

MDRP launches Learning for Equality, Access and Peace Program

N&N no. 16 – December 4, 2007

The MDRP Secretariat has launched its new Learning for Equality, Access and Peace (LEAP) Program to strengthen the impact of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs from a gender perspective.



MDRP meeting on gender with NGOs

LEAP is envisioned as a flexible approach that can be integrated into a program regardless of its stage or the prevalence of gender experience, awareness or related activities found at the national or local level.

The initiative will explore new approaches to gender in demobilization and reintegration through a range of activities.

At the operational level, LEAP will explore how to better address the issues of gender equality and sexual violence in ongoing and planned DDR projects. To that end, technical assistance will be provided to national programs and special projects to implement new gender-responsive initiatives and to incorporate gender-aware practices into ongoing activities. Woman and girl ex-combatants and ex-combatant families will receive particular attention.

“Gender has already been integrated into MDRP DDR program planning at the concrete technical levels – demobilization camps provide separate spaces for women, for example, and assistance packages often account for different gender needs,” says Abderrahim Fraiji, Senior Social Development Specialist in Kinshasa. “The LEAP program will now help us see what further gender considerations can be operationalized at this point in our programming, particularly as regards reintegration activities.”

The program will also design, implement and evaluate community-level pilot projects that aim to address gender relations and associated gender expectations associated with societal norms that arise within the DDR context.

One pilot, for example, will aim to include the whole family in reintegration activities rather than the individual ex-combatant. Another will address stigmatization and social exclusion of female ex-combatants and strengthen their economic reintegration, paying special attention to vulnerable groups such as teenage mothers and female heads of household.

The overall goal of these efforts is to increase the sustainability of reintegration training and support, extend their benefits to the whole family, and improve overall gender equity and relations within ex-combatant households.

News & Noteworthy

At the same time, the LEAP program will also seek to further investigate various aspects of gender and DDR and disseminate knowledge to practitioners and other colleagues.

One topic already identified for study is that of women associated with fighting forces as wives, cooks, spies, porters, sexual slaves and in other non-combatant roles.

Since these women are not generally included on official combatant lists drawn up by armed force commanders, they are not eligible for conventional DDR programs. LEAP would therefore aim to document what activities have been implemented to help this population, what agencies are carrying out these activities, and what approaches have been successful. This research would culminate in a position paper recommending means to provide better and more consistent support

The links among masculinity, power and violence will be another area for careful investigation, focusing on the impact that the role of masculinity in DDR operations has on overall maintenance of peace and security. The LEAP program will gather best practices from programs in Sub-Saharan African countries that have successfully engaged boys and men on issues of gender equality, gender-based oppression and social expectations. It will also support a study on persistent unemployment, young men, masculinity and links to conflict and violence in urban areas.



Female Combatants in the Great Lakes Region

Any findings LEAP generates will be disseminated through publications and public events, with a particular emphasis on communicating with organizations working with war-affected groups and with whom coordination with MDRP could be strengthened.

Among MDRP donors, the Danish government is particularly supportive of the LEAP initiative given the strong emphasis their foreign aid program places on gender.

"Armed conflict affects women and men in different ways, but conflict cannot be solved without the involvement of women," states Toni Michelsen, Chief Adviser of the Department for Africa in Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "They can act as soldiers and perpetrators of violence, but they often also play a positive role in resolution of conflict and the resources they possess are striking. They must be at the core of any peace-building or reconstruction efforts. LEAP will help fill the gap between knowledge and practice concerning the situation of women in conflict and post-conflict contexts."

MDRP Gender Specialist Pia Peeters concurs about LEAP's practical implications.

"If we extend the currently limited knowledge of how gender plays out in DDR, we can improve DDR programs now and in the future," she states. "We can ensure that both men's and women's needs are more fully taken into account, and pay increased attention to vulnerable sub-populations, such as female single headed households and teenage mothers. We can strengthen social and economic reintegration by including families in the ex-combatant reintegration process. On a larger level, we believe that this will contribute to the development of sustainable peace and development in post-conflict countries."

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