



### Central African Republic: Lessons from a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program

This Dissemination Note is based on "RCA: Le DDR sans GPS", final report from the independent evaluation mission of the *Programme de Réinsertion des ex-combattants et d'Appui aux Communautés (PRAC)* in CAR, which was commissioned by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program and published in December 2007.

#### Introduction

The **Program for reinsertion of ex-combatants and community support** (PRAC in French) was launched by the UN Development Program (UNDP) in the Central African Republic in April 2004. Financed by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), it was intended to organize the demobilization of over 7,500 ex-combatants in the Central African Republic.

PRAC was implemented over three years between 2004 and 2007. Its original components made it unique in the region: PRAC was the only MDRP-financed operation executed by an agency outside government, in this case UNDP. The program also had an innovative approach to DDR activities: drawing lessons from previous experience, PRAC was committed to avoid financial incentives for ex-combatants, to

support the communities as well as the ex-combatants, and to focus on institution strengthening. The underlying idea was to facilitate ex-combatants' social reinsertion by involving the communities in the DDR process, but also take the victims of ex-combatants into better consideration.

However PRAC was confronted with many obstacles from the start and encountered difficulties in planning, coordination and monitoring. After the closing of the program, an independent evaluation led by national and international experts began in October 2007 to assess the results and identify lessons learned.

The report based on the mission's conclusions contains important observations and recommendations that can be helpful to the execution of other DDR projects. The dual approach of individual and community based reintegration, as an innovative take on



Annie and her uncle Theophile, who received reinsertion support from PRAC, in their sewing workshop

traditional DDR programs, gave mixed results in the implementation phase. It is therefore crucial to identify lessons learned to enrich the discussion on ways to design successful DDR programs.

## Context

The Central African Republic (CAR) presents **many factors of instability**. The country is one of the poorest in the world, ranking 171/177 on the UNDP human development index scale. Its natural resources have traditionally spurred predation from various national and international actors. A decade of violent conflict during the Patassé regime further weakened the country's security and small economy. Finally, its position between Chad and Sudan on one hand and the Great Lakes region on the other, as well as its porous borders, all add up to the already high level of insecurity.

From the start, the PRAC was facing **difficult conditions**: first there was a variety of armed groups to demobilize, some of them inactive for as long as a decade. Another issue was establishing the criteria for identifying ex-combatants in a context where rebel groups were sometimes hard to distinguish from simple bandits.

Just like in any post-conflict country,

local capacities were characterized by their instability and limited scope, which made their reinforcement a crucial objective. The security and political situations were far from stable at a time when the country was going through an electoral process.

## Program Concept

The underlying principles of **community-based reintegration and non-financial incentives** shaped the conception and planning of the program.

PRAC was innovative and groundbreaking. As early as 2004, PRAC provided support not only to ex-combatants but also to host communities. Another of its objectives was to support the victims of ex-combatants. In order to reinforce national capacities, PRAC would interact and consult with an interdepartmental institution, the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion (CNDDR). Finally, in order to avoid the pitfalls of previous disarmament programs, the reinsertion of ex-combatants would not take the shape of cash incentives but instead make a variety of professional trainings available.

## Implementation and Results

At the end of the project, **almost all of the 7,500 ex-combatants initially targeted had received support**, as did a number of community projects. Four execution units located in four different cities disbursed support to ex-combatants and communities in collaboration with the CNDDR. The evaluation team met with beneficiaries eager to show their successes in various domains including agriculture, small trade, schooling and university studies. Generally ex-combatants who chose a training in which they were mentored over the long-term—either through the project itself or in a family environment for women or farmers—were the most successful. With regard to community support, the rehabilitation of associations and schools was more successful than that of public service infrastructure such as fountains, gutting of buildings or bridges.



*A water fountain considered completed in the 2nd arrondissement in Bangui*

### How PRAC planned its reinsertion component

At first the reinsertion phase was supposed to last several months for each ex-combatant with the distribution of a reinsertion kit, a training completed by the issuance of a diploma, and a six-month long follow-up. An exception to this was the school or university training, designed to last two years.

Demobilization kits were to be granted only at the end of the training in order to create an incentive, and were intended to be in kind and adapted to the training chosen.

During this long reinsertion period PRAC wanted to put the focus on families and the development of host communities.

Finally, the objective was to encourage ex-combatants to regroup after training and create cooperatives.

**But PRAC rapidly encountered difficulties** mostly due to problems in planning, communication and monitoring. Among many impediments was the frequent turnover of the Project Leader position within the first year of implementation, the lack of DDR experience of PRAC and

CNDDR staff, and the absence of any training available to them. Also problematic for an organization used to long-term development projects was the necessity to implement the project with rapid disbursements. Finally,

differing management systems between implementing partner and donor, together with the absence of a realistic action plan for the duration of the project, contributed to the difficulties in planning.

A mid-term review conducted in 2006 led to profound changes and improvements in the implementation of PRAC. First, all projects were accelerated to reach the objectives established in the initial plans. Then

## PRAC Implementation

### Disarmament

Disarmament was very low with only 190 combatants disarmed among the 7,556 demobilized ex-combatants. The surrounding insecurity in the country made ex-combatants reluctant to give up their means of self-defense.

### Demobilization

A majority of ex-combatants expressed satisfaction with the demobilization kit since, like the majority of Central Africans, they were lacking any type of asset. The medical check-up and HIV testing were another source of satisfaction for beneficiaries, especially women. Over 86% of beneficiaries (more than 6,500 ex-combatants) were demobilized in Bangui.

Difficulties encountered were: the turnover in project leaders (three in the program's first year), the lack of project resources in Bangui, where most resided, the lack of clarity over identification of ex-combatants, and insufficient monitoring.

### Reinsertion

Four successive waves of ex-combatants went through the reinsertion phase of the program. The first wave of ex-combatants received in-kind reinsertion kits, according to the training they had chosen, but the following waves had less choice in training and more often received their reinsertion kits partially or fully in cash. Less than a thousand ex-combatants had been reinserted two years into the program. As a result of the subsequent acceleration of activities, the later waves benefited from a significantly reduced choice of training.

Long-term trainings such as school or university and rural activities were the most successful at reinsertion. Long-term follow-up was deemed very important by many ex-combatants interviewed. The choice of training was also key in determining the success of reinsertion: fishing and retail were not as successful as other activities such as husbandry or mechanics.

An acute lack of communication between PRAC and the beneficiaries was observed during the reinsertion process.

The small trade training option, chosen by almost half of ex-combatants (48%), included the least amount of actual training. Its kits were disbursed entirely in cash.

### Community support

Out of the 69 sub-projects planned, 41 were declared completed by PRAC. Most of them consisted in rehabilitating existing structures; some consisted in building new ones. The mid-term review had identified as an issue the lack of involvement of the communities in the implementation of the sub-projects. The most successful ones were rehabilitated institutions and schools such as the Sibut high school for example. On the downside, markets and water fountains were only partially built or renovated.

Monitoring of the sub-projects appeared problematic and the evaluation team had to physically assess their completion. Visiting 35 of the 41 projects, the team found that 17 were completed, whereas 18 remained at various stages of completion.

The intent to involve communities did not match the initial expectations, as evidenced by PRAC's budget. Out of US\$ 10 million allocated to the program, only US\$ 1 million went to community support. These activities regularly suffered from being understaffed and lacking funds. Furthermore, little connection was established between community-driven projects and ex-combatants reinsertion.

CNDDR was strengthened with a renewed budget, training for its staff and the hiring of an international expert in disarmament, eventually leading to better coordination with PRAC.

## Main Recommendations

PRAC closed in February 2007. The evaluation team made some key recommendations for each phase of the program drawn from its observations on the ground. These recommendations are useful for future DDR programs in CAR or in other countries in the region.

### > Planning

1. Adopt a more restrictive definition of what constitutes a weapon, excluding for example pieces of uniforms.
2. Work with firm and definitive lists of ex-combatants provided by the signatories of the peace agreement.
3. Modify the one man/one weapon ratio and introduce a negotiated ratio

of one weapon for X number of ex-combatants together with a test for disassembly/reassembly of a weapon for each of the candidates.

4. Establish precise criteria to select target communities.

### > Budget

1. Establish a realistic budget line to finance the planned activities.
2. Harmonize budget lines of all international organizations.

### > Implementation

1. Train law enforcement personnel in disarmament procedures, management and destruction of stocks.
2. Have a secure storage facility with a minimum of two independent control systems.
3. Provide DDR training to project's national staff.
4. Outsource to local partners when activities are to be conducted in remote, inaccessible areas.

5. Disburse kits in-kind rather than in cash.

6. Develop relations between ex-combatants and community programs, for example by using ex-combatants as workforce for community support projects.

### > Communication

1. Organize sensitization operations targeting the beneficiaries (ex-combatants and communities).
2. Appoint an ombudsman to settle disputes between stakeholders.
3. Use the local language in all communications, especially the list of kits' contents and offered trainings.

### > Monitoring

1. Establish a centralized database to follow up on each beneficiary with his/her full identification number.
2. Donors and international partners should organize regular missions on the ground and interview separately counterparts, trainers, implementing partners, and beneficiaries.



The Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) is a multi-agency effort that supports the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in the greater Great Lakes region of Central Africa. MDRP is financed by the World Bank and 13 donors – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the European Commission. It collaborates with national governments and commissions, and with over 30 partner organizations, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations.