



Position Paper

Targeting MDRP Assistance: Ex-Combatants and Other War-Affected Populations

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I Introduction

1. This paper has been prepared by the MDRP Secretariat¹ in response to a request from MDRP² partners to prepare a position paper on beneficiary definition and targeting under MDRP-supported demobilization and reintegration programs and activities in the greater Great Lakes region. The paper seeks to (i) explore the issue of beneficiary targeting within the MDRP framework, (ii) clarify principles for targeting MDRP assistance, (iii) elaborate on the linkages between support to ex-combatants and other war-affected groups, and (iv) propose strategies to further improve targeting of MDRP assistance in the future.

2. As a starting point, it is helpful to recall that the primary objective of the MDRP is “to enhance the prospects for stabilization and recovery in the region” by supporting the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. The MDRP strategy’s main premise is that “the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants is necessary to establishing peace and restoring security, which are in turn preconditions for sustainable growth and poverty reduction.”³ Consequently, program assistance is focused on the direct demobilization and reintegration needs of ex-combatants and, during certain phases of the process, on the immediate family members of ex-combatants.

3. At a practical level, the process of beneficiary targeting under the MDRP seeks to determine who is eligible for assistance, and for which kind of assistance different ex-combatants may be eligible. In this regard, there are three key questions: (i) who is a combatant? (ii) are there different categories of combatants? and (iii) what, if anything, should be done for those who do not qualify as combatants? In the initial phases of national program design and implementation in Angola and the DRC, MDRP partners and others have raised concerns as to who qualifies as a combatant and whether other war-affected groups should also receive assistance under MDRP-supported activities. This paper seeks to address these questions and concerns.

II. The Rationale for and Challenges of Targeted Assistance

A. Targeting of Ex-Combatants

4. There are several reasons that underlie the MDRP strategy of providing direct support for the demobilization and reintegration of ex-soldiers and guerrillas. First, failed reintegration of ex-combatants could jeopardize the peace-building process. Indeed, long-term costs for the entire society could be considerable if ex-combatants are not able to establish new livelihoods and reintegrate in communities. Their inability to do so could contribute to new violent political opposition or lead to an increase in banditry and insecurity that could inhibit recovery and development efforts. This lesson has been learned in several other war to peace transitions, most notably in Liberia in 1997 and Kosovo in 2001. Second, ex-combatants of national armies are giving up paid employment and job security, in which case reinsertion and reintegration assistance represents a compensation for the termination

¹ This paper by the MDRP Secretariat does not necessarily reflect opinions or positions held by the World Bank or MDRP partners. Several colleagues outside the Secretariat provided comments on an earlier version, which are gratefully acknowledged.

² MDRP – Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration program for the greater Great Lakes region.

³ Page iii, Greater Great Lakes Regional Strategy for Demobilization and Reintegration, World Bank, 2002.

of a contractual agreement. Third, ex-combatants are often at their most productive age and therefore reintegration support can be considered an investment in development. Fourth, providing targeted assistance to ex-combatants is also often part of a political settlement, generally included in peace agreements, which results in the end of the war; the failure to follow through on such commitments can and has led to the restart of violent conflict.

5. Targeted assistance for ex-combatants requires clear definitions of combatant status, i.e. the determination in specific situations of who is – and is not – an ex-combatant, and the establishment of practical mechanisms to apply these definitions. “Combatants” could be narrowly defined as those who operate within a military structure and actively engage in preparing for armed conflict or are actually using weapons. While this definition may be sufficient when dealing with conventional military forces, current understanding of guerilla forces suggests that it may be inadequate.⁴ For example, some individuals might have taken an active role in military activities without actually having carried guns (e.g., cooks, porters, drivers, messengers, intelligence staff, fundraisers, etc.), or have done so on a “part-time” basis, sharing their weapon with other members of a guerilla force.

6. Formal eligibility criteria agreed upon by all parties, a practical system to screen and verify combatant status on the ground, and a robust identification and management information system to track beneficiaries and the delivery of benefits are critical to the success of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program. In their absence, any program of this type is at risk of abuse, cost overruns due to a potentially open-ended case load, providing perverse incentives for individuals to take up arms, and ultimately failure.

7. Despite the justification for and procedures adopted to facilitate targeted assistance to ex-combatants, some MDRP partners have raised questions regarding this approach. First, where targeting is accepted, there are nonetheless concerns that targeting processes may exclude some legitimate “combatants” from the program. Second, as a strategy for promoting economic reintegration, the efficiency of targeting male ex-combatants over their female dependents is questioned by some. Finally, and much more broadly, issues of equity are raised when targeted assistance to ex-combatants is compared to the level of assistance provided to other war-affected groups and communities. In addressing these concerns, it is useful to look at the three distinct groups that the concerns focus on: (i) special ex-combatant target groups, (ii) non-combatants associated with fighting forces, and (iii) other war-affected populations. These three groups, and the challenges that the MDRP faces in dealing with them are discussed below.

B. Special Ex-Combatant Target Groups

8. **Child soldiers:** The MDRP has adopted the Cape Town principles and associated definitions of child soldiers, and these principles have been integrated into the national programs in Burundi and Rwanda, and the special projects in the DRC. However, the practical application of these principles is challenging, especially when the MDRP does not have full access to all stages of program design and implementation. For instance, in Angola child soldiers were significantly under-reported due to the manner in which demobilization was carried out (with UNITA forces being integrated into the national army before being demobilized) and a concern on the part of some UNITA military leaders about criminal liability for prior recruitment of child soldiers and on the part of Government over the illegality of recruiting under-aged combatants. This same concern over legal sandions affects other Government and guerilla leaders’ willingness to report child soldiers among their ranks.

⁴ It is also in direct conflict with established protocols (i.e., Cape Town principles) for dealing with child soldiers.

9. **Female soldiers** The MDRP also recognizes the likelihood that significant numbers of women are part of, in particular, irregular fighting forces, and calls for the establishment of specialized arrangements to accommodate the needs of these women. However, program implementation to date (in Angola and Rwanda) suggests that women are also being under-reported by combatant groups at the front end of the process, and that more needs to be done to encourage women combatants to present themselves, and to properly identify and incorporate women into national DDR programs. The types of assistance envisioned through the MDRP for female ex-combatants include: guarantee of equal access to reinsertion and reintegration benefits, gender-responsive arrangements at demobilization facilities, provision of gender specific health care, etc.

10. **Disabled and chronically ill soldiers** Disabled and/or chronically ill ex-combatants are also afforded special assistance under the MDRP. To the extent possible, disabled ex-combatants will usually be provided specialized physical rehabilitation treatment (prosthetics and therapy) and social and economic reintegration assistance, while chronically ill (including those afflicted with HIV/AIDS) would have access to medical services, counseling and sensitization, and reintegration support. Investments in the provision of such services frequently also benefit other disabled and/or chronically ill population groups. Furthermore, if an ex-combatant were unable to take full advantage of economic reintegration assistance, national programs within the MDRP would seek to ensure that their dependents would have access to the service or support. Finally, as such cases often require longer-term support, the national program would seek to identify supplemental arrangements available in the local environment that could provide for this category of ex-combatant after the time that the program has closed.

11. These special target groups are all afforded assistance under the MDRP. However, the key challenge, particularly with women and children, is under-reporting at the front end of this process, which is usually carried out by agencies not financed directly by the MDRP. A second challenge for the program is ensuring that the definition of a female ex-combatant reflects the demographics of the rebel movements, while limiting the risk that large numbers of non-combatants gain access to program benefits. Therefore, MDRP's strategy for addressing the challenges with these special target groups is three-fold: (i) improve identification and inclusion of these groups of traditionally under-reported combatants; (ii) ensure child and women friendly environments are established at the earliest possible point of the demobilization process; and (iii) link up with other social assistance programs for longer-term care of these groups. For women and children in particular, MDRP would seek to reach agreement with Government authorities and representatives of rebel factions as to the criteria to be applied, sensitize peacekeeping forces and/or national armies on screening procedures, seek to ensure presence of specialized agencies and/or staff (child protection officers, female soldiers) at point of in-take.

C. Non-Combatants Associated with Armed Groups

12. The MDRP recognizes that in general there will be a reasonably large "non-combatant" population associated with, in particular, irregular forces. Among this population are dependents of combatants (spouses and children), abducted women, and unaccompanied children. With regard to the first category, MDRP-supported programs generally provide assistance to the "families" of ex-combatants directly through demobilization, resettlement and reinsertion elements⁵ of a program, and indirectly through the reintegration support provided to the ex-combatant. Dependents should also be eligible to access an ex-

⁵ This includes food and health assistance, domestic and household items, transport to community of return, and a transitional allowance in kind or in cash, the value of which is based on an analysis of family needs.

combatant's reintegration benefits in the event the ex-combatant is incapable of doing so.

13. Unaccompanied children are generally assisted by the child protection network operational in a given country – usually led by UNICEF and the relevant Government agency. The assistance provided to unaccompanied children will be similar to that provided to child ex-combatants, and in the case where there is significant under-reporting of child soldiers (as in Angola) the caseload is nearly one and the same. The MDRP would then look to integrate its planned assistance to child ex-combatants with that of other child protection agencies dealing with the broader category of unaccompanied or war-affected children. This is the approach being adopted in Angola, where the national DDR program is looking at ways to finance general child support activities in those areas where a high percentage of ex-combatants have returned.

14. Abducted civilian women present the largest challenge for any program, as they are in a particularly vulnerable position (often abused by, but dependent on, men with whom they have no legal status, and with whom they face possible social ostracism), and yet in a complex situation that is not easily undone or repaired. Frequently, such women do not come forward to identify themselves as having been abducted, and male combatants may limit national programs' ability to obtain adequate access to them. For the reasons above, the size of this particular group and challenges they face are not well known. The MDRP should always use its influence during the process of demobilization to facilitate access to and acquire information regarding this group by specialized agencies that could subsequently facilitate appropriate humanitarian assistance and counseling.

15. For those sub-groups who are afforded direct or indirect support (as in the case of dependents), the MDRP should improve its ability to assess whether benefits provided to the ex-combatant are serving the needs of all family members. In the case of abducted women and unaccompanied children the MDRP would look to ensure linkages with the humanitarian agencies for the provision of appropriate support, as was done in Angola during the demobilization phase.

D. Other War-Affected Populations

16. The provision of targeted assistance to ex-combatants may in some cases raise issues with respect to access, exclusion, and equity *vis-à-vis* other war-affected groups. There is some concern that the provision of greater benefits to ex-combatants could lead to perceptions of injustice and possibly frustration among some of these groups. Arguments are heard against providing ex-combatants with any type of targeted assistance due to their involvement in or responsibility for serious human rights violations. There is also a fear that targeted assistance could undermine the process of social reintegration. Finally, assistance to ex-combatants could be perceived as encouraging people to take up arms in the expectation to be 'rewarded' later. Since these general perceptions and their dynamics vary widely depending on country and regional perspective, they should be considered in each specific context. In certain parts of Angola, UNITA forces are well-regarded and welcomed back to returning villages. In Sierra Leone, community members have viewed support to ex-combatants as an investment in peace that would ultimately benefit the population at-large. Serious human rights violations by individuals should obviously be prosecuted through the appropriate channels.

17. Clearly, in most MDRP countries, ex-combatants are only one of the many groups affected by violent conflict, and likely in need of support. Other groups requiring assistance to restore their livelihoods include internally displaced persons (IDPs), returning refugees, war widows/female headed households, war orphans, and communities affected by the conflict. Nonetheless, the MDRP does not consider its role to extend to providing direct

assistance to these numerous other groups. Other partners, including UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, ILO, UNDP, the World Bank, bilateral donors and numerous NGOs, have more appropriate mandates and capacities to support these war-affected groups. Many such organizations have ongoing activities in support of a broader cross-section of these war-affected groups in the greater Great Lakes region. The fact that most of these organizations are also MDRP partners should facilitate the harmonization of such initiatives with that of the national DDR program. The UN's Consolidated Appeal Mechanism seeks to encourage a coordinated approach to ensuring that all war-affected groups are assisted and seeks to secure financing for these activities.

18. The MDRP does recognize a need to proactively harmonize and coordinate assistance to ex-combatants with that to the more general war-affected populations from its side, and to support community-based reintegration approaches that would have positive multiplier effects. Several approaches should be considered by national programs to attain more balance in the support provided to ex-combatants, other war-affected groups and the communities in which they try to reintegrate by striving to:

- Use community development mechanisms and systems to appraise and channel assistance to ex-combatants (e.g., in the DDR program in Rwanda, reintegration assistance to ex-combatants is explicitly channeled through local community development committees);
- Contribute to general (donor) coordination and information sharing between activities in support of the reintegration of all war-affected groups;
- Advocate for the interests and potential of ex-combatants, and actively promoting their participation in broader development initiatives;
- Provide support to ex-combatants that would have a positive secondary (spin-off) effect on the larger community (e.g., rehabilitation of roads, health centers and schools);
- Provide support to community- or area-based programs – and other broad development schemes – in areas where a large number of ex-combatants resettle, conditional on the participation of a large proportion of ex-combatants in the implementation of such activities;
- Create opportunities for reconciliation and facilitation of contacts between the ex-combatants and their 'host communities';
- Provide support to women in receiving communities in order to better deal with returning male ex-combatants (counseling, awareness raising, etc.);
- Ensure clear communication towards a broad audience on the support provided to the ex-combatants and the broader benefits to the community; and
- Conduct research and analysis on the ex-combatant reintegration processes and the relationships with other population segments.

III. Conclusions

19. The MDRP has been established to enhance the prospects for stabilization and recovery in the greater Great Lakes region. It does so through targeted assistance to ex-combatants of both regular and irregular forces. The reasons for maintaining the focus of the program include: (i) the risk to peace and stability if combatants are not provided assistance as promised in political settlements, (ii) the need to replace combatants' war-time sustaining strategies with more peaceful alternatives, (iii) finite financial resources under the MDRP, and (iv) implementation challenges for a program that lacks clear limitations on potential beneficiaries and assistance strategies. To expand the mandate of the MDRP beyond this specific beneficiary target group risks diluting the main purpose of the program. Maintaining the focus of the program is also a recognition of the complementary roles that the partners to

the Program have in financing and working with the wider vulnerable populations and communities in the greater Great Lakes region. The MDRP cannot provide support to all war-affected groups and relies on these efforts to work in concert with national DDR programs to help ensure long-term stability and recovery.

20. Finally, it is worth noting that while MDRP assistance is focused on ex-combatants and their direct family members, the impact of the assistance goes far beyond this narrow target group. By supporting peace processes, the MDRP helps to significantly reduce the scope and opportunity for the recruitment of child soldiers, the abduction of women, and the destruction of community infrastructure. It contributes to an environment where a country can recover and return to a path of development.

21. Criteria for determining who is and who is not an adult combatant will be defined on a country by country basis, but should take into consideration current understanding of the roles and responsibilities of women and children among irregular forces. The definition of a child "combatant" will be governed by the Cape Town principles for all national program and special project activities under the MDRP. Any national program or special project would also provide specialized support for particular target groups including women, disabled and chronically ill combatants. Finally, the program must seek closer linkages with and coordination of its assistance with that of more general vulnerable group strategies and programs.

22. Within this framework, the MDRP should undertake a number of actions that will help improve its own targeting and support the broader reintegration needs in post-conflict societies. The following points are offered as recommendations for future MDRP planning and programming with national Governments and implementing partners. MDRP should:

- (i) Develop generic guidelines and criteria for the definition of female ex-combatants; and sensitize national governments, implementing partners and peacekeeping forces to these guidelines to ensure more representative identification and participation of female combatants;
- (ii) Ensure that national programs and special projects are cognizant of and prepared to apply the Cape Town principles in identifying and assisting child soldiers;
- (iii) Establish, as early as possible, with Governments and implementing agencies responsible for disarmament and initial demobilization, DDR eligibility criteria and screening procedures to avoid problems of exclusion or improper treatment;
- (iv) Require that specialized partners dealing with women and children are present and can participate in the initial "in-take" process of a DDR program to ensure that:
 - (i) eligible individuals are identified as combatants and
 - (ii) that they receive the proper care and assistance during the demobilization process;
- (v) Advocate for and enhance linkages with other programs supporting IDPs, to ensure that non-combatant groups associated with fighting forces are afforded assistance in the process of returning home and restarting livelihoods;
- (vi) Ensure that reinsertion support is based on needs of family units, and consider strategies to ensure that inputs are used in the most effective fashion;
- (vii) Provide support to community-based reintegration activities for ex-combatants that have a higher multiplier effect (i.e., that also support broader economic and social benefits for the community);
- (viii) Allow for the partners or children of ex-combatants to have access to reintegration support benefits in the event that the registered ex-combatant has died or is unable to take advantage of the available benefit;

- (ix) Ensure that all information and counseling provided through MDRP-supported activities (both during demobilization and reintegration phases) is open to all groups associated with the fighting forces; special information regarding STDs and HIV/AIDS should be provided for women;
- (x) Monitor the relative reintegration of the combatant and his or her family as part of the overall program monitoring process and share the information widely with other concerned agencies and implementing partners; and
- (xi) Link DDR planning and implementation to broader recovery planning and the PRSP process.