

MDRP hosts event about youth and DDR in Burundi

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To begin the year, the MDRP secretariat organized a discussion on Burundi's demobilization and reintegration process. Featuring Peter Uvin, Professor of International Humanitarian Studies & Director of the Institute for Human Security at the Fletcher School, the event highlighted the primary findings of a study on youth in Post-Conflict Burundi and Rwanda.

As part of a wider study partially sponsored by the MDRP and involving over four hundred Burundians from all walks of life, Prof. Uvin interviewed sixty-three ex-combatants in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the circumstances which brought them to take up arms, demobilize and return to their communities. "I asked them open-ended questions without using any of the development jargon. I wanted them to tell me what they wanted to tell me, and not simply what I wanted to hear."



Prof. Peter Uvin

Although the analytical process is still at an early stage, it has already produced some interesting findings. First, it became clear that the war in Burundi was a war fought with children. With the exception of the career soldiers and a few CNDD-FDD soldiers in Nyanza-Lac, all the people I interviewed, in all categories, for all armed groups, were minors when they were recruited, and many were very, very young, noted Uvin.

Not only were they young, but they came from all walks of life. "When I asked the question, to both ex-combatants and non-combatants, about what type of people joined rebellions or the army, the answer invariably was that all kinds of people did—young and old, poor and rich, married and unmarried, farmers, school teachers, chefs de colline, etc..."

When asked why they joined, ex-combatants offered different responses. Many, especially amongst those who joined late in the conflict, cited insecurity and anger as a driving force. "It is not ideology that drove them, but insecurity, fear, and anger at the killings of those close to them. They joined the war because there was a war—they did not create it, but reacted to it." Others mentioned ideology and their belief in the cause as well as financial needs as decisive factors. Surprisingly, only a small minority attributed their participation in the armed forces to kidnapping and other forms of forced recruitment.

When discussing their departure from the forces, two-thirds of the interviewees officially demobilized had done so voluntarily. The remaining third was generally let go as a result of age or injuries. Interestingly enough, noted Prof. Uvin, those officially demobilized and those that auto-demobilized left for pretty much the same reasons: they were tired, injured, felt like their task had been completed or simply felt angry at their commander or at the military system as a whole.

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A closer look at the demobilization and reintegration process itself also resulted in a number of interesting preliminary findings. The majority of ex-combatants interviewed mentioned being well treated by their neighbors and families and many of the initial worries about possible tensions between returnees and other community members have subsided with time.



World Bank audience

In addition, the common fear that targeted assistance to ex-combatants would generate jealousy seems to be poorly substantiated, at least in Burundi. “In our hundreds of conversations with non-combatants,” indicated Uvin, “the demobilized were never once brought up as an economic problem.”

The perception and success of the reinsertion and reintegration programs varied by regions and social environments. Nine out of the ten interviewed in the Ngozi province, for example, fell into the highest economic category of rural

life. “Many of these people seemed distinctly at ease with their lives, talking about dreams they had or investments they intended to make.”

The process seemed more complex amongst younger low ranking members of the armed groups located in the cities. According to Prof. Uvin’s early observations, “Many of the ordinary ex-combatants (things are different for officers) who return to the city have major costs of a non-productive nature right away, while at the same time having few ways of making money. They are from poor families in poor neighborhoods; they have less schooling than the already low average around them; they lost their networks which are so important to progress in the city. They are truly in a tough situation.”

Concluding his presentation, Prof. Uvin noted “Overall, I am struck by the few differences that exist between the demobilized soldiers and their peers. They largely have the same dreams, face the same constraints, and have the same attitudes towards life.”

Prof. Uvin’s findings are scheduled to be published later this year as part of the partnership’s efforts to increase the existing knowledge on DDR and work in post-conflict environments.

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