

Voices and Choices of Disarmament

Lessons learnt from BICC's experience in other countries

Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)

Presented by : Director of BICC, Mr. Peter J. Croll

Introduction

„The causes of conflict and the promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa” lists “the reintegration of ex-combatants and others into productive society” as one of the priorities of post-conflict peace building. This is also the result of a report in 1998 and another report by the UN-Secretary General and in early 2000. General issues are raised in a similar report stressing the importance of DDR and also the Brahimi Report referred to demobilisation and reintegration as key to post-conflict stability and to reducing the likelihood of conflict recurring.

In post-war peace-building support efforts, attention should be devoted to the people in the armies that fought the war. Demobilisation is often one of the urgent, central and sensitive post-war processes—be it after a defeat of one of the parties or a peace settlement. Large numbers of combatants (government soldiers and/or opposition fighters) are to be released from the forces and start a new life as civilians. During and after these downsizing operations, policy makers have to deal with a complex set of issues, such as encampment and provision of basic needs, the logistics of resettlement, weapons collection and control, conflict resolution, support for reintegration, employment opportunities, psycho-social problems, co-ordination of external assistance etc. The issues are sensitive since the success of a cease-fire depends a.o. on the actual behaviour of the armed forces. In some cases it also concerns support to what used to be the ‘bad guys’, in times that many others need support as well. This chapter identifies, on the bases of demobilisation experiences in the past decade in Africa and Central America, some of the key issues involved and several general lessons learned.

Demobilisation is usually seen as one of the development efforts in post-war situations, along with for example economic stabilisation, democratisation, infrastructural rehabilitation and repatriation of refugees. But it is often also part of a security sector reform. In most countries the armed forces are totally overhauled, or an entirely new one is established. Often in the cases of demobilisation reviewed, there was also a need to reform the police system. In cases, such as El Salvador, Haiti and South Africa, internal security issues had during the conflict largely been dealt with by the army. After the war, or with the change of regime, the decision was taken to revert the internal security issues back to the police force. One should in these types of cases question whether a demobilisation is really a demobilisation, or merely a change in the colour of the uniform.

The status and standing of the (new) armed forces—and civil-military relations in general—are likely to play a role in peace-building processes. An atmosphere of reconciliation in and around the armed forces could make a major contribution. Retraining and reorientation of armed forces personnel and balancing the ethnic and regional composition of the forces might be required. It might strengthen people's confidence in the future, if human rights violations of members of the armed forces are dealt with. This could however create a dilemma. These people should be appropriately punished, but heavy punishment might also increase tensions between the military and the rest of society.

Demobilisation and resettlement

Blueprints for demobilisation do not exist. Each case involves a distinct political and socio-economic context. And decisions to demobilise have been based on specific military, political and socio-economic circumstances. In Ethiopia, for example, the defeat of the Derg army in 1991 led to its total demobilisation. In Mozambique, the two parties agreed in 1992 to stop fighting, demobilise, and create a much smaller new national army, consisting of volunteers from both parties. In the case of Uganda, armed conflicts had virtually disappeared several years before the demobilisation was initiated, and a considerable number of soldiers of the army of the previous regime had already been absorbed in the new National Resistance Army (NRA). Some countries have opted for first unifying and then demobilising. For example, after the 1994 elections in South Africa, the old South African Defence Force (SADF), *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK - armed wing of the African National Congress), Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA - armed wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress), and the armies of four former 'homelands', were integrated in the new South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Subsequently, the number of personnel in the SANDF is being reduced.

Generally, once the decision to demobilise is taken, practical plans have to be worked out and financing ensured (see box 1). The combatants that are to be demobilised are often brought to assembly areas, where they are registered, disarmed and given an identification card. In other cases soldiers are demobilised directly out of the barracks. In the assembly areas or barracks they may also receive health care and be assisted with reorientation and counselling. In Uganda, for example, the ex-soldiers and their dependants went through pre-discharge briefings, providing them details on how to open a bank account, how to start income generating activities, environmental and legal issues, family planning, and AIDS prevention. At time of demobilisation, a 'package' in cash and/or kind is usually provided to assist the ex-combatants in the initial stages of resettlement. These may include foodstuffs, civilian clothing, household utensils, building material, seeds or agricultural implements. In most cases, the demobilised receive a cash payment at the time of demobilisation and then at subsequent intervals. In Mozambique, the combatants received six months' severance pay at demobilisation as well as reintegration subsidies, representing a further 18 months' pay.

Box 1: Possible components of demobilisation exercise

A typical post-war demobilisation includes the following activities:

- selection and preparation of assembly areas
- planning of logistics, including transport, basic needs supply etc.
- resource mobilisation (domestic and foreign)
- selection of those that will be demobilised
- cantonment and registration
- disarmament
- needs assessment
- provision of services, such as health-care and basic training
- pre-discharge orientation and counselling
- discharge and transport to home areas

Soldiers are considered to be demobilised once they have been disarmed, received discharge papers and have—officially and *de facto*—left the military command structure. Considerable support is often required to transport them to where they will resettle. The availability of land is often a critical factor for those returning to rural areas. In many cases, returning refugees and internally displaced people are also in need of land. Landmines in the areas where ex-combatants (and others) would want to start agricultural activities cause one of the constraints for resettlement.

Reintegration into civilian life

Once the ex-combatants are demobilised and have settled together with their families in the area in which they want to begin a new life, the reintegration process starts. Although often at least some support is being provided, most of the effort rests on their shoulders. They have to build up a new livelihood and have to reconcile with former enemies. Reintegration is not one general process, but consists of thousands of *micro-stories*, with individual and group efforts, and with setbacks and successes.

Reintegration has economic as well as social and psychological aspects. **Social reintegration** is the process through which the ex-combatant and his or her family feel part of, and are accepted by, the community. The history of the war and the degree of reconciliation between the various groups play a role in how the ex-combatants are received. Other factors such as gifts and rituals could also play a role. In Mozambique, for example, many ex-combatants spent a good part of their initial demobilisation money on gifts to village elders. That contributed to acceptance in the villages, becoming part of the ‘social security’ and sometimes being allowed to marry a young woman in the village. Most ex-combatants underwent cleansing rituals. These have an impact both on the acceptance by the community as well as on the state of mind of the ex-combatants. Since the history of Uganda has caused a general fear and disrespect for soldiers, the Ugandan government tried to help ex-soldiers reintegrate, through sensitisation of soldiers and communities.

Economic reintegration is the process through which the ex-combatant's household re-establishes its livelihood, through production and/or other types of gainful employment. It is important to note that in some cases, the combatants released are the ones with the worst perspective for (self-)employment, because of little skills and education, or health problems (such as HIV/AIDS). Despite constraints, such as the availability and accessibility of agricultural land and housing, the experience with reintegration has not always been very negative. Research in Ethiopia, for example, shows that the ex-soldiers are indeed generally poor, but they are not significantly worse off than civilians in the same location without a military background are.

Psychological adjustments are also important to consider. Military personnel and guerrilla fighters are trained in top-down approaches, which are often not appropriate for management and entrepreneurship in the civilian sector. Ex-combatants go through a personal process of adjusting attitudes and expectations, after losing a predictable environment and a certain social status. In addition, large numbers of the demobilised suffer from serious psychosocial problems, due to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Demobilisation and reintegration support

It is important to make an analytical distinction between the demobilisation and reintegration process, on the one hand, and support programmes to facilitate the process, on the other. Often, particularly among international development agencies, these are (implicitly) used as synonyms. Box 2 provides an overview of the possible actors in the total process. If those designing and managing support activities are not sufficiently aware that ex-combatants and their families carry the heaviest day-to-day burden of reintegration, support efforts might in fact not help reintegration, nor lead to local capacity and sustainability of the achievements.

Box 2: Possible actors in demobilisation and reintegration processes

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) demobilised combatants (male and female ex-combatants; ex-child soldiers; ex-government soldiers and ex-guerrillas; associations of demobilised combatants)2) families of ex-combatants3) communities in which ex-combatants resettle4) other groups trying to reintegrate (e.g. returned refugees and internally displaced people)5) local business community6) government agencies7) armed forces, and other security forces8) local NGOs9) the UN and its agencies10) donor agencies11) international NGOs |
|--|

Some people might argue that it is unfair that ex-combatants receive special support. These combatants often created havoc and made development and life impossible. Many other groups of people suffered and should be supported in restoring their livelihoods. When peace returns, ex-combatants are usually not the only group that has to reintegrate. Returning refugees and internally displaced people usually outnumber by far the ex-combatants. However, the justification to support ex-combatants is usually based on one or more of the following arguments:

1. Demobilised soldiers and fighters require support from a humanitarian point of view. Upon demobilisation, they are out of a job and often far from their homes. Therefore, they require at least the initial provision of basic needs and physical resettlement.
2. In some cases demobilised combatants have sacrificed several years of their life to improve the development perspectives for their compatriots (e.g. Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front - EPLF, or MK in South Africa). In other cases, some of the demobilised have been recruited into the armed forces under pressure (e.g. Derg army in Ethiopia and Renamo – Mozambican National Resistance - in Mozambique). In those cases, support could be seen as a compensation for foregone education or other investment.
3. A third argument to support ex-combatants is because of their potential contribution to general development. Their skills and capabilities might bring new economic activities and employment opportunities.
4. Lastly, but in some cases most importantly, lack of reintegration support could jeopardise peace-building and human development. Without support, demobilised soldiers and guerrilla fighters might have great difficulties re-establishing themselves in civilian life, and frustrated ex-combatants may threaten the peace and development process by getting involved in criminal activities or violent political opposition. They could also try to apply their skills elsewhere. The use of ex-soldiers as mercenaries in official and private armies is increasing, and many of them originate from armies that have recently downsized.

In most efforts to support reintegration, policy makers face thus a dilemma on whether or not to treat the ex-soldiers and guerrillas as a special target group. Support programmes have to strike a balance. It is argued that for example ex-combatants should not receive more support than necessary to help them attain the standard of living of the communities in which they live. This targeted support might be costly, but long-term costs for society could be even larger if the ex-combatants would not be able to find new livelihoods. It could lead to increasing unemployment and social deprivation, which could again lead to rising crime rates and political instability.

Governments and NGOs have in the various countries designed and used a broad set of instruments to directly support the ex-combatants and facilitate reintegration (see box 3). These measures are best applied in different combinations, according to the local circumstances, the target groups and the available resources. Governments could of course also take general measures to create an environment that facilitates reintegration. A general environment of economic growth has shown to be one of the most important factors for successful economic reintegration.

Box 3: Possible components of resettlement and reintegration support programmes

- cash payments (in instalments)
- foodstuffs (or coupons)
- health care
- civilian clothing and household utensils
- building material and tools
- seeds or agricultural implements
- agricultural extension services
- school fees for children
- counselling
- legal and/or business advice
- job placement or general referral services
- land distribution
- housing support
- public works and other (temporary) public sector job creation
- wage subsidies
- credit schemes
- managerial and technical training

In most of the post-war countries implementing demobilisation and reintegration programmes, economic conditions are such that the activities cannot be funded solely by national resources. Several of the international development co-operation agencies have over the past few years largely overcome their initial reluctance to get involved in development activities that relate to the military and other parts of the security sector. Multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental development agencies provide support in many cases of demobilisation through the financing of UN operations, demobilisation packages, special services during demobilisation, technical assistance, and programmes to facilitate reintegration.

Lessons learned

Success of demobilisation exercises could generally be assessed in terms of whether the demobilisation contributed to peace-building and whether the ex-combatants have been able to reintegrate satisfactorily into civilian life. The diversity of demobilisation experiences among countries is large. However, with the appropriate care, and always putting demobilisation in the specific context of the broader reconciliation, peace-building and rehabilitation processes, some general lessons could be drawn on the basis of recent experiences.

1) *Demobilisation is no ‘magic bullet’ – Politics comes first*

Demobilisation does not automatically take care of the major development and security challenges. The clearest example is the case of Angola, which has unfortunately shown twice that demobilisation cannot substitute for political will. Demobilisation has little chances to succeed if one of the major parties is not fully committed. This lesson was also learned by the UN Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM) after it tried to demobilise certain armed groups.

'Politics' has to come first. Only then, on the basis of a real political solution of the conflict, will demobilisation, resettlement and reintegration support be natural—and often inevitable—components of post-war conflict transformation, rehabilitation and development.

2) *Balance and opportunity-costs to be considered*

Financial resources are limited in post-war situations, even if donor funding is available. Since the overall objectives are peace-building and human development, demobilisation exercises have the best results if decisions on resource allocation consider the trade-offs with other types of development spending. First, one could ask what activities are really necessary to prevent violence to restart or address other direct security threats? Demobilisation requirements are often pressing and politically sensitive, and soldiers pose a potential threat to the peace. So, there are usually large potential benefits in support to the demobilisation itself. But, beyond that, funding subsequent reintegration support would have to be considered along with broader development efforts and the needs of others.

3) *Successful demobilisation requires a central authority and implementing agency*

Demobilisation requires a clear and credible central authority and implementing agency. If it is the government, it should be able to guide and secure the process with sufficient oversight. Its police force should be able to intervene if the security of the ex-combatants or others is threatened. Following a peace agreement between two or more parties, this role may be played by an independent outside entity. For example, in El Salvador, Mozambique and Namibia, the UN was the neutral facilitator in sorting out details during the process, and it stepped in and mediated when the demobilisation showed delays or was at risk. Clear and active co-ordination remains very important during the resettlement and reintegration phases.

4) *Planning for demobilisation and reintegration support should start early*

Despite the political uncertainty and institutional weakness usually existing in a country emerging from war, there is need for early and rigorous planning. Important preparatory work includes needs assessment, the mobilisation of resources, and sensitisation of stakeholders. Programmes for reintegration should start soon after the end of the war, since armies might begin to disintegrate ahead of formal demobilisation. Clarity about these programmes will provide the ex-combatants and their leaders confidence in the peace agreement and in their future in society. Similarly, if the encampment takes too long and the demobilised have to do without information and opportunities to see their relatives, violent activities and rebellion could undermine the demobilisation, as well as the peace process.

5) *Sufficient provision of basic needs in the encampment stage*

Demobilisation requires effective management and substantial resources for accommodation, registration, transport and the provision of basic needs. If the provision of basic needs, such as water, sanitation, shelter and food, is insufficient at the encampment and discharge stage, frustration

is likely to occur. In Angola in late 1991, for example, living conditions and provision of basic needs in some of the camps were extremely poor. This contributed to widespread desertion. As with the previous lesson, quick visibility of the benefits of peace is required.

6) *Careful disarmament of the combatants*

If the combatants are not properly disarmed and armories not well protected, weapons might remain or fall in the hands of ex-combatants and other people. The availability of these 'uncontrolled' light weapons causes dangers at different levels. It increases the risk that disputes are settled with deadly violence, since most ex-combatants know little else than using violence to solve problems. These weapons could also fuel banditry; and armed groups could more easily disturb non-violent, democratic political processes. The way in which disarmament is implemented during the demobilisation differs. It particularly depends on whether the demobilisation is after a defeat of one party, right after a peace agreement, or as a result of a decision to downsize the existing army. Disarming soldiers and guerrilla fighters is usually not easy. Many own several weapons. So, if they turn in one, others might be hidden elsewhere. Large stocks might remain unreported if the parties are not sure that the peace will hold—or speculate on future income. However, the disarmament of ex-combatants is not always so difficult. In Uganda the weapons remained in the barracks when the soldiers moved to the demobilisation centres. And in Eritrea, all weapons used by the EPLF had been registered during the war.

7) *Support programmes to be designed in a participatory way*

In order to respond to the real needs, reintegration assistance programmes could best be designed and adjusted in continuing dialogue with ex-combatants, their families and communities. Ex-combatants themselves are usually going through a learning process, after leaving the military. For example, they have to find out what is possible—whether the sometimes over-ambitious plans they had while still in the army, make sense after they arrive (back) in the village, town or city. The reintegration process is also best facilitated if the support is as demilitarised as possible, stressing the new environment and people's own responsibility.

8) *Decentralised implementation of reintegration support*

Actual reintegration usually takes place throughout the country, in different circumstances and environments. The appropriateness of possible support measures (see box 3) depends case by case. A support programme organised in a decentralised way is most likely to provide the appropriate support in a flexible and cost-effective manner. Also the need for joint learning (lesson 7) implies that the actual implementation of the programmes should be as decentralised as possible. Good communication with the 'centre' should ensure that general lessons—positive or negative—are being learned in the future and in other areas.

9) *Reintegration support to benefit the entire community*

The dilemma of targeted support to ex-combatants and the need to balance between supporting them and the other war-affected groups was indicated above. From a short-term point of view, one may be inclined to keep the ex-combatants happy, to forestall a return to arms. From a long-term

perspective, ex-combatants should as soon as possible be treated like everyone else. A consensus appears to have developed that special efforts for ex-combatants are necessary during the demobilisation and resettlement phase, but that reintegration support should be as much as possible community-based and part of general rehabilitation efforts.

Studies have found that support by communities themselves was often critical for the success of the reintegration of the ex-combatants. These findings indicate that support to reintegration processes is more effective if it falls in line with the broad reconciliation and peace-building processes and the creation of an enabling environment in which people are encouraged to take initiatives.

10) *Support for female ex-combatants, former child soldiers and disabled ex-combatants*

Reintegration programmes have thus far generally taken too little consideration of the special needs of female ex-combatants, their children and the wives of ex-combatants. In the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) in El Salvador as well as in the EPLF in Eritrea, about one-third of the fighters were women. These female ex-fighters as well as other women in war affected communities have usually acquired new roles during wars, and are often expected by men to return to their traditional roles. Thus, reintegration creates tensions. A high divorce rate has for example been observed between ex-fighters in Eritrea. In Uganda, wives from returning soldiers, who came from other regions, were very often not accepted by his family and their community.

Special and rapid support is also needed for former child soldiers. Many of them have become adults in the meantime, but still require extra care and assistance. Their experiences in the forces have had a profound impact on their social and emotional development. Many are seriously traumatised by the brutal experiences they have undergone and the violent acts committed. Their environment inhibited the development of social values. They usually lack parental care and access to school. At demobilisation, they should not undergo assembly. Assistance in family tracing, special care for the orphaned and physical and psychological rehabilitation may facilitate reintegration. The success of reintegration will also depend on opportunities to gain access to education, training and employment. Special protection and rehabilitation programmes are necessary for girl soldiers, whose existence is often denied and who face multiple problems after demobilisation.

Also health care and special assistance to the disabled should be part of reintegration programmes. They usually represent a large proportion of the demobilised in Central America and Africa. Incidence of HIV/AIDS is also high among the demobilised in several countries.

11) *International development agencies should be able and willing to provide flexible and co-ordinated support*

External funding has in recent demobilisations contributed to the speed with which demobilisation and resettlement was implemented. To increase their value, international development agencies should be well prepared to deal with (unexpected) requests for support. Once called upon, they need to be involved in the planning processes early on. Demobilisation and reintegration support requires a large degree of flexibility and willingness to actually co-ordinate at all levels on the side of the donors—even more so than in more traditional development co-operation. Slow procedures and

specific rules and regulations on the side of the donors, have more than once affected the effectiveness of demobilisation and reintegration support. Duplication and conflicting policies and incentives can be prevented. Good communication and transparency on the side of the donors and their implementing agencies, facilitates co-ordination by the government and the strengthening of its management capacity.

References and further reading

- Ball, Nicole. 1997. "Demobilizing and Reintegrating Soldiers: Lessons from Africa." In Krishna Kumar (ed.). *Rebuilding Societies after Civil War; critical roles for international assistance*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner. pp. 85-105.
- _____. 1998. "The International Development Community's Response to Demobilization." In Gebrewold (ed.), pp. 21-27.
- Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC). 1996. *Conversion Survey 1996; Global Disarmament, Demilitarization and Demobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colletta, Nat J., Markus Kostner and Ingo Wiederhofer. 1996a. *The Transition from War to Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Directions in Development Series. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- _____. 1996b. "Case Studies in War-to-Peace Transition; The Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Ethiopia, Namibia and Uganda." World Bank Discussion Paper no. 331. Africa Technical Department Series. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Gebrewold, Kiflemariam (ed.). 1998. "Converting Defence Resources to Human Development." Proceedings of an International Conference, 9-11 November 1997. Report 12. Bonn: BICC.
- Kingma, Kees. 1996. "The Role of Demobilization in the Peace and Development Process in Sub-Saharan Africa: Conditions for Success." *African Security Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6, pp. 33-42.
- _____. 1998. "Demobilization and Reintegration: an Overview." In Gebrewold (ed.), pp. 12-20.
- _____. (ed.). forthcoming. *Demobilisation in Sub-Saharan Africa; the development and security impacts*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers.
- Kingma, Kees, and Kiflemariam Gebrewold. 1998. "Demilitarisation, reintegration and conflict prevention in the Horn of Africa." Discussion paper. London: Saferworld and BICC.
- Spencer, Denise. 1997. "Demobilization and Reintegration in Central America." BICC Paper 8. Bonn: BICC.