



**Key Findings from the
Nation Wide Survey of Ex-combatants in Liberia:
Reintegration and Reconciliation
February-March 2006**

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In February-March of 2006 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with the Liberian chapter of African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) conducted a randomized nationwide survey of the population of ex-combatants. The study aimed to determine the status of ongoing international intervention on reintegration and reconciliation efforts at the individual or micro level and to obtain a mid-point assessment of the impact of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRR) program.

RESEARCH SCOPE

The study targeted a sample of 600 former fighters and instituted a randomized, nation wide sampling approach in order to obtain a representative sample of ex-combatants by category of DDRR program participation or non-participation and gender. Assignment of experimental groups was selected randomly from the same clusters of geographic locations. Ex post facto, the respondents were segregated into two major groups – DDRR program participants and program non-participants for analysis. The program non-participants, self-reportedly, did not formally disarm nor receive any direct benefits provided by the international intervention effort. The DDRR program participants were identified as those self-reported former combatants who had received some form of internationally provided benefit and was further segregated into three categories that delineated which stage of the program they were in.

The three categories of DDRR program participants include ex-combatants who disarmed and/or demobilized, those who have disarmed, demobilized, and are now participating in a reintegration program, and those who had enrolled in the DDRR and have completed reintegration training. Those respondents who had received program benefits were drawn from the same communities as the group of ex-combatants who had not received benefits. Former combatants under the age of 18 were excluded from this study for focus and logistical reasons. Of note, however, is that approximately 108 of the 590 respondents included in this survey would've been under the age of 18 at the time of the signing of the CPA in 2003. As of February 2005, the National Commission on DDRR (NCDDRR) reported that almost 11 percent of the disarmed combatants were children. While a representation of child soldier experience is embedded in the data, all inferences will be translated to the population of adult ex-combatants. Due to the quality and size of the sample, generalizations made with reference to the general population of ex-combatants can be accepted with confidence.¹

KEY FINDINGS

Status of Ex-combatant Reintegration

- Ex-combatants who formally disarmed, registered and completed a program of internationally funded reintegration training show, on average, an overall 8%² average increase in their socio-economic situation when compared against those former fighters who never formally disarmed or registered with the National Commission on DDRR (NCDDRR).

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- While the results support a markedly positive impact of the DDRR program upon the lives of those who complete the program, registering alone does not necessarily correlate with an improved overall socio-economic situation. In fact, those former fighters who have registered but have yet to receive formal training benefits are the least successfully reintegrated class fairing, on average, more than 9 percentage point worse than those who went on to receive training and complete the program. This class of former fighters is the least reintegrated of all categories.
- With respect to the former fighters' overall situation, those that live within the Greater Monrovia area were found adapting better than those outside of Monrovia, and that the older the ex-combatant, the harder reintegration is proving to be. No evidence of problems associated with female fighter reintegration was uncovered.

Reintegration Determinants – Social

- *Acceptance (self-reported)*: 94% of the sample of ex-combatants reported that they did not have any problems gaining acceptance from their neighbors today. The percentage of DDRR program completers claiming major problems (7% of sub-sample) more than doubles when compared against any other category.
- *Acceptance (perceived)*: When the sample of ex-combatants was asked to indicate how they believed the community viewed the population of ex-combatants, only 66% believed that acceptance was the norm. While program completers perceive acceptance from the community at a higher rate than the non-participants (62% vs. 44%), they also are doubly disposed to perceive that the community lives in fear of the ex-combatants (20% vs. 10%).
- *Social Networks*: 63% report spending the majority of their free-time with family. Reliance upon family and the primacy of their position in the lives of the sample of former fighters is quite apparent and significant in achieving an overall better socio-economic status.³ Interesting, however, is the finding that DDRR program completers spend their free time alone at a much higher rate (22%) than any other category of ex-combatants.⁴ This finding is troubling as there is a highly significant negative relationship between being alone and reintegrating successfully that was also uncovered.
- *Community Participation*: 80% of the sample reported significant participation in non-combatant lead community activities. Participation rates across categories of ex-combatants (program participants and non-participants) were found to be fairly similar.
- *Sources of Conflict*: The top four sources of conflict within the Liberian communities were reported as 1) Bad leadership/corruption 2) Crime/lawlessness/lack of prisons 3) Land 4) Unemployment/idleness/youth dissatisfaction. Of least concern to the sample of ex-combatants was the illegal possession of firearms and the reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees.
- *Conflict Resolution*: Over 96% of the former fighters indicated that their home community's mechanism for conflict resolution was either "mostly fair" or "almost always fair." Amongst the ex-combatants who were dissatisfied with a perceived impartiality the DDRR program completers were clearly the predominant group in both raw numbers and sample proportions.⁵
- *Judges of Conflict Resolution*: 88% of all conflict was reportedly judged by traditionally-based mechanisms (family, elders, and chiefs). There was a definite distinction between what was reported in the Greater Monrovia area versus the rest of Liberia, however. With regards to the traditionally-based mechanisms, the chiefs were looked to 68% of the time to settle disputes outside of Monrovia versus only 2% in the metropolitan area. The elders appear to accept the role in Greater Monrovia at a rate of 52%. Utilization of the courts system for both locality types stands at an almost non-existent rate of less than 2%.
- *Home Community Resettlement*: 58% of the sample has resettled in their home communities. This high rate of home community resettlement by all categories of DDRR program participants is a good indication of a positive progression towards reconciliation. The tendency of the non-participants, in stark contrast, to shy away from their pre-war home communities (56%) may be indicative of many confounding factors, but the worst among them may be the result of abusive or immoral actions committed during the conflict that keeps them away. Formal identification as an ex-combatant was the reason most often cited by non-participants (47%) for declining entry into the DDRR program. Whether the decision of the non-participants was made due to a general social stigma or the result of individual conduct cannot be explained here.

Reintegration Determinants – Economic

- *Employment:* 25%⁶ of the sample of ex-combatants reported that they were unemployed. The newly introduced construct for determining employment status appears to have provided the variation desired for analysis. In a country like Liberia where the nationally reported unemployment rate is around 80 percent, researchers and policy makers require a construct that provides more precision of definition. The findings show a strong entry into the formal employment sector by the DDRR program completers as compared with the non-participants.⁷ The construct was also useful in multivariate analysis as it reinforced the importance of income earning employment in post-conflict reintegration and amplified the troubles that face the sick and disabled in Liberian society. Respondents who were categorized as sick/disabled were almost 20% worse off than those former combatants who were unemployed.
- *Occupations:* 28% of the respondents indicated that they were farmers. Important to this qualification is that 70% of all farmers in the sample were former combatants who had disarmed and demobilized but as of yet had not received any form of reintegration training through the DDRR program. This finding is a particularly noticeable and significant anomaly. The next three most often reported occupations were “student” (17%) and “petty trader” and “home duties” (both at 11%).
- *Poverty Reduction:* 82% of the respondents live on less than US\$5/day, DDRR program graduates indicate a better ability to stay above the US\$1/day notional poverty line (93% versus 85% for the non-participants). Alarming, 54% of the sample of respondents who have registered for DDRR benefits but have not received training live on less than US\$2/day.
- *Education:* 51% of the sample population reported having a junior high or better education while only 18% reported that they never attended school. The sample of respondents who had disarmed and demobilized but had not yet received any form of training was the grouping with the least amount of education and reported a “no school” rate of 32%.
- *Living Arrangements (Housing):* On average, 68% of the sample of former fighters rent or own their own home. 85% of DDRR program completers pay their own costs for living accommodations (rent or own) compared to 58% of the unregistered former fighters.

Reintegration Determinants – Political

- *Belief in the Democratic System:* Those former fighters would believe in their new democratic system of government are, on average, 6%⁸ more likely to achieve an overall better socio-economic status within their respective communities.
- *Political Activism:* 94% of the sample of ex-combatants indicated affiliation with a contemporary political party. The top four most reported affiliations were Unity Party (UP) (47%), Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) (37%), National Patriotic Party and the Liberty Party (both 3%). Importantly, for the international community, association with either the UP or the CDC was not found to either increase or decrease an individual’s chance of reintegrating successfully. This finding is significant because the CDC had just lost the closely run Presidential election just three months earlier at the time of the survey.
- *Breaking Ties with Former Faction Leaders:* On average, more than 75% of the sample population reported that they never go to their former faction leaders for financial aid or assistance. Troubling, however, is the finding that 22% of the DDRR program completers sustain routine ties compared against the sample’s population average of 14%.
- *Arms Presence:* Only 2.2% of the respondents believed that small arms were a problem in their respective communities today with the conclusion of the Disarmament and Demobilization phase. The strength of this finding should not be understated as it has also been corroborated with a finding from a parallel survey of the country’s non-combatants taken from the same communities which indicated that only 2.5% believed that small arms were a problem.⁹

MID-POINT DDRR IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Registered Ex-combatants yet to receive Training Benefits

There is a major risk of leaving behind a very vulnerable grouping of NCDDRR registered ex-combatants – those who have disarmed and demobilized but have yet to receive training. This category of former fighters is the least educated, most agriculturally oriented, and poorest of the four classes under investigation. Most importantly, they have been shown to be the least reintegrated of all categories under investigation.

- International intervention should ensure the continuity of the DDRR program and follow through with delivery of training benefits to those former fighters who are still waiting.
- Education, locality and personal resources will be a barrier for this category of former fighters so specially designed reintegration approaches will be necessary to ensure the dissemination of information that is targeted to achieve maximum participation.

Non-NCDDRR registered Ex-combatants

The survey found a non-participation rate of 12% which was nearly identical to the finding in the Sierra Leone case (13%).¹⁰ The significance of the convergence between the two country cases is quite important to policy makers in itself as it may now be able to be utilized as a planning factor for future cases. Non-participation is really a non-measurable action, but convergence should now enable a bit more confidence in the planning stages.

- International organizations, agencies, and academic institutions should further investigate the profile of the non-participant in order to better understand the nuances of attracting these types of fighters into disarming and registering.
- The current DDRR mission in Liberia should investigate the feasibility of scaled down incentive packages focused on inclusion to entice the remaining “hard core” fighters into formally registering and to prevent further separation from society.

Ex-combatants who have Completed a Course of Reintegration Training

While this group was found to be the most capable of reintegrating back into their respective communities, the international community must not forget them. Many of the former fighters are moving on economically, but some are still having a hard time reintegrating socially within their respective communities. The low self-reported acceptance rates, lack of faith in the communities’ judges of conflict resolution, and large proportion of these former combatants spending their free time on their own indicates that much more progress is needed.

- Ensure that a “tracer” mechanism is in place (and working) for the reintegration training graduates. This mechanism should not only simply track graduates of the DDRR program, but also serve them as a resource for progressing in their respective careers.
- Investigate the barriers to reintegrating socially for those former fighters who have completed a course of reintegration training and are now “on their own.” Closely examine the reasons for spending time alone. Determine the feasibility of promoting programs and events that focus on socially reintegrating this group.

Ex-combatants Currently enrolled in a Course of Reintegration Training

The situation of this category of ex-combatants is only slightly better than those who chose not to participate in the DDRR. The category of combatants is challenged by their economic situation (42% live on less than US\$2/day) and their physical separation from their home communities (52%). The reason for the separation was unclear in the study.

- The international community should ensure the continuity of training currently being conducted and endeavor to make available the same reintegration transition assistance as was available to previous training graduates.
- Investigate the reasons for training in a non-home community location. Was it due to a non-availability of training, personal choice, or mechanism for community anonymity?

CONCLUSION

This study has uncovered solid empirical evidence that the DDRR program in Liberia has indeed enabled a much better life for those ex-combatants who have completed their program of training when compared to those former fighters who chose not to register and to reintegrate on their own. In almost every sub-facet of the dimensions of reintegration (social, economic, and political), the DDRR program completers were decisively more advanced in their efforts to reintegrate than those combatants that chose self-reintegration or any other category for that matter.

There is strong evidence that indicates that the presence of small arms have ceased to be an immediate threat to the peace and stability of Liberian communities, but other sources of violent conflict are still very prevalent. The sorry plight of the sick and disabled is also in dire need of addressing. The socio-economic-political environment is in the process of healing itself in this post-conflict country, but a serious commitment on behalf of the international community is, obviously, still very much necessary to ensure a full recovery and to keep Liberia away from the edge of chaos.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since a baseline study had not been conducted and the DDRR program intervention was already in progress, a non-equivalent control group, posttest-only, quasi-experiment was considered the best available research design. The study also ran a parallel investigation with respect to the non-combatants within the same geographic sampling clusters. Implementation of the design was conducted in a blended approach that incorporated a quantitative interview employment alongside a qualitative participatory method – focus group discussion. The findings of this study are mainly derived from the ex-combatant interviews intakes, but utilize open-ended quotations obtained from the focus groups for amplification. The majority of the key findings from the non-combatant data set will be presented under a separate cover.

¹The representative sample is quantified using the 1 March 2006 NCDDRR status report of Liberian ex-combatants.

²This statistically significant finding ($p=0.015$), where p =significance, resulted from an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression of reintegration variables on categories of ex-combatants, controlling for social, economic and political characteristics.

³In a multivariate regression model, ex-coms who spent more time with family showed a 7% increase in achieving an overall better socio-economic situation when compared to those who spend their time by themselves ($p=0.031$).

⁴Currently registered and enrolled ex-combatants (9%), non-participants (12%).

⁵DDRR program completers reported unfair biases in their community conflict resolution mechanisms at a rate of 8% versus the sample population's average of 3% (1% for the sample of program non-participants).

⁶Unemployment rates for DDRR program completers (23%) and non-participants (29%).

⁷DDRR program completers indicated an employment status of employer or employee at a rate of 41% versus program non-participants who reported "formal" employment at a rate of 31%.

⁸($p=0.058$)

⁹A parallel investigation of community reintegration and reconciliation was conducted with a sample of 600 non-combatants from the same geographical clusters used in the ex-combatant survey. The findings of this investigation are forthcoming.

¹⁰A large-N study of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone was conducted by Humphreys and Weinstein during June-August 2003. The UNDP funded study in Liberia largely replicated the Sierra Leone study and found many similar areas where convergence is significant. The Sierra Leone report "What the Fighter's Say: A Survey of Ex-combatant's in Sierra Leone" can be found at URL:<<http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/SL.htm>>. The reference regarding the non-participation rate can be found on page 30.