

Disarm, Demobilize and Reintegrate

Transforming combatants into citizens to consolidate peace

BY MARIA CORREIA

SUPPORT BY THE WORLD BANK GROUP for the demobilization and reintegration (D&R) of ex-combatants in fragile countries is still in its infancy, with its regulatory framework to address this challenge having been revised in March 2007. A few visionaries pushed this agenda in Africa in the late 1990s, however, which resulted in the creation of the Multi Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) in early 2002. This program was designed to provide a framework for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) activities in Africa's Great Lakes region, with \$260 million to demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants channeled through a multi donor trust fund, and parallel International Development Association (IDA) grants totaling \$193 million, as well as disarmament activities managed by MDRP partners. The program initially targeted over 400,000 combatants from regular and irregular armed forces.

After seven years of implementation, the MDRP closed down in June. It leaves behind an unquestionable legacy of success—over 280,000 ex-combatants demobilized and 260,000 having received reintegration support—as well as many remaining challenges and unanswered questions.

The MDRP was the first attempt to implement a regional DDR program on such a large scale. Instead of support directed at one country, the architects of the program purposely established a regional approach as an incentive for countries to disengage concurrently from interconnected conflicts and to allow the program to tackle the cross border issues in the region.

One of the program's unique characteristics was the agreement by all partners—13 donors, seven country governments and over 40 UN agencies, NGOs and other international actors—to adopt a true partnership model, pooling their resources into a common pot and coordinating their efforts through regular exchanges and joint supervision missions. The program also focused heavily on national ownership and implementation of DDR activities. In all but two recipient countries, the local governments were at the helm of the DDR programs. For the first time also, partners agreed to ask the World Bank to lead the partnership.

The Bank has learned a great deal from this experience. Experience has shown that disarm-demobilize-reintegrate programs have high risks, but also high returns. Because they hinge on processes beyond the control of the partners, including political processes, international consultations,

peace negotiations and agreements, results on stated targets are difficult to predict. But there is evidence to support the contention that DDR programs supported by the Bank in MDRP countries and others such as Sierra Leone have been central to consolidating fragile transitions to peace following the conclusion of civil wars.

It should be clear that DDR programs are not THE answer to post-conflict situations. They are only one small but critical part of peace consolidation. Basically, by breaking up armed groups and command and control structures, DDR buys time so that the root causes of the conflict can be addressed and peace strengthened. And DDR programs must be complemented by other recovery activities, which together can reinforce security and stability and pave the way for development.

Successful DDR projects can also facilitate the reallocation of public expenditures from defense to social sectors, either in the context of public expenditure restructuring, security sector reform, or post conflict transitions. Examples of this shift are evident in countries such as Ethiopia and Sierra Leone where DDR programs have been successfully completed.

Disarm-Demobilize-Reintegrate programs have not always enjoyed the support needed to sustain budget and human-resources allocations from international development organizations, including the World Bank. Some have questioned whether or not this work is within the Bank's remit. The answer to that question may have been ambiguous a few years ago, but it is no longer. Recent studies show that the involvement of the international community in post-conflict situations has had a clearly positive impact in these countries, and this despite the inherent difficulties associated with the implementation of these programs.

The question is not whether or not the Bank should support DDR, but rather what can the Bank do to adjust its policies to provide leadership in post-conflict reconstruction, alongside the United Nations. Support to fragile countries right after their most troubled times is vital if the Bank is to "secure development" as the institution's President Robert Zoellick has stated. Disarm-Demobilize-Reintegrate programs must be part of this support.

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