



Oxfam briefing note on the need for community-based reintegration in the aftermath of the Goma peace conference

The Goma Conference on Peace, Security and Development in January 2008 was an important step towards building peace in the Kivus. An inclusive and Congolese-led initiative, it brought together most parties to the conflict and provided a platform for both the expression of grievances and a joint exploration of solutions. Implementation of the commitments made in the resulting Amani plan offers the best chance for lasting security in the Kivus in a very long time. All signatories to the agreement, including international donors, must make a concerted effort to ensure implementation if it is to be more than just a statement of intent.

One of the critical challenges for a lasting peace is the demobilisation and reintegration, provided for in the Goma peace agreement, of the armed groups that were signatories. Over 100,000 fighters must be either incorporated into the armed forces (FARDC) or effectively reintegrated into civilian communities and occupations. The alternative is to see them pose a continued threat to civilian safety and the peace process as a whole.

The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of all these groups is urgent – but the process will need to be designed with care if it is to be effective and sustainable. To date the concluding and decisive part of the process, namely the reintegration of ex-combatants into their communities of return, has been the weakest pillar of DDR in DRC. Yet effective reintegration will be essential to secure stability in eastern DRC in the short and medium term. There are lessons that can be learned from past reintegration efforts to help ensure the success of this critical stage of building the peace.

Foremost among these, Oxfam proposes the following:

- The **mapping** of the number of militia fighters requiring demobilisation should include those not reintegrated by the DDR process to date.
- The DDR process should be based on the internationally agreed **UN Integrated DDR Standards** (www.unddr.org/iddrs/), particularly regarding gender equity and socio-economic reintegration.
- Communities should be involved in the whole reintegration process, from design to implementation. **Reintegration projects should benefit the whole community** to promote economic and social interdependence. While combatants need to be targeted, experience suggests that at least 50% of the beneficiaries should be other community members.
- Intervention must be based on a credible assessment of local economic potential** and provided with long-term support.
- Women combatants and women associated with armed groups should benefit fully** from reintegration projects.
- An **effective screening system** to identify human rights abusers should be put in place and attention paid to **justice and reconciliation** when integrating ex-combatants into communities.

Specifically, Oxfam proposes the following lessons learned and recommendations for urgent consideration by the Congolese government and its international partners in the design of the next round of DDR:

Structure and organisation

- 1) **Increase community involvement:** Up to now, DDR in DRC has focused exclusively on the ex-combatants, ignoring their communities of return. Yet the society that demobilised fighters are integrated into is critical. Oxfam's experience of supporting the reintegration of ex-combatants in Maniema and North Kivu demonstrates that it is both possible and desirable to give local communities a greater lead in the reintegration process from design to implementation. Popular consultation, for instance mediated by a traditional council of elders (*barza*), can help ensure the participation of all sections of society – including women, often disproportionately affected by militia violence.
- 2) **Adapt to local context:** The type of approach to DDR to be adopted depends on several local factors, and can thus vary according to context. Factors include the existence of parallel community recovery projects, the degree of social cohesion between ex-combatants and their communities of return, economic opportunities and the monetisation of the local economy, the severity and number of local conflicts persisting. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to reintegration in every province is simply not realistic: programme design must allow for flexibility to take account of these local factors.
- 3) **Decentralise implementation:** A diversified approach to DDR will be easier to achieve in a decentralised process. This may take the form of provincial peace and security committees, as provided for in the Amani plan, which could lead on issues concerning community security, community disarmament and community-based reintegration.
- 4) **Use inclusive eligibility criteria:** These committees could also monitor the application of eligibility criteria and implementation procedures for reintegration. The criterion of 'one man, one weapon' automatically leaves out many Mayi Mayi as well as other militia who either shared a weapon or fought with machetes. In practice, women were also excluded on the basis thereof. The eligibility criteria should be adapted to include all combatants, including women.
- 5) **Make provision for women:** Provision should also be made for those women who have been enlisted in militia groups as spy, cook, sex slave or carrier, possibly under a parallel programme.

Socio-economic reintegration

- 6) **Offer realistic economic options:** In DRC, what has been termed 'reintegration' has in reality been limited to short-term reinsertion. Credible economic prospects and sustained support are needed for ex-combatants and war-affected communities to become productive civilians. The Integrated DDR Standards underscore the need for this. Experience shows that subsistence agriculture is not of interest to ex-combatants but the chance to start a money-making business is. Reintegration assistance such as vocational and business training should be based on an assessment of the real micro-economic opportunities on the ground, and provide for longer-term follow-up.
- 7) **Target the whole community:** The economic benefits granted to ex-combatants must be sufficient to tempt them into a sustainable civilian livelihood. However, the community of return must benefit as well. This is important for three reasons. 1) Targeted investment in local infrastructure and services is needed to boost the local economy if new business ventures are to be successful. 2) From a (gender) justice perspective: a more equal distribution of resources between ex-combatants and those who have suffered from the war, especially women, who have often suffered disproportionately from sexual violence. 3) When economic benefits are embedded in the community, there is a greater chance that social reintegration will also be achieved – the 'demobilisation' of attitudes and behaviours that includes non-violent action, respect for elders and peers and observance of community customs.

- 8) **Promote interdependence:** There are several possible approaches to community-based reintegration. These range from ‘expanded DDR’, in which 30-50% non ex-combatants are included, to a community recovery project in which ex-combatants are only one special group among others, or a targeted DDR project that has explicit benefits for the community. Or a combination [see box below]. In all cases, economic interdependence between ex-combatants and other members of the community should be promoted.
- 9) **Avoid cash incentives:** One of the ways in which the additional costs of community-based reintegration can be financed is by leaving out direct cash incentives. While DDR is to some extent inherently unfair, the cash incentives paid to demobilised fighters in DRC have been perceived by many as a war bounty. They have also raised expectations among those awaiting demobilisation now. This needs a smart solution, such as a salary in labour-intensive reconstruction projects, or business start-up capital as part of a carefully monitored training and support package.

Small arms

- 10) **Control small arms:** The proliferation of light weapons in the Kivus continues despite DDR and the arms embargo. International donors and the government of DRC are urged to set up a programme to address the issue. Oxfam’s experience has shown that support to civil society organisations for intensive awareness raising in communities has motivated ex-combatants and civilians alike to hand in their weapons voluntarily.

Justice and reconciliation

- 11) **Screen participants:** The gross violence inflicted upon civilian women, children and men requires that justice be done. An effective screening system should therefore be established to avoid returning grave human rights violators to communities.
- 12) **Offer access to justice:** Provision should be made to facilitate access to justice for civilians wanting to file a complaint against ex-combatants for human rights violations. For those who express an interest, restorative justice mechanisms could be explored that offer real, if always symbolic, repair to the victim. Restorative justice, if undertaken with sufficient care and professionalism, resonates with Congolese tradition and could provide a valid alternative to the ‘amnesty vs justice’ paradigm in DDR.
- 13) **Promote reconciliation:** As the war has often exacerbated conflicts between and within communities, provision must be made for reconciliation programmes offering opportunities for e.g. truth-telling, cleansing rituals and inter-community dialogue.

The building blocks of reconciliation

In a number of reintegration initiatives, Oxfam and its partners have offered skills training in masonry, in which 50% ex-combatants and 50% other members of the community take part, including women. The bricks produced during the practice period are used to re-build the school next to the training centre. At the end of the 6- to 8-month skills training, the participants start a mixed cooperative and receive a start-up kit. They continue, as a kind of contribution/payment for the training, to make bricks for the school – together with other community members. In this way, the ex-combatants clearly demonstrate to the population their willingness to rebuild rather than destroy their community. Furthermore, in working alongside ‘ordinary’ community members, they are re-educated to civilian values. As one of the women told Oxfam: ‘The militias have inflicted great suffering on me and my family, but still I want to be in this training with them. Just you wait and see: I’ll educate them so that they behave themselves and show us respect.’

For more information, contact: Eveline Rooijmans, Policy Advisor Central Africa eveline.rooijmans@oxfamnovib.nl +3170 342 1725 / Ellie Kemp, Policy & Advocacy Coordinator DRC ekemp@oxfam.org.uk +243 81 34 89 309