

# Supporting Demobilization and reintegration through information and sensitization activities

*In Focus No. 4*

## Info-Sensi in Context



In the countries supported by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), “information and sensitization,” or, “info-sensi” activities play a key support function to the entire demobilization and reintegration (D&R) process, from inception, through implementation, to completion.

“Info-sensi activities play a pivotal role in informing the public and

beneficiaries of the full range of demobilization and reintegration program components and activities,” explains Prosper Ruvusha, the Sensitization Officer of the Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Program. “As they inform, they endeavor to reinforce confidence in a program and send out practical and positive messages that can counter negative propaganda.”

At the beginning of a demobilization and reintegration program, info-sensi activities are used to lay the groundwork for program implementation. National programs disseminate information through appropriate mediums to ensure that all stakeholders have accurate information about the program and how it will relate to them, and to counteract any potential concerns or frustrations.

Combatants and their dependents receive messages about how the program will work and what they can expect in terms of support. Correct information also prevents unrealistic expectations among beneficiaries that could otherwise result in frustration and even violence later on. Communities receiving returning ex-combatants are also targeted by activities that address their questions, concerns or fears. Other initiatives seek to explain to the larger public the importance of the national demobilization and reintegration process, often stressing that it is not a means to reward violence, but rather to return to peace.

## Info-Sensi Activities Across the MDRP

In the Republic of Congo (RoC), an information and sensitization strategy has been underway to support a program providing reintegration benefits to ex-combatants. Every component of the national program has been planned with an associated info-sensi effort.

The Government of the RoC first launched a campaign of conferences and debates to inform the entire population – from the parliament down to the village level – about what to expect from the program.

Committees have also been created in the eight departments affected by the national program. These are continuing to ensure that correct information about the reintegration is disseminated, and also are tasked to help resolve any tensions that may arise during implementation.

In Rwanda, the Program for Demobilization and Reintegration faces a more complex situation. The program certainly engages in basic information dissemination activities. However, in addition, it has launched a new communications strategy that targets members of Rwandan armed groups (AGs) that fled Rwanda in 1994 at the end of the genocide and are residing in other countries. The goal is to convince these groups to give up armed struggle and return home.



Sensitization activities in Ewo province: a woman speaks her mind

In particular, there are an estimated 8,000 of Rwandans in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), along with approximately 25,000 dependents (and a disputed number of non-combatant refugees). The presence of these Rwandan “combatants on foreign soil,” as they are called, constitutes a threat to national and regional security, and hinders peace and reconciliation efforts in Rwanda and beyond. Both the Rwandan and DRC governments wish these individuals to repatriate. However, until now, only 5,857 have done so.

This low rate of return is the result of several factors. The large majority of younger combatants have indicated that they would like to demobilize and return to Rwanda. However, many hesitate. They say they have no information about their families, and fear for their personal and material security if they go home. They also fear prosecution for genocide crimes by traditional Rwandan Gacaca courts, unaware that those under 25 years of age are not under its jurisdiction. There are also many reports that AG commanders prevent combatants from leaving armed groups through a combination of misinformation, threats and fear tactics. Some apprehended or would-be “deserters” have even been killed as object lessons, or in the name of “justice.”

The new Rwandan communication strategy therefore aims to increase the rate of repatriation. It aims to get the message out to Rwandan combatants in the DRC that Rwanda is safe, address

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fears about rejoining civilian life, and give accurate information about the Rwandan demobilization and reintegration process. The most trusted information sources cited by Rwandan COFS were family members, former fellow combatants, international radio, religious figures and international organizations. The Rwandan info-sensi strategy therefore seeks to transmit consistent information through all these personal, social and political channels. In parallel, “messenger” groups must themselves be educated about their key role in repatriation and peace efforts, and be encouraged to participate in cross-border info-sensi activities.

Currently in Rwanda, there is a weekly radio program 'Isange Mubanyu' (“Return freely among your people”), as well as a radio drama 'Habura iki' (“What’s keeping you from returning?”). Other broadcasts feature testimonies of ex-armed group members describing the real situation in Rwanda, and their successes in civilian life. Meetings have also been held with ex-combatants and their dependents, encouraging them to send messages to those still in the DRC asking them to come home. The Rwandan sensitization office is also now producing a repatriation guide, and preparing distribution of tapes and films for sensitization activities in the DRC itself. Consultants are also working on complementary print tools, such as radio magazines.



Sensitization activities in Ewo province:  
a village elder gives his opinion

The Rwandan Program developed the communications strategy along with the United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC), which works to ensure support for the strategy from the DRC side.

“There is remarkable progress in the implementation of the Rwanda Communication Strategy,” says John Rusimbi, Information and Public Relations Officer for the Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Program. “And Rwandan combatants on foreign soil are expected to begin returning in greater numbers.”

Uganda is another MDRP country where info-sensi plays a major role. There is no national demobilization and reintegration program for the regular army, but rather an Amnesty Act, under which any rebel or rebel collaborator can renounce rebellion, receive official government amnesty and go home. The Amnesty Commission, with support of the MDRP, guides this process, fosters reconciliation between reporters and the community and assists in resettlement and reintegration of amnesty recipients, known as “reporters.”

Through its six regional offices, the Commission works to explain the Amnesty Act to the general public, and to inform those contemplating the Amnesty process about what to expect. Radio is a major medium of communication, as are print and regional sensitization meetings.



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One of the largest challenges is to transmit messages to active combatants of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and of the Allied Democratic Front (ADF). During one visit to the Amnesty Commission, Commissioners reiterated that the essential message they wanted to send to these combatants was: "We forgive you. Come home." However, rebel leaders often try to prevent their followers from receiving information that would encourage combatants to leave the group. Geography is also an issue. Northern Uganda in particular is a large area with little means of transportation, let alone communications infrastructure through which to send mass messages.



Ex-combatants in an info-sensi session in Rwanda about demobilization and reintegration.

Ugandan info-sensi activities can also be a delicate issue because of the ongoing peace talks between the Government and the LRA. In the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed last year, both parties agreed to not engage in any propaganda activities. Because of this, Moses Draku, Communications Officer at the Commission, explains that, "The Amnesty Commission needs to be very careful. Some LRA leaders might misunderstand our ongoing information-sensitization activities, and see them as tactics to sap the LRA of force strength and change the balance of power during negotiations. Suspicion and mistrust under the current circumstances can make dissemination of even legitimate messages difficult."

Information and sensitization have nevertheless helped making the Amnesty Act effective. Since 2000, 22,000 combatants have embraced amnesty. Now the Amnesty Commission is working increasingly on using a mixture of formal and informal channels for information dissemination – it is holding workshops with communities, including potential message multipliers, such as family members, who can pass information about the Amnesty Act to those still fighting.

Says Draku of his information and sensitization work, "Conflict resolution is not an easy matter. But one thing is certain and it is that, all over the world, people now want to solve conflicts through peaceful negotiation. A peaceful resettlement brings reconciliation and reconciliation brings lasting peace. I am happy to have been able to contribute towards this."

- Sincere thanks to: John Rusimbi, RDRP Information and Public Relations Officer, Prosper Ruvusha, RDRP Sensitization Officer, and Moses Draku, Communications Officer of the Ugandan Amnesty Commission, for their assistance in writing this article.

*For more information on MDRP, please visit [www.mdrp.org](http://www.mdrp.org) or contact Bruno Donat, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at [info@mdrp.org](mailto:info@mdrp.org).*