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WB, UNIFEM target female ex-soldiers

By Kasule R. Daniel

In its endeavour to rehabilitate ex-combatants of the numerous Great Lakes region irregular armies, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) plan to involve ex-female soldiers in the rehabilitation process.

This was discussed during a three-day consultative meeting under the theme "Taking a Gender Perspective to strengthen the Multi-Country Demobilization Programme (MDRP) in the greater Great Lakes Region", held in Kigali to address the way forward for the gender perspectives to strengthen demobilization and reintegration programmes.

In her opening speech the World Bank Programme Manager for the World Bank's MDRP Secretariat, Maria Correia stressed the importance of the meeting saying that "This workshop is a unique event, not only for the World Bank, the MDRP Secretariat and national programmes represented here today, but also for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) community as a whole."

"MDRP strives to address gender issues that affect both male and female ex-combatants and their dependants throughout the greater Great Lakes region. Its efforts to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into Programme-supported activities include desk reviews at the Secretariat level, as well as country-level assessments," Correia added.

In his speech delivered by the UNIFEM Regional Programme Director for Central Africa, Josephine Odera, the UNIFEM Executive Director Noeleen Heyzer, noted that, "Peace in the Great Lakes Region, as elsewhere, hinges on transforming soldiers into citizens and the politics of war into the politics of democratic governance. Peace and democracy hinges on the equitable participation of women, men, boys and girls in all reconstruction processes, including demobilization and reintegration. The full participation of women in such processes requires that we vigilantly recognize and support women's leadership and their contributions to peace in their communities." Noeleen's statement read in part.

Women ex-combatants from inside and outside the region shared their experiences of demobilization and reintegration and made recommendations on how to improve existing programmes.

Lieutenant Chantal CNDD- Alliance des Femmes (Burundi) commented, "I was happy to meet with women ex-combatants from other countries. I was relieved to see that my problems and aspirations are not peculiar to me."

Among the participants of the workshop were delegations from all seven MDRP target countries of Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, representatives from women's NGOs in the region, ex-female combatants, gender and representatives from UNICEF, UNDP, ONUB, MONUC, UNIFEM and the MDRP Secretariat.