

Interview with Dingamadji Madjior Solness: MDRP Senior DDR Specialist in Burundi

N&N no. 16 – August 10, 2006



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in Burundi

Can you describe MDRP's role and the role of the National Commission for Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration (CNDRR)?

MDRP assists national governments in formulating their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) policies. It also supports the implementation of national DDR programs and special projects through supervision missions, and facilitates exchange among the different countries, as well as among governments and MDRP partners.

In turn, national commissions, along with their implementing partners, must ensure implementation of national programs, manage program funds, and be responsible for regular follow-up. The commissions must also assure there is an exchange of information among the diverse partnership of MDRP and program partners at the local level.

And your role?

My role at MDRP has two aspects. As the MDRP representative in Burundi, and, as such, focal point for the partners, my role is to provide technical support to the CNDRR and the government, to ensure the coordination of follow-up and exchange among MDRP partners, and, finally, to participate in international coordination of DDR-related activities.

As an MDRP staff member, my role is also to actively contribute to the running of the program and to its impact as a model program for Africa, to make available to MDRP my technical abilities and my experience in DDR and security sector reform (SSR), and to learn from others and share my own skills.

What is the importance of DDR?

Given the security dimension of DDR activities and the socio-economic dimension of reintegration efforts, DDR is an excellent tool for managing conflict in countries prey to internal and external wars. Nevertheless, it's important to point out that DDR alone is not enough to fully resolve the problems associated with the post-conflict context. The challenges are numerous and inter-connected, notably with SSR and the fight against poverty. DDR is a necessary precondition for the restoration of peace and security, which are themselves necessary conditions for sustainable growth.

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In the specific context of Burundi and the sub-region, demobilization and reintegration are, first and foremost, initiatives that can foster peace and stability. These are complementary to regional initiatives and those of the international community. In general, the program is important because of its impact on the fight against poverty, and on the consolidation of peace and the restoring of confidence between the government and its people. Progress in these areas will free up national resources that can be invested in the socio-economic sectors, attract foreign capital and reinforce the development capacities of communities.

How and why did Burundi start its DDR program ?

The background to Burundi's D&R program goes back to 2000, when there were negotiations underway among the various actors in the Burundi conflict – which had started in 1998 – that resulted in different peace accords, including, notably: the Arusha Accords in Tanzania in 2000, the cease-fire agreements signed with most of the *Partis et mouvements politiques armés* [PMPA: Armed Political Parties and Movements] in October 2003, and eventually also with the *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie* (CNDD - FDD: National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy) in November. At that time, the last rebel movement, Agathon Rwasas's *Forces nationales de liberation-Parti pour la liberation du peuple Hutu* [FNL-PALIPEHUTU: National Liberation Forces -Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People], was mostly outside of the peace negotiations. The movement finally signed a cease-fire accord with the democratically elected government.

The ultimate goal of all these accords was to put an end to a widespread internal conflict that had overtaken the country since October 1972. Among other conditions, the accords required that a new national army be formed – the *Forces des défenses nationales* [FDN: the National Defense Forces] – and a new police force. Also stipulated: the demobilization of those not eligible to join these new forces, and the disarmament and demobilization of the *Gardiens de la Paix* [Guardians of the Peace]. As a result, in 2003, the national government erected the CNDDR, which is responsible for implementing Burundi's DDR program. This program was officially launched on December 2, 2004.

How did you begin working in the DDR field?

I began in 1991, after the first rebellion, led by Idriss Deby Itno, the current President of Chad. At that time I was *Chef d'Etat major de l'Armée de terre*, [Chief of Staff for the Army], and then *Chef d'Etat major général Adjoint* [similar to a Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs] for the Tchadian National Army (ANT). The government had just made me president of the national commission in charge of forming the new national army. Afterwards, I was given the responsibility of developing the second national DDR program. Implementation of this program began in 1996 through the National Commission for DDR, of which I was director of operations, and then coordinator. In June 2004, I started in what is my current position as MDRP representative in Burundi. I also have done consulting missions for the World Bank concerning DDR, and serving as a facilitator/trainer.

What is a normal day like for you?

I often attend meetings: meetings with the MDRP Secretariat and its partners, meetings and seminars concerning DDR issues, and meetings with the MDRP Secretariat management team to evaluate progress. These are extremely necessary in order to maintain a satisfactory level of collaboration and cooperation, and to ensure that the program runs smoothly. Sometimes I visit the field to make sure that activities are going well, and go on supervision and program evaluation missions.

What part of your work do you find the most satisfying?

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What I find the most satisfying in my work, both on the local level and with MDRP, is the opportunity for interaction and collaboration with project partners. I also have the chance to learn from others and gain field experience, both of which will allow me to contribute further to the processes of peace and socio-economic development. I have a growing and lasting desire to serve peace and development on the one hand, and, on the other, in doing this work, to be useful to this country whose destiny I share.

What are the biggest challenges for you, for MDRP and for the Commission?

There are definitely numerous challenges, but they are unique to each actor. For the Commission, the challenge is to attain the general objective of the national program – to take part in restoring peace in Burundi and in fighting poverty, both through D&R and through the standing up of the new defense and security forces, which are responsible for ensuring the security of the country, its citizens and its resources.

The MDRP needs to continue to assist national programs and special projects; in general, it should expand its activities in analysis, research, and experience sharing.

My personal challenge is to help the national program and the Commission be fully successful by providing effective technical assistance, and thus also contribute to the success of MDRP and its partners.

Have MDRP and the Commission made progress?

Yes, without a doubt the Commission and MDRP have made progress in many areas. The demobilization process, for example, has gone off without any major problems, and so far demobilized a total of 20,000 combatants – children and adults – out of the 55,000 targeted. We've also succeeded in ensuring that ex-combatants receive their transition allowance regularly. After a tumultuous start, a good number of militia members have been disarmed and demobilized. However, while worthy of praise, this progress was initially impaired by the late start of reintegration operations to return ex-combatants to civilian life.



What are your hopes for Burundi's future?

I can sum up my hopes for the future of Burundi and the program very simply: the total and permanent return of peace and the restoration of an atmosphere of security. I also hope for the creation of a real democracy, built upon a reconciliation of the heart among the brothers and sisters of Burundi – without which no development in the future is possible. Lastly, I wish Burundi full success in reintegrating ex-combatants, so as to truly contribute to the fight against poverty, and to peace in this country so damaged by 12 years of fratricidal war.

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