



Promoting Peace in Africa

Thanks to Jerry Floyd for sharing this information!

"Reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life is a high risk exercise", Ingo Wiederhofer told three dozen staff during a lecture and film event cosponsored by ISG's World Bank Group Library and AFTCS on September 18, 2007.

Wiederhofer, who works in Africa Region's Post Conflict and Social Development Unit (AFTCS), introduced the compelling film, "Buying Time for Peace". After the film was shown Wiederhofer discussed it with the attendees.

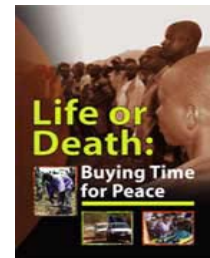
The film describes work being done by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), which has helped demobilize nearly 300,000 combatants in seven Great Lakes region countries in central Africa, including Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.

About 175,000 of these former soldiers have been assisted by the program, which began in 2002 and is financed by the World Bank and 13 donor countries.

"We are tired of war," one of the ex-combatans says during the film. The film's participants relate how they were abducted from the villages and forced to serve rebel armies. A woman recalls being forced to beat a fellow captive to death, as a way of reminding her what would happen to her if she tried to flee.

As the film was shown, staff sat transfixed by the horrifying accounts of conflict's impact on innocent civilians and the social fabric of African countries.

More positively, the film depicts how former soldiers are given grants and learn vocational skills that can help them reintegrate into civil society and thereby contribute to economic and social stability in the seven affected countries.



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During the informative question and answer session, Wiederhofer answered questions and responded to comments from those who watched the film.



The program's sustainability, long term vocational training, and mental and physical health care for ex-combatants were a few of the points raised during this discussion.



"The MDRP demonstrates how development institutions such as The World Bank can play an important role in post-conflict situations." said Eleanor D. Thompson, a visitor who is researching rehabilitation and reintegration for former child soldiers.

"However, many questions remain about MDRP sustainability," Thompson noted.

"These programs can only work when basic security and a social fabric is in place," Wiederhofer said.

"Otherwise, former combatants may be re-recruited. It's the people who reintegrate themselves. Our program can't do this for them."

Event photos by Michael Kingsberry, ISGVV

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