study complained of the following cycle: the government had bought back weapons in 2009; the operation had to stop for lack of funding, and ex-combatants were asked to wait until a next round; then, in 2010, weapons were taken by force by the national army, based on local denunciations and without financial compensation.

2. The MDRP-reintegration operation in the Pool (2007-09)

As outlined above, there have been several programs over the years for reintegrating ex-combatants. The last targeted intervention, MDRP-RCERP, was implemented between 2007–09 in the Pool region after suffering many delays due to pockets of insecurity in the area.

The MDRP-RCERP was designed to support the



« Ex-combatants demand the creation of vocational training centers ».

demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration of ex-combatants, with a particular focus on special groups: children, women, and disabled individuals. It also included a community component to foster social reintegration through the rehabilitation of social infrastructure.

The general aim of the program was to create a sustainable source of income for ex-combatants. The range of options offered, either individually or in groups, included employment placement, support for micro-enterprise creation, informal technical training, and placement in labor-intensive projects.

Support could not exceed US\$400 per beneficiary. Eligibility criteria to enter the MDRP-RCERP included: participation in combat operations; involvement in sustained logistical support; indication of a preference for training and/or self-employment through managing a micro-project; no involvement in labor intensive projects or in a regularly paid activity in the formal sector; and not having benefited from other reintegration assistance, such as the IOM/UNDP program, the HCREC, or the government pension scheme. Verification of eligibility status was significantly tightened compared with the earlier programs, and militia leaders, or their designees, were involved. They had to certify the dates and localities where the ex-combatant had been active and his or her current employment status.

The opaqueness of numbers posed a real challenge to evaluating the real needs of the MDRP reintegration program. Estimates ranged from 8,000 in the MDRP Regional Strategy to 41,000 in the government's letter of demobilization policy (World Bank, 2007; 2010). Although some of these differences can be explained by the undocumented number of self-demobilizations, the lack of accurate registration and discharge

records in the different armed militias makes an accurate estimate of ex-combatants difficult. For the MDRP, the population targeted by the PNDDR for reintegration support included three categories:

1. 6,000 former members of the *Force Publique* (to downsize the national army);
2. 5,000 combatants associated with the rebellion in the Pool region, an estimate based on an interview with the Haut Commissaire deputy; and
3. 19,000 ex-combatants who had already self-demobilized from the various militias at an earlier stage, some of whom had retained their arms, and all of whom were assumed to be in a difficult socioeconomic position.

Eventually, of the 19,000 ex-combatants who were classified as self-demobilized, 1,679 residing in the Pool region received reintegration assistance.

Individuals in the public security forces and those still mobilized in Ntumi's group were also eligible to receive a transitional safety net payment of US\$150 to cover their immediate needs after demobilization.⁴⁶ Following a CNR suggestion, this cash safety net was transformed into an in-kind incentive for the ex-combatants close to Ntumi. The incentive comprised an individual kit of twenty roofing metal sheets to use for housing. In early 2009, 100,000 metal sheets were bought and stocked at the sous-préfet's office in Kinkala. By the time we completed our fieldwork on May 31, 2011, the metal sheets had not yet been dispatched and remained in storage.⁴⁷

The 1,679 ex-combatants who received PNDDR assistance within the framework of the MDRP comprised five waves of beneficiaries. Five funding plans for micro-projects were therefore spread across 2007 and 2008 to provide financial assistance to those five waves of beneficiaries.

A large share of beneficiaries came from the southern districts and consisted of militarized populations armed by the national army to push back the Ninjas in 2002. The registration team focused on the less problematic areas in the Pool region; no PNDDR activity was undertaken in the localities with remaining Ninja bases in Matoumbou, Voula, Madzia, and Missafou, nor in the districts of Mindouli, Vinza, Kindamba, and Mayama.

Some indicators were difficult to assess objectively by the team in charge of the identification process. For instance, the criteria of "idleness" was difficult to determine in a context where people derive their income mostly from informal jobs or from seasonal agricultural activity. It also raised an obvious question: why was the program excluding "non-idle" ex-combatants? Why penalize those who, before the MDRP program was implemented, had already engaged in spontaneous income-generating activities on their own initiative?

In comparison with what the PNDDR offered in other regions, reintegration support was strikingly confined to agro-pastoral activities in the Pool region, with an almost complete absence of short-term vocational training. One can only regret that this vocational option was not developed more, despite demand (figure 1).

In practice, CFA 200,000 (the equivalent of US\$400) were given to beneficiaries in two installments about one year apart. Group support comprised the aggregate of individual incentives. Financial support was less than expected because the incentive was processed through a financial institution (the MUCODEC), which captured a 10 percent transaction fee, instead of going directly to the beneficiary. Furthermore, according to ex-combatant testimonies, MUCODEC was charging CFA 13,500 to open an account and required a minimum balance of CFA 4,000. Depending on the type of account, CFA 2,000 could be deducted every time another transaction was made. This was a waste of money for many, as well as being a complex procedure since at the time the cash was distributed, the MUCODEC Kinkala was actually based in Brazzaville. All 1,679 beneficiaries had to travel to Brazzaville to cash out their incentive. Only in April 2011 was banking activity revived in Kinkala.

Several testimonies also indicate that beneficiaries simply did not understand the financial cuts. How the cash was given to the ex-combatants also left plenty of room for potential abuse on the part of the local

⁴⁶ The 19,000 self-demobilized were not eligible to receive this incentive on the grounds that they were already back in their communities, thus less likely to suffer immediate financial strife.

⁴⁷ Some metal sheets were stolen in the beginning of 2011, according to gendarmerie reports and interviews with Ntumi's close advisors. Some of the thieves were arrested. Their photographs were displayed in the local gendarmerie station.

NGOs, which were in charge of accompanying the ex-combatants in the execution of their micro-projects. Boko beneficiaries pointed out that at the MUCODEC premises, the money given to the local NGO representative instead of the beneficiary. The eventual handover of the cash to the beneficiary could take place on the street or in local bars, and the beneficiary sometimes had the impression that the sum was not complete. Since the perception of abuse could derive from a general incomprehension of the financial process, we must treat these statements with caution. However, there is still a need to acknowledge that the procedure chosen for distributing the financial reintegration incentive was not the most appropriate in the Congolese context. Financial costs were high, and the process was complex, increasing the likelihood of confusion among the target population. The process was also open to abuse.

Most of the ex-combatants interviewed had handed over a gun during the cash-for-weapons operation of 2009; therefore, many of them chose not to register for the PNDDR reintegration component. Some were reluctant to register for fear of being put on a black list and facing potential retaliation.⁴⁸ Others located in the red zones, such as a delegation of ex-combatants from Loutéhété that went to Kinkala to register with the PNDDR, were eventually not selected.

3. Lessons learned from past interventions

Firstly, it is important to note the predominance of targeted assistance to ex-combatants in reintegration programming in the Congolese context. Only recently did broader programs targeting communities begin to be implemented by UNDP and some NGOs.

Secondly, the Congolese case is a good illustration of the overlap between the disarmament and the reintegration phases. Individual interviews show that many ex-combatants who benefited from the cash-for-weapons disarmament phase of 2009 used part of the cash for reintegration purposes, with some rent-



Ex-combatant supported by the PNDDR in Louingui

ing agricultural plots, others investing in small businesses, and still others buying residential parcels on which they could settle.⁴⁹ In other words, they could spend their money the way they wanted.

The idea that DDR is a linear sequence and that reinsertion/reintegration should follow the processes of disarmament and demobilization, is firmly anchored in the local political discourse and widely relayed by the local media. Although the MDRP reintegration programming eventually occurred just before the 2009 disarmament operation in the Pool region, much of the delay was due to the belief that it had to happen after the disarmament stage (political reasons delayed the disarmament phase many times).

One can only regret the undue influence of political ends on the reintegration component. In many localities of the Pool region, the reintegration phase could likely have started before 2008—perhaps under a “pilot” label—and could have helped alleviate tension between aggressive Ninja elements and the civilian population, especially in localities where an operational Ninja base remained. As several scholars pointed out, DDR programs do not necessarily have to start with disarmament and demobilization (Muggah, 2005; Pouligny, 2004; Specker, 2008).

48 Ex-combatant supported by the PNDDR in Louingui

49 Ex-combatant supported by the PNDDR in Louingui