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Kurzbeiträge / Reports

Friederike Fuhlrott

Burundi after the civil war: demobilising and reintegrating ex-combatants

After the signing of a peace accord it is the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the former fighting groups that is one of the first steps towards a conflict transformation process (Kingma 2000). In most cases, some of those who fought are, for the time being, integrated into the subsequently downsized national army. Those who remain, often the majority, are demobilised and reintegrated into civilian life. But how does this process take place on site? What are the procedures involved and what are the consequences of living together in the receiving communities? In this article, based on a PhD thesis in progress, the question of reintegrating ex-combatants after the civil war in Burundi will be discussed. At the beginning of 2006, the four months of field research were structured around the following guiding questions: How are ex-combatants reintegrated into their communities in Burundi and which factors influence this reintegration? The article will show that up to now reintegration has gone relatively well on the social level, but has not yet started on the economic level.

Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration

Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) are part of the general framework of peacebuilding. In order to classify the problem in the larger context of peace consolidating measures after the settlement of violent conflicts, it is common to view DDR from a global perspective.

In general, DDR is a highly valued peacebuilding measure during the immediate post-conflict phase. After the settlement of a violent conflict, it is seen as an important activity to, first of all, disarm all former fighters in order to ensure a safe environment during the (re)establishment of official structures in the government, in the military, and in the police. As such, DDR is, as a standard practice, part of the broader concept of security sector reform. The part of disarmament is rather a technical issue, which is predominantly executed by peace operations in the country, typically by peace-keeping troops in cooperation with the national government and military.

Often, the collection of arms not only targets ex-combatants but also civilians. Generally, the conditions of DDR are negotiated in advance and recorded in the formal peace agreement. The process of disarmament is separated from the demobilisation and reintegration process in planning and execution.

Regarding demobilisation and reintegration activities, they are non-military and should mark the transition from being a soldier to becoming a civilian. Demobilisation and reintegration have an impact on and, at the same time, are influenced by the economic, social, and political dimension of peacebuilding. In addition, they have an influence on the future development of those areas in the country or region concerned. In spite of the importance of successful demobilisation and reintegration for a peaceful development, it should be noted that the ex-combatants are usually not the largest group to be reintegrated after a war because returning refugees and internally displaced persons often outnumber the group of ex-combatants. This complicates the post-war situation because all returning groups compete for generally scarce resources and opportunities, getting land to cultivate, public support from the government or international organisations, and finding jobs, amongst other things. The balancing act of DDR is that on the one hand, the support of ex-combatants must not give the impression that they are being rewarded for fighting, killing, and other atrocities they committed. On the other hand, ex-combatants should be sufficiently reintegrated both socially and economically, in order to avoid that they pick up arms again.

The most pressing problems or structural circumstances that hamper reintegration are the fact that post-conflict countries are usually very poor with immature economic structures and thus there is an absence of jobs to absorb this new labour force (Date-Bah 2003). From the political point of view, the government is highly unstable and political institutions are not fully developed. In addition, a demilitarisation of politics has not yet taken place. Generally, a culture of violence prevails also on the social level. This entails the risk of a relapse into violence, especially when it is known from experience that using arms and being a fighter earns a living and being a civilian does not.

From a political and economic point of view, it is one of the aims of DDR that the government saves money in the military budget, which it should then invest in the social and economic development of the country. However, as these programmes are very cost-intensive for the government, also in the long run, the so-called peace dividend is actually rather low. The aim of DDR in the short run is thus to provide a safe environment to stabilise a fragile peace after the end of violence, and in the long run to set the conditions for long-term sustainable peace and development (Kingma 2000).

The revealing question on DDR programmes is: What are the factors that influence reintegration in such a way that the target of living together

peacefully can be met? Since this aim is difficult to meet, the case of Burundi will provide a deeper insight into an ongoing process of demobilisation and reintegration.

Background to the conflict

Since independence in 1962, Burundi has gone through several periods of 'ethnicised' massacres. 85% of the population is generally regarded to consist of Hutu and 14% belong to the group of the Tutsi. However, the conflict was and is more about power than about ethnicity. The Tutsi minority had always been in power in Burundi, which was used and reinforced by the colonisers. As a result, ethnicity was politicised and violence repeatedly broke out along ethnic lines. In 1993, the civil war broke out after the first democratically elected Hutu president was assassinated. The predominantly Tutsi military fought against Hutu rebel groups, the largest of these groups is today the ruling party *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces de Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD) (Summit Oketch and Polzer 2002, African Union 2005, Brachet and Wolpe 2005).

Because the war was never officially declared, it is difficult to pinpoint its duration. In 2000 the *Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi* was signed and in 2002 the main rebel group, the CNDD-FDD, agreed to a cease-fire. In 2005 a new government was elected, with Pierre Nkurunziza from the CNDD-FDD as president. The last remaining rebel group, the *Forces Nationales de Libération* (FNL) signed a cease-fire agreement as late as September 2006. The war caused approximately 300,000 deaths and it is estimated that about 400,000 persons were internally displaced. 250,000 refugees went to camps in Tanzania and several thousand to Rwanda and to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Tanzania still hosts about 200,000 refugees who had already fled from an early outbreak of violence in 1972. Until the end of 2005, the UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of over 250,000 Burundian refugees, hence, about 200,000 were still living in Tanzania in 2006 (UNHCR 2006). According to the *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, the number of internally displaced persons in Burundi was about 117,000 in May 2005 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2006).

Demobilisation and reintegration in Burundi

As described for DDR in general, the situation of ex-combatants in Burundi is also related to the general socio-economic situation and to other groups in the country. In comparison to the figures of refugees and internally dis-

placed persons, the officially planned number of 55,000 ex-combatants participating in a reintegration scheme seems relatively small. Nevertheless, former fighters are a highly sensitive group and their successful reintegration is crucial to enduring peace in the country.

The main body responsible at the national level for demobilisation and reintegration activities is the Executive Secretariat of the *Commission Nationale Chargée de la Démobilisation, de la Réinsertion et de la Réintégration des Ex-Combattants* (CNDRR). Parallel to the principle of national ownership of the CNDRR, the most important international institution is the World Bank (WB), which is engaged through the *Multi-Country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme* (MDRP) of the wider Great Lakes Region (MDRP 2007). In Burundi the WB/MDRP, in cooperation with CNDRR, formulated the demobilisation and reintegration strategy for the country, namely the *National Programme*. Basically, CNDRR is responsible for organising and managing the execution of this and WB/MDRP provides financing, technical assistance, monitoring and controlling of the progress of the programme. As the CNDRR is located in the capital, provincial and local reintegration structures coordinate the activities in the countryside.

Official strategy

By implementing the articles of the Arusha agreement, the overall aim of the national reintegration programme (here: National Programme) is to consolidate peace, security, and national reconciliation in order to allow a sustainable economic and social development. Specific aims are to reduce the risk of ex-combatants' participating in armed actions, to reintegrate them into economic activities, and to satisfy social conditions in a context of conflict prevention. Furthermore, with their reintegration a contribution to national development and employment creation as well as to poverty reduction should be made (CNDRR 2005).

How does demobilisation and reintegration work in Burundi? If an ex-combatant does not want to join the newly established army, the *Force de Défense Nationale*, or the police, or has been rejected by these bodies, he or she returns to civilian life. The official procedure, starting with demobilisation and ending in reintegration, is technically clearly prescribed. The journey begins at a demobilisation centre, where the ex-combatant removes his or her uniform and – ideally – his or her combatant manners and attitudes. All ex-combatants are registered and ID cards are distributed. Organised in modules, ex-combatants are informed about programme benefits, including implementation arrangements, about how to behave as a civilian, and about civic duties and rights, including also women's rights. Another component of the demobilisation phase consists of HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation measures including medical screening and voluntary counselling and

testing. After approximately ten days in the demobilisation centre, the certified demobilised person receives a transitional subsistence allowance (approx. US-\$ 500) in instalments, which allows the payment of transport to the place where the ex-combatant wants to settle (normally his or her province of origin) and covers the basic needs over a period of nine months. The reinsertion period is ideally followed directly, at the latest three months later, by the reintegration measures. In order to facilitate the economic reintegration, the ex-combatant receives in this phase a benefit of the equivalent of approx. US-\$ 600 in-kind. During the stay at the demobilisation centre the ex-combatant will have planned a project in which he or she wants to invest this money. The US-\$ 600 are given in the form of, e.g., a cow for cattle-breeding, flour for a bakery, or items to start a retail trade.¹ These activities are accompanied by NGOs as executive partners on site and by the provincial office concerned.

By October 2006, 21,657 ex-combatants had been demobilised, of which 494 were women and 3,015 children. Of the demobilised adults, 5,412 had been reintegrated, meaning they had received all the intended support (MDRP 2007). Depending on when they were officially demobilised, at least the first group of people were or are without support for up to four months. The reason why the demobilised people had or have to wait for their support seems to be at least two-fold: Firstly, the World Bank and thus the MDRP administration is rather complicated and as a consequence was only adopted with delays by the Burundian government. Secondly, the CNDRR is technically overtasked by the requirements of the WB/MDRP as well as by the requirements of the ex-combatants. In addition, the executive partners on site are not capable of fulfilling their tasks adequately.

Who is an ex-combatant?

Not everybody who participated actively in the war is, however, defined as being an ex-combatant. In order to gain access to the demobilisation centre, to become a certified demobilised person, and thus to be entitled to the reinsertion and reintegration payments, the former fighter has to fulfil certain criteria. The identification and verification of combatant status is a difficult process and caused a delay in launching of the programme. General criteria are the following:

¹ 68 % of the Burundian population lives on less than one dollar a day (World Bank, 2006). Thus, although the financial and in-kind support seems to be high, this support will not lead to a long-term secured livelihood because of the generally very poor economic conditions and perspectives of the country.

- Submission of a specified ratio of arms and ammunition;
- Identification by the unit commander of his/ her force;
- Affiliation with a recognized armed entity that engaged in military fighting before the signing of the respective cease-fire agreement of that group;
- Passing a test of basic military knowledge and skills; and
- Burundian nationality (World Bank, 2004: 17).

This excludes, for example, not only ex-combatants who demobilised spontaneously before the signing of the cease-fire – i.e. deserters – but also militias. Although they fought and carried out other orders such as recruiting new blood or picking up dead or injured combatants from the battlefield, they do not have access to the benefits of the National Programme, but they receive a single allowance of approximately US-\$ 100. About 27,367 militia members have been demobilised, nearly all of whom have already received assistance (ONUB 2006). Furthermore, apart from the militia and those who demobilised spontaneously – after the government then in power appealed for them to surrender their arms – there are other groups who claim to have been officially demobilised. Those are, for example, reservists and men who did their military service during the war. They do not have any entitlement and their number is not known.

Influencing factors of reintegration

A preliminary analysis of the obtained data and information shows that the main factors that influence the reintegration either divide the ex-combatants from the rest of the community or merge the demobilised and the population into the receiving communities. Regarding both possibilities, the influence can be viewed from the perspective of the ex-combatants and from the *civilian* perspective. Of course, ex-combatants are now civilians too, but the term civilian is used here for those who did not take part in the fighting, in order to distinguish between ex-combatants and the rest of the non-fighting population.

Generally speaking, by May 2006 the reintegration process had proceeded relatively well on the social level, but had not yet started on the economic level. All ex-combatants interviewed had received their reinsertion funds, but most of them had not yet received the reintegration benefits, even though they had left the demobilisation centre more than a year before and consequently had been without any support for up to four months (official demobilisation started in December 2004).

For an effective demobilisation and reintegration process it is essential that unifying factors are enhanced, or at least not hindered, and divisive

factors are avoided as much as possible. The principal aim of reintegration is at least two-sided: on the one hand, a peaceful co-habitation in the local community is targeted, and on the other hand, new recruitment by rebel groups should be made impossible. For this purpose, not only a positive social reintegration but also a positive economic reintegration is crucial. However, it is often not possible to separate these two dimensions from each other in reality. Within both dimensions of reintegration, separating and divisive factors can be discovered.

Divisive and unifying factors

In Burundi, there is much evidence on the social level that a non-targeted approach increases the feeling of solidarity among the community and thus facilitates reintegration. All such activities and attitudes have a positive influence that ignore and negate differences between the group of ex-combatants and other groups. On the economic level the reaction by the local community is two-sided. On the one hand, from the security point of view, most community members are scared in case the ex-combatants no longer receive financial or in-kind transfers because 'they are used to using weapons' to get what they want by force. On the other hand, they feel unfairly treated because the ex-combatants receive more financial support than they do. In addition, they criticise the fact that the ex-combatants did not learn how to use their money successfully because they also spend it, sometimes predominantly, on alcohol and consumer goods. As the MDRP programme emphasises mainly personal monetary and in-kind reinsertion and reintegration support, the main interest in the programme seems to lie in economic assistance, and so the support of social, unifying, and non-targeted activities is neglected. Although it is problematic that the MDRP does not focus on these aspects, it has to be taken into account that technically it is a big challenge, especially to put them and economic support into practice, simultaneously.

Not having access to, for example, aid distribution lists, counteracts both the economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants. Some local authorities deny access to these lists because of the assistance the ex-combatants already receive; however, some of them are in need because they are just as poor as the others. Even so, it is not so much a question of which group is poorer but what the effect of a different treatment might be. It seems to be a mistake to judge, treat, and exclude ex-combatants as if they were a homogenous group, since this can create a negative counter-reaction from the demobilised as a group, which could discourage reintegration, and simplify recruitment and violent actions.

A possible risk on the social level is the fact that many of the internally displaced persons, some being ex-combatants, have not yet returned home.

They live in camp sites and often go to their hill² to farm, returning to the camp at night because they feel safer there. In addition, it was mentioned in the interviews with community members that those ex-combatants who do not return to the hills but prefer to stay in the provincial centres are mostly ex-army soldiers. Considering that internally displaced persons as well as ex-army soldiers are predominantly Tutsi, these two facts show tendencies of segregation, which is, however, denied in every interview. At present, this is not perceived to be a possible threat to reintegration or to the peace process as a whole, but it could become a major issue in the future.

A further threat to the peace process could be situated outside the target group of this research, namely, in the reaction of those former fighters who have no access to the official demobilisation programme. It is not possible to estimate the potential for unrest among this group but they, especially the ex-militias, have already demonstrated in the capital against being excluded from the programme. However, since they were seriously threatened with prison, they seem to be quiet for the moment. As already mentioned, not only the militias are outside the official demobilisation process, but also deserters, people who did their military service during the war, and reservists. The effects and the symbolic impact of choosing exclusively 'real' ex-combatants remain to be analysed, especially since the excluded former fighters are presumably a much larger group in number.

Facts and procedures that jeopardise the aim of reintegration are influenced to the same degree on a social and economic level. But especially economic failures are dangerous at the moment. First of all, it is very risky to create high expectations, as has been observed in other countries as well (Colletta et al. 1996). Expectations created by the National Programme in Burundi, and thus by the WB/MDRP and the government (including the former fighting parties), are the following: receiving money and in-kind transfers, receiving medical treatment for free, getting help from the National Programme in every situation, reintegrating easily on the economic level, not being forgotten by the party they fought for, and, especially, creating a stable economic basis for the future through the reintegration benefit. Most of these assumptions are not met. Disappointed expectations lead to frustration, and people who are accustomed to use weapons could react violently and thus put the peace process at risk.

It can be reasoned that the social reintegration works relatively well to date because the ex-combatants have been prepared to face difficulties. They were scared of meeting again those they had raped, stolen from, and whose houses they had destroyed. This, in combination with seminars they had in

2 Because the landscape is mountainous in Burundi, hill (frz. *colline*) is an administrative entity.

the demobilisation centres about how to behave as a civilian – even if they were short and brief – contributes to a relatively good co-habitation so far. The reinsertion money also had a very positive effect on peaceful co-habitation. Thus, it is important to keep the balance between economic support and not creating the impression that fighting is profitable even after the end of the war. On the one hand, they must not be tempted or forced to steal and they need a chance to generate income after having lost their primary source as a combatant. On the other hand, the civilian population as well as the ex-combatants must not get the impression that they are rewarded for what they did. In order not to risk social unrest it is crucial to communicate clearly and transparently about benefits. Raising expectations that cannot be met must be prevented. Explicit communication is essential and in the case of Burundi it seems that this claim is not being met. The conditions and information about benefits are not consistently communicated from the top of the National Programme down to the beneficiaries and to the community members. There are a lot of ambiguities and rumours about who profits how, and why the reintegration benefits are delayed. In order to avoid frustration, it is crucial to show realistic future prospects of economic reintegration perspectives that actually exist among those who are well-informed about reintegration activities.

Finally, some uniting effects during the ongoing reintegration process should be mentioned. It seems that Burundi was fortunate in the early beginning of the demobilisation and reintegration phase. As the ex-combatants were not the only returning group, even if a very special and important one, no dichotomy between the community members per se and the demobilised could be established. In particular the social weight of return was distributed among all repatriates, not solely among the ex-combatants. Furthermore, the reinsertion payment was able to remove a lot of tension. As all sides were afraid in the beginning of how the other would behave, the reinsertion money had built a kind of anchor. The community members knew the ex-combatants would not need to steal and the ex-combatants knew the civilians would profit from the money if they spent it within the community. In the same way the knowledge about the time in the demobilisation centre calmed the population in the communes. They knew that the former fighters had learnt how to behave as civilians and how to interact with other civilians. Consequently, preparation for every group in every perspective can definitively be pointed out as having influenced a relatively positive start of the reintegration process. However, its potentials do not seem to be fully realised because there are not enough actions in this direction.

Furthermore, it is a unifying factor when the receiving community is the community of origin. The demobilised are known by the people, they might have family and friends there and so they are not strangers. In addition to this, it is possible to get into contact with people they had worked

with before the war. Thus, social and economic reintegration (in the short term at least) seems to be all the more possible, the more contact the ex-combatant had to his or her community before or during the war. What further influenced a mostly positive welcome home for the demobilised is the fact that it seems to be true that the civil population is tired of war. They are ready to forgive for the sake of peace. On the surface, the ex-combatants feel the same way, but they often declare that in case of a new war they would be ready to take up arms again.

Conclusion

The development of the general political and security situation in the country is of foremost importance for the future of reintegration. With the mid-2006 allegations of a coup attempt, supposedly planned by members of the former transitional government, ensuing detentions, massive accusations of human rights violations committed by the security forces, the resignation and flight into exile of the vice president in September 2006, the sacking of the new vice president in February 2007, and the expulsion of the controversial CNDD-FDD party chairman in February 2007, the future development of Burundi towards a peaceful country is far from being on a stable path. Moreover, Burundi remains one of the poorest nations in Africa. After the absence of sufficient rain during the rainy seasons in 2006, two million people are at risk of a food crisis after devastating flooding in January and February 2007.

In conclusion, it can be said that the demobilisation and reintegration process in Burundi has contributed to the stabilisation of the fragile peace at the beginning and until today. It is particularly on the social level that living together peacefully can be ascertained in the time immediately after the return of the former fighters. It is the task of all people and official organisations involved to strengthen unifying factors and to overcome divisive influences in reintegration. However, it remains to be seen whether demobilisation and reintegration can support long-term peace and development, especially since – no matter how important – the situation of the ex-combatants is not the only influencing factor in the peace process.

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