

Eastern DRC: What is happening? An Interview with Phil Maughan

N&N no. 2 – January 14, 2009



Phil Maughan - MDRP consultant

Phil Maughan, an MDRP consultant who specializes in social development in post-conflict settings, recently carried out a mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo to follow up on the current situation in the east. Phil traveled to both Kinshasa and Goma between December 3 and 19, 2008 and presented his findings and impressions in an interview with Chantal Rigaud, Communications Associate in the Secretariat.

MDRP Secretariat

Phil, what was the primary objective of your mission in the DRC?

Phil Maughan

Most people know there has been an upsurge in fighting in eastern Congo that has had a number of effects both on humanitarian and development programs, and notably on issues concerning armed groups. As a result the MDRP Secretariat was interested in having an idea of the latest situation from a broad perspective, an outside view on the issues and on how one could go forward in the current context. In addition I also looked at the current humanitarian situation, and overall how the

situation in the east impacted other Bank-funded programs.

MDRP Secretariat

Were you able to travel to Goma?

Phil Maughan

Yes, I was. While the peace negotiations are taking place in Nairobi, there is a cease-fire. There were some ongoing skirmishes but it was certainly safe to go to Goma and even to travel to certain parts around Goma, so that was very positive.

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We hear many news reports about the

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humanitarian crisis due to the insurgent fighting affecting civilian populations in a very tragic way. There are a lot of displaced people in the East. What is your assessment after having been to Goma?

Phil Maughan

My background is in humanitarian work. I saw a lot of crises over the last 15/20 years and this one was bad but certainly not the

worst. As I said, the fighting had stopped and this has enabled the humanitarian agencies to gain access to the populations and for some of the populations to actually return home. The situation is very tense. Civilians have been killed and there has been many human rights abuses. But we are not seeing a situation of mass starvation, or of systematic killings. So I would say that the situation is bad but not the worst I have seen. There was seemingly sufficient capacity in terms of humanitarian agencies on the ground and it would appear sufficient funds in the immediate to cover the essential needs of the populations. But things could, I'm afraid, get worse again.

MDRP Secretariat

If we now consider the specific Demobilization and Reintegration project (PNDDR) that the World Bank and the African Development Bank are funding, how has the crisis affected the implementation of the project?

Phil Maughan

As you know, demobilization and reintegration activities have been suspended for some time. The project has now just resumed. There are two essential parts to the program: one is demobilization of combatants,

and the other one is reintegration of ex-combatants who had previously been demobilized and are still waiting to be included in reintegration programs. As far as the impact of the conflict in the east on this

program, reintegration projects currently underway are not affected at this stage as they are not operational in the conflict zone. There is a certain controversy on what can

be done in terms of demobilization in the east. This is an issue that was hotly debated while I was there and one that the Bank and the MDRP continue to look at.

MDRP Secretariat

To give us a bit of background on the framework for the PNDDR, can you describe what processes have been in place in terms of peace building in the DRC, and what agreements are helping implement DDR programs?

Phil Maughan

The PNDDR is the national DDR program, which was executing an agreed program, but at a certain stage the project did not have enough resources to complete its objectives. While the project was sourcing new financing the situation in the east changed. In the absence of the PNDDR and lack of clarity on the composition of the armed groups to be demobilized other initiatives were started as a result of the Goma peace accord and subsequent Amani process. Unfortunately, these new initiatives were not always coherent with the principles of the PNDDR. So what we've had in the past few months is a certain

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amount of confusion and incoherence between these different initiatives. As the mission progressed, it was evident that people were becoming aware of this and there was a desire to sit around the table to discuss and iron out the problems and the incoherencies between the different programs.

MDRP Secretariat

The current situation in the east is making it difficult to resume demobilization activities. What other key issues could you identify in moving the process further?

Phil Maughan

As a rule, DDR programs are carried out after a peace process has been concluded. So in theory, if you apply this rule in DRC, there should be nothing happening in the east right now. The situation in Congo is actually quite unique. There are a number of areas on the fringes of the main conflict where there is a consensus that certain DDR activities could go forward and could assist in helping bringing back the peace that everybody wants. There are apparently a small number of groups that would like to be demobilized but cannot at this stage until there is clarity about their eligibility and that the PNDDR has received the necessary clearance from the *Etat Major*/Ministry of Defense to proceed with demobilization.

Among the armed groups there are many who claim to be combatants but are actually not eligible for the demobilization or army integration process. MONUC and various government bodies are looking at ways in which these groups can be dealt with outside

“There is consensus that certain DDR activities could go forward.”

“Reintegration projects currently under way are not affected by the crisis.”

of the PNDDR program. It’s not an easy task because obviously there needs to be clear criteria to define these groups, their disarmament and reintegration. ...At the moment they have come up with a name “the ineligibles”. In other words, these are people that are not eligible for the DDR program but somehow have a potential nuisance factor and need to be neutralized. The term itself is confusing because being non-eligible for DDR implies a group that includes the whole rest of the population, which is clearly not practical. But eventually I think we will see a set up whereby those eligible

from the armed groups and the army will go through a formal demobilization process with the PNDDR and a second group of people , mainly local militia type, that are incorporated into community programs not financed by the PNDDR.

MDRP Secretariat

The MDRP was founded as a regional program gathering the knowledge and expertise of a variety of actors. Where you able to meet with other partners in the region, and is there a consensus on the process to move forward on DDR?

Phil Maughan

I was able to meet with donors, UN agencies and others working on the national program.

I think everybody is in agreement that we do need to achieve a new consensus on the issue of demobilization and reintegration, in the light of the situation in the east, which one must remember is different than the situation four/five years ago when the

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program was conceived.. There are still differences between certain parties, even if they tend to be more of emphasis than opinion.

On the side of the government, there is also a dilemma. The government is at war. During a war you often need to recruit rather than demobilize. It is fairly obvious that recruitment is the priority for the government at the moment, and not demobilization.

With respect to the international community and the MDRP, I would say that the MDRP team has learnt a great deal and achieved an enormous amount of experience over the past several years. it would be a shame, as we reach what we all hope will be an end game, that we lose all that knowledge and experience. I would even say and stress that with the issue of the FDLR (the former Rwanda army/the interhawame group) and now with the LRA, the regional aspect is more crucial than ever. We will need to maintain a regional dimension to solve these issues. As such I think an MDRP type structure is more necessary than ever.

MDRP Secretariat

We have discussed the PNDDR, which is the national program. There is also an emergency trust fund for the east, currently being funded by the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium, and there is also interest from other donors. I assume that its activities are also on hold for the time being. Is that correct?

Phil Maughan

No, actually the money is going toward additional reintegration for people who have been demobilized and still need to receive their reintegration package.

Certain contracts have been signed, and activities are starting. One must remember that the fighting is localized to two territories of one province. Activities are progressing in and around other parts of the east.

There are one or two issues to bear in mind when considering this program. The first is that it's an Emergency fund set up to provide reintegration assistance which is implemented through direct contracting of organizations (special projects). It's not set up

to fund the government, so it wouldn't be able to fund the PNDDR directly but must work in harmony with the PNDDR. We have to be careful about what it funds in order to avoid a coordination problem. The other issue is that it's legally difficult to deal with demobilization as opposed to re-integration with special projects. So at the moment it has certain inbuilt limitations. However the donors may choose revise the scope of the trust fund as the situation on the ground changes.

MDRP Secretariat

Phil, you mentioned the current peace negotiations which are taking place in Nairobi. I think there has been a request for the MDRP as a neutral body to support the process by providing some training in DDR. What can you tell us about this?

Phil Maughan

Actually, it's not just the mediation and facilitation teams that might need support but also a number of other actors in the east that need training on DDR. To go back to the original question, yes the idea would be to provide the negotiation teams in Nairobi with technical support on DDR. Often the issue of DDR comes up in the negotiations, and sometimes the negotiators are not aware of the issues and the potential pitfalls. They sign into

“The regional aspect of MDRP is now more crucial than ever.”

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agreements things that are not feasible or that are extremely costly to implement.

So the idea would be to provide the mediators with a two-phase approach: a first phase might be a situation analysis, giving people the background on what has been happening on DDR in Congo and the current instruments at disposal. The second phase would be a more active participation over a series of weeks or months, during the negotiating process. The consensus from most of the states funding the MDRP was that this would be a good idea but the obvious question was when would we do it and who would do it. But we need to get an official request from the mediation team for such assistance and then we would discuss it with the MDRP Secretariat and donors.

MDRP Secretariat

You mention just now the need to do a situation analysis. Further information about what is going on in the east and who the groups at play are is critical. The MDRP Secretariat is also trying to gather that information with some of its consultants on the ground. Hopefully we'll have some sort of

report by the end of January or maybe early February.

Phil Maughan

That's key. We really need more information

on the groups - who are the real combatants? How many are they? Where are they? And what are their aspirations? Consultants are currently carrying out this analysis and we are hoping to have the preliminary findings soon. This will give all the actors better information for realistic program planning and interventions. For the

PNDDR it will of course limit numbers and thus keep the program more focused and more effective.

MDRP Secretariat

Thank you - Would you like to share any other thoughts?

Phil Maughan

I wish the people in Nairobi well, but there are very deep ingrained issues that may take some time to resolve. The important thing I've learned is to be patient. DDR has its moment. It's important to be well prepared and to have good information, but it's also important to exercise a certain degree of patience.



For more information on MDRP, please visit www.mdrp.org or contact Chantal Rigaud, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at info@mdrp.org.