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## **ERITREA'S ECONOMIC SURVIVAL**

### **Summary record of a conference held on 20 April 2007**

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Africa Group

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## **ERITREA'S ECONOMIC SURVIVAL**

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgment

Introduction

Historical context

A mobilized nation – benefits and burdens

The contemporary state

Eritrea and the global economy

Conclusions

### *Appendices*

Discussion Paper: The evolution, uses and abuses of remittances in the Eritrean economy

*David Styan*

Conference Paper: Border conflict and its impact on youth (This paper will be added shortly)

*Amanuel Mehreteab*

Conference agenda

**Acknowledgment**

*I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the speakers who contributed to the conference and to the participants who brought so much to the discussion. I would also like to thank Cedric Barnes for setting up this event and Chatham House for hosting it. The full programme, papers and speakers' notes (where available) appear at the end of this review.*

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## **Introduction**

The conference focused on the political economy of Eritrea in the 'no war – no peace' stalemate that has prevailed since the 1998–2000 conflict with Ethiopia.

The war and its aftermath have deprived Eritrea of its key economic role as the external trading outlet for the Ethiopian hinterland. In addition, a very large section of the productive population remains tied up in compulsory military service or national development programmes. This has affected food production, exacerbating shortages at the same time as major international food security programmes have closed down.

But Eritrea's economy has not collapsed. In increasing isolation, it continues a policy of economic autarky. Defying the logic of the so-called Washington Consensus, it restricts free enterprise and has tightened state control of all aspects of the economy. Most of the international donors have left, exasperated by Eritrea's difficult policy environment.

Official Eritrean explanations for the country's endurance centre on the courage and strength of its people. The conference sought to get behind this rhetoric to understand the mechanics of population control, including control of the diaspora, and the remittance economy, as well as refugee flight, as part of the survival strategy of the Eritrean state.

## **Historical context**

The opening session of the conference placed Eritrea's economic experience in the historical context of the region and the wider African context of underdevelopment. Eritrean nationalist discourse has constructed myths to suggest that Eritrea is a rich country, that successful industrial development under Italian rule was sabotaged by Ethiopia, that it enjoyed rapid growth in the early years of independence and that all this could be restored when peace returns. Gunter Schroeder questioned these myths and outlined a more complex reality: an economy that was static and stagnant up to the time of colonialism; an ecology that was already depleted by the start of the 20th century; food production capable of meeting only 60–70% of needs; little evidence of any significant additional natural resources – in short, all the main characteristic of a poor rural economy.

Schroeder drew attention to the historical importance of soldiering as an escape route from rural poverty. This was a tradition in the region that pre-dated colonialism and it continued with greater vigour under Italian rule, especially during the Fascist period. Eritrean participation in

Italian warfare against Ethiopia was a powerful motor for social transformation in the 1930s, when 150,000 men were under arms out of a population of just 750,000. The soldiers gained skills that gave them alternative opportunities for employment and options to leave the land.

Preparations for war also drove Eritrea's early industrial development, which operated in a protected market, catering exclusively for the Italian army. When the Federation was created, Eritrea enjoyed a huge comparative advantage for its industry and its skills in relation to Ethiopia's underdevelopment. Industry was drawn to the political and economic centre in Addis Ababa, resulting in significant migration from Eritrea. The result was that a modern Eritrean economic elite forged ahead inside Ethiopia, before, during and after the war of independence.

This all came to an end in 1998, leaving Eritrea for the first time without a protected market for its industry or its skills. Even when the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict ends and trade resumes, Eritrea cannot expect to recapture the Ethiopian markets – these have been lost to Ethiopian competitors. Eritrea's industry is too small to compete with Ethiopian producers, let alone with the Chinese producers who now dominate industrial production for African markets. Schroeder concluded that the historical hindrances to Eritrea's economic development needed to be clearly grasped. Faced honestly, they might yet be overcome through a genuinely creative approach to economic development.

### **A mobilized nation – benefits and burdens**

Remittances are central to the modern Eritrean economy. David Styan argued that Eritrea was unique in both the scale and the level of control the government exercised over remittances. Eritrea's exports are officially worth only \$20 million while imports are \$700 million. There are sufficient reserves to cover just two weeks of imports. This highlights the crucial importance of maintaining the flow of remittances upon which all aspects of the economy, including government finances, depend.

Styan's paper highlighted the high degree of statistical uncertainty surrounding all aspects of Eritrea's economy, with little internationally verifiable reporting of data since 2003. Financial flows in recent years are estimated at around \$350–400 million a year, which equates to roughly a third of the value of GDP (c. \$1.2 billion).

During the liberation war, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) depended on voluntary contributions from members of its mass organizations and sympathizers. After independence they developed a financing system based on a 'voluntary' tax of 2% of income from Eritreans

living abroad. The legitimacy of such payments was increasingly being called into question by Eritreans in the diaspora. Nonetheless, the government is still able to rely on these contributions. It achieves this by maintaining an effective monopoly over all official contact with home: a clearance paper is required in order to have access to any state services or official dealings with Eritrea. Private remittances to families have increased over the past decade as the economy has contracted.

The government appeared to have no compunction about its demands on the diaspora, viewing them as a 'lost limb' that will integrate in host countries and eventually lose touch with Eritrea.

There are at least 150,000 Eritreans living in OECD and Middle Eastern countries. The pressure of outward migration remains high, with an estimated 1,000 people a month fleeing to Sudan in late 2006 and early 2007. The costs of trafficking are high, with initial fees of around \$200–500. There are suspicions that, given the very tight grip of state control, those who facilitate escape do so with the collusion of individual army officers. Families are liable to pay a further fine of Nakfa 50,000 (\$3,300) once the escape has been detected. Relatives abroad finance these costs, which indirectly support the government.

Despite acute shortages of foreign exchange there is little sign of black market activity. Styan attributed this to the tight control and strict penalties imposed by the Government of Eritrea. Evidence that demand for foreign exchange is drying up suggests a further slowing of the economy.

Eritrea finds itself reliant on economic activity in foreign countries for its own economic survival – a far cry from the nationalist ideals of 'self-reliance'. Remittances have enabled the government to remain in power despite the disastrous state of the economy. They also fuel (and finance) migration and create a form of parasitic dependency, which paradoxically causes resentment against the diaspora.

Amanual Mehreteab's paper 'Border Conflict and its Psychological Impact on Youth' was presented by Richard Reid. It stimulated a broader discussion about the phenomenon of conscription and the permanent mobilization of Eritrea's youth in military service or in the National Development Campaign (*Warsai Yeka'alo*).

Eritrea has a history of large-scale mobilization going back to the liberation struggle (and earlier, as Gunter Schroeder had indicated). At independence in 1993 it had an army of 95,000 men and women. Extensive demobilization reduced the size of the standing army to less than 50,000 in

1996. During the war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000 massive remobilization of demobilized fighters and National Military Service conscripts, as well as rigid enforcement of military conscription, led to a rapid increase in the number of Eritreans in the military, and at the end of the open hostilities in mid-2000, some 300,000 had been mobilized. They were made up of three sectors: around 40,000 serving in the Eritrean Defence Force, another 40,000 remobilized EPLF fighters and a further 220,000 National Service conscripts. Of those enlisted, a pre-demobilization survey established that 54% were between the ages of 20 and 29 and 78% were heads of households. They constituted the most economically active and productive sector of society. Many had psychiatric problems. According to Mehreteab, between 35% and 40% were thought to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

After the end of the armed hostilities the government promised a rapid demobilization of 200,000 soldiers. However, the process was slow and when it ground to a standstill in mid-2005 only 105,000 had been demobilized. These soldiers did not receive the heroes' welcome that the EPLF liberation fighters were accorded and were left to deal on their own with problems of mental health and social readjustment. About half of the demobilized forces had actually already been working, mainly in government service, under the militarized work service, and most continued in their jobs. Most of the remainder were demobilized for reasons of age and health and shifted into a sort of pension programme. After the end of the hostilities, military conscription continued to be rigidly enforced and demobilization was limited. Today the estimates for people under military service range from 350,000 to 420,000. About half of them are estimated to be in active military service, the others in the militarized work service. Even those formally demobilized, provided they are still physical fit, remain members of the National Reserve Army and are frequently called up for military refresher courses or even renewed active military service or duty in the militarized work service.

The poor state of the economy was both a cause and an effect of Eritrea's militarization. The private sector has collapsed, there are no jobs and no spare land, and government activity is at a standstill. For now, it makes sense to keep young people occupied in the military and *Warsai Yeka'alo* if only for fear that the social consequences of releasing them could be much worse than the economic problems caused by mobilization. But the government also possesses a revolutionary vision of creating new Eritrean citizens. The Sawa military training centre served as a laboratory for social engineering and indoctrination with the implicit aim of alienating the youth from their family, faith and community. Mobilization (and the threat of war) was seen to help an authoritarian leadership to keep tight control of the country.



The influence of the military now pervades all areas of Eritrean life and young people continue to leave Eritrea to escape military service. A key conclusion of Mehreteab's paper was that when demobilisation does come, attention would need to be paid to the social and psychological aspects to enable former conscripts to reintegrate into society and the economy.

### **The contemporary state**

Gaim Kibreab provided an assessment of how Eritrea's ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), exercised economic control. He outlined a clever and secretive strategy which has resulted in complete control of the economy by a network of about 40 party-run firms.

The party appropriated the EPLF businesses from the liberation period and had also established its own bank and a Trust Fund. Using a combination of easy access to start up capital and unfair business practices, PFDJ firms had come to dominate all aspects of the economy. This process had accelerated since the end of the 1998–2000 conflict and the crushing of the private sector. A party company, Himbal financial services, manages the remittances. Another, the Red Sea Trading Corporation, enjoys a complete monopoly of imports (since 2005). It also sustains a network of neighbourhood shops. All public contracts are now awarded to PFDJ outlets. Since early 2006, party enterprises have secured a monopoly over the construction business.

Discussion revolved around the reasons for this approach and attempts to unravel the social and economic vision that underpinned it. It was seen to contain elements of a 1960s populist, socialist vision, in which private enterprise and the middle class were viewed with dark suspicion. This combined fortuitously with the passion for control and a determination to prevent the development of pluralistic power centres.

However, the control, including control of manpower, related to the social engineering, nation-building project referred to in the previous session. It was noted that many Eritreans still believed in the creation of a new nationalism that transcended sectarian and ethnic divisions. Kibreab observed that people outside the country often underestimated the degree of public support and consent for the PFDJ.

But the economic strategies pursued had completely failed to deliver development or prosperity and appeared to be wholly unsustainable. There were still small inflows of international aid (US\$250m in 2004/5) that helped. The situation of 'no war, no peace' helped to preserve this

economically hopeless situation. The government refused to demobilize on the grounds that Ethiopia would invade.

The case was also made that the government might be trapped in its present policies by necessity (the huge reserve of labour in the military) rather than through seriously pursuing a faulty vision. The private sector could not function without labour. But reducing the army could threaten national security. Demobilization was in any case socially risky in the absence of jobs. It was therefore necessary to keep all the military occupied in infrastructure building projects. They were acquiring some low-level construction skills and agricultural training continued, suggesting a degree of long-term economic logic.

### **Eritrea in the global economy**

In the final session of the conference, Christopher Eads provided a macroeconomic profile of Eritrea. The outlook was poor, with sluggish growth and a looming debt problem in an economy heavily dependent on the diaspora.

In the period 2001–5 GDP growth was officially 3.1% but actually less than 2%, taking account of the post-war catch-up. Real per capita GDP declined in the same period. Officially inflation is 12%, but a 15–18% range was thought more accurate. The fuel charge and rationing policies distort the inflation figure.

The currency has been depreciating over several years and the IMF think the Nakfa is overvalued. Black market rates seem to be about 50% above the official rate but are little used because of strict government control.

There is no annual budget available but, according to IMF figures, deficits averaged 35% of GDP between 2000 and 2003, falling to 17% in 2003. Monetary data indicate that even when the deficit was high claims against the government were not growing as fast as might have been expected. This indicates that even companies owned by the ruling party are borrowing less and is a further sign that the economy is slowing down.

Growth is driven by the financial services and construction sectors. The financial services sector revolves completely around remittances and the construction sector is firmly controlled by the party. External earnings from exports are almost non-existent at just \$15–17 million per year. There is some light manufacturing but the main export market (Ethiopia) has been lost. The

mining sector might offer a way out of the economic slump. There are some easy pickings but as extraction becomes more difficult foreign companies will be scared away.<sup>1</sup>

Eritrea's total external debt is around \$700 million, or 65% of GDP. Most of this debt is owed to the IMF, which provided an 8–10-year grace period with no repayments. Multilateral debt repayment must start in 2008 and is likely to cause serious difficulty. Eritrea may opt to default. Domestic debt is even greater at around 135% of GDP but presents less of a problem since interest rates are very low (3%) and easy to service. Eritrea would be an excellent candidate for HIPC debt write-off. In order to qualify it would need to maintain an IMF programme for six months, something the government seems unlikely to contemplate. However, the looming debt crisis might act as a catalyst for change.

Assumptions that once the conflict is resolved, Eritrea will benefit from Ethiopian use of the ports of Assab and Massawa need to be reconsidered. Huge investment has been ploughed into Djibouti to service Ethiopia's external trade. Mombasa arguably serves the south of Ethiopia more efficiently. Ethiopia would not want to depend so exclusively on Eritrean ports in the future. Eritrea will need to identify other long-term sources of revenue generation.

## **Conclusions**

It is surprising to find one of the world's newest nations wedded to a discredited form of command economy that has been systematically abandoned by the rest of the world. The signs are that Eritrea's economy is slowly grinding to a halt. Is it only the remarkably tight government control that prevents the appearance of the dramatic indicators normally associated with economic collapse?

But there is some logic to Eritrea's insistence on marching to its own tune. It stems from the grain of truth in the official rhetoric about dependence on the courage and determination of the people. The people are Eritrea's greatest resource and are being exploited as such by the government. Eritreans abroad may be seen as a diminishing asset but they are caught up inexorably in providing finance to the regime. The most productive sectors of the population are conscripted into perpetual military and national development activities, providing cheap labour

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<sup>1</sup> According to Reuters, industry experts predict gold could contribute up to 40% of government revenues once mining begins. The Australian firm Sub-Sahara Resources is set to begin mining operations. Jack Kimball, 'RPT-Interview – Australian explorer to start mining Eritrea gold', 3 June 2007.

for state construction projects. Even the illegal migration that results from this harsh system has been turned into an income generation scheme for the government.

These are desperate measures, conceived as a suitable response to a desperate threat posed by Ethiopia. But there is also much historical continuity. The export of talented people is not new to Eritrea. Nor are high levels of militarization. Armies have long served as motors of social transformation. There is little prospect for change while the country remains on a war footing. When that does end, however, Eritrea cannot assume a swift return to the economically beneficial relationship it enjoyed with Ethiopia until 1998. It will be a fresh challenge for Eritrea to develop an economy fit for the modern world.

30 July 2007

## **Appendix 1**

David Styan Birkbeck College, University of London

### **Discussion Paper: The evolution, uses and abuses of remittances in the Eritrean economy**

#### **Introduction: caveat**

- The objective of these notes is to frame and facilitate a debate on external financing of the Eritrean state via financial flows from the diaspora.

- This is not, indeed cannot be, an ‘expert’ overview; much here remains unclear. Evidence is drawn from a trawl of available sources, and on a number of conversations with Eritreans, some based in London, some transiting to and from Asmara. The notes highlight the paucity of data and understanding of remittance flows, and the degree to which they are vital to the continued survival of both the current Government of Eritrea (GoE), and the wider Eritrean economy.

- In addition to problems of data, sources and interpretation, we are also confronted with two challenges of vocabulary.

Firstly how to describe the GoE’s astonishingly ‘efficient’ tools of financial coercion and control of the financial resources sent by a huge diaspora population? The evolution of remittance flows can only be understood in the context of the legitimacy the EPLF/PFDJ had in the decades prior to 1998-2001, and the rapid evaporation of that legitimacy since.

Secondly how to characterise the current Eritrean economy? The conventional terms of ‘statist’ or ‘dirigiste’ clearly do not adequately convey the PFDJ/GoE control of economic activities. Escalating party/state control of the economy simultaneously accompanies, reflects and enhances the current acute contraction of the economy (‘withering, stagnation, meltdown, decompression’, are all terms which could be applied?).

#### ***Context: why focus on Eritrean remittances?***

There are three obvious reasons:

- Among those few outsiders following Eritrea’s economic present and future, it is generally assumed that, relative to the country’s size and economic activity, Eritrea’s

remittances are proportionally 'the highest in the world' <sup>2</sup>. Eritrea's monetised economy, its ability to earn foreign exchange, and thus import goods and services from abroad, rests almost entirely on cash sent by its diaspora. Given it currently receives virtually no Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) or Official Development Assistance (ODA), the diaspora is its sole external financial resource. Therefore given the current international focus on the role of remittances in 'development' finance <sup>3</sup>, Eritrea deserves more attention as a rather unique case, both due to the scale of its remittance dependence, and the government's ability to *control* this forex.

- Thus, secondly, the government's ability to control and channel what are - in almost all other cases in the world - *private* transfers is worthy of attention. The GoE is dependent on remittances for survival. Thus its de-facto control and surveillance of its diaspora and the funds they remit appears unique. Indeed in the Horn of Africa thus contains two diametrically opposing 'models' of acute remittance dependency: Somalia at one end of the spectrum, with no centralised power able to channel remittances or indeed coordinate almost any form of economic activity – an extreme form of 'free' market; and Eritrea on the other end of the scale, where a central authority, the PFDJ/GoE, exercises a near total control on the economy and financial flows from migrants.
- Thirdly there is evidence that the relationship between the diaspora, their remittances and the economy is shifting; a hardening of GoE economic control necessitates an even tighter monopoly over forex, at a time when outward migration is accelerating and the government's legitimacy is badly- many Eritreans would say terminally - tarnished.

### **Structure of remarks**

These notes are structured around three principal sections, each with a central question:

- 1. Basic figures on remittances and migration magnitudes: are remittances now declining?
- 2. The nature, operation and trends in remittances flows: are there now signs of a crisis in forex flows?
- 3. The nature of recent strains: the blurring of the public/private distinction; the acceleration of outward migration; what this might tell us about future evolution of regime and economy?

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<sup>2</sup> IMF staff member, talking to London-based economist, March 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For recent examples, see World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects 2006; Economic Implications of Remittances and Migration*. Also World Bank, *Migrant Labor Remittances in Africa: Reducing Obstacles to Developmental Contribution*, Africa Region Working Paper Series No. 64. November 2003. For UK/DfID portal, see the resources and links from:  
[http://www.livelihoods.org/hot\\_topics/migration/remittancesindex.html#11](http://www.livelihoods.org/hot_topics/migration/remittancesindex.html#11)

## Section 1: Basic figures, remittances, migration and the economy

1.1 **Magnitude of remittances.** The most oft cited, 'ballpark' figure for Eritrean remittances in recent years appears to be c. \$400m p.a. Put in the most simple terms (see also the Eads/EIU paper here), and taking the official rate of US Dollar (USD):Eritrean Nakfa 1 = 15, a very simple snapshot of the economy and remittances in recent years, in USD, might look as follows:

GDP	1.2bn
Exports	20m
Imports	700m
Foreign Reserves	25m

Since 1998 exports have been insignificant. These figures suggest reserves are sufficient to cover only 2 weeks of imports. This is critical, any interruption or decline in remittances endangers the GoE's ability to import.

The current account deficit in recent years appears to have been c. 3-350m. Given the above figures, and known lack of other sources of forex (ie export earnings, FDI or ODA), this does suggest c350-400m annual remittances, i.e. c. **one third of GDP**.

The deficit has also been growing, suggesting remittance flows have slowed. There is also considerable recent evidence of a growing inability to import even essential items.

This snapshot is reinforced when we delve into what little data available. Note that most of this comes from 2003/04. The Eritrean government does not publish economic data or budgets, thus even guesstimates of economic performance and structure over the past four years are hugely problematic. International economic reporting all but ceases after 2003<sup>4</sup>. Thus the 'baseline' for discerning what has happened over the past four years is provided by an IMF Working Paper from 2003. The most detailed, albeit now slightly dated, discussion of this can be found in the 2003 IMF report<sup>5</sup>

A detailed analysis of the GoE's fiscal position states:

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<sup>4</sup> Although basic Bank of Eritrea data is still supplied to IMF's International Financial Statistics(?)

<sup>5</sup> IMF, *Eritrea: Selected issues and statistical appendix*, April 2003.

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2003/cr03166.pdf>

The importance of the diaspora for the public finances and foreign exchange is demonstrated by the fact that the level of bonds issued to the diaspora reached 3.1 percent of GDP in 1999 and grants amounted to 3.2 percent of GDP in 2000. On the external account, private transfers from the Diaspora are the largest single source of foreign currency inflows into the country, with the ratio of these transfers to GDP averaging 37 percent over the last ten years.<sup>6</sup>

In so far as they exist, govt planning docs acknowledge the crucial role of the diaspora. Thus while the PRSP process is stalled, the GoE did issue an outline 'MDG Report' in July 2005. This notes that 'The diaspora is one of the most important sources of foreign savings. It was a dependable source during the liberation war. *Actually a significant proportion of domestic household and business saving originates as remittances from the diaspora*' (emphasis added)<sup>7</sup>.

**This highlights an essential element, in that in Eritrea the role of remittances is rather more complicated than in many other countries. Given the critically weak nature of the economy, remittances are the source of a vast portion of formal sector expenditure. GoE finances rest upon it (eg figure from the IMF 'sustainability' report...), not simply in terms of direct taxes on the diaspora, through the '2%' contributions and control of the foreign exchange market, but also through much of the domestic taxation system, in which household expenditure rests on family remittances.**

**1.2 Magnitude of migration.** Data on total number of Eritrean migrants is hugely problematic. It seems plausible that there were c100,000 Eritreans in the high-income Middle East and OECD states in 1991.

One – clearly factually problematic - estimate suggests that 720,000 migrants are formally registered with the GoE, who further estimates 350,000 illegal, unregistered migrants<sup>8</sup>; figures which, even if they include the refugees in Sudan, are difficult to credit. The author of this study, Berhane Tadesse, suggests (drawing on GoE data?) that between 1994-98 443,000 left the country, while between 1999-2003 a further 269,000 people left, suggesting that between 1994

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<sup>6</sup> Yamauchi, Ayumu, *Fiscal sustainability; the case of Eritrea*, IMF Working Paper WP/04/7, Jan 2004, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2004/wp0407.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.un-eritrea.org/mdgr.html>, p50.

<sup>8</sup> Behrane Tewolde, Migration in Eritrea: a brief account, *Journal of Middle Eastern Geography*, Vol 1, No 1 (2005), p3



and 2003 around 20% of the total population migrated. These figures add to the stock of migrants outside <sup>9</sup>.

This data, (apparently drawing on GoE's Department of Migration and Nationalities, 2003) for decade from 1994 suggest the following geographical dispersal of overseas Eritreans:

64% of total migrations are in Su (37%) and Eth (25%), whereas  
36% are in N.America (5%) , Western Europe (15%) Middle East (16%)

To this, one needs to add the latest trend, of young people fleeing since 2004/05 (see Section 3 below). Despite the obvious data limitations, ***overall it would appear plausible to suggest that at least 150,000 Eritreans are now resident in high-income, OECD or Middle Eastern economies and thus able to remit significant sums home.***

## Section 2: The nature, operation and trends in remittances flows

- Need to distinguish between voluntary remittances and the standard payments (2% of salary, plus the surcharges and 'voluntary' contributions during the war) to the GoE.

- **Paradox is that (uniquely in Africa?) one theoretically could have a fairly accurate view of figures for Eritrean remittance flows. This is because a) the bulk are channelled through the Bank of Eritrea, b) detailed records are kept of official payments in each of the Eritrean embassies abroad.**

- **2.1 Composition of remittances:** In essence these appear four-fold

- (1) 2% is the standard diaspora tax/payment, necessary for state 'clearance'. This is effectively a tax on migrants. It evolved from EPLF contributions made prior to liberation. To this have to be added ad-hoc payments, notably during the 1998-2000 war. Those on the minimal, student contribution (say £70 p.a.) seem to have been expected to contribute £500, then £200 to the war effort (?). This does not include other collective 'voluntary' payments, e.g. the 'pound a day keeps Woyane away' appeals etc.

*This standard diaspora tax, or 'clearance' is essential if one is to have access to any form of GoE services (funeral, passport, business licences, export visa for relatives etc etc) either*

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<sup>9</sup> Between 6-750,000 at '91 (Elias Habte-Selassie, 'Homecoming in Eritrea' in Tim Allen (ed) *In search of cool ground; war, flight and homecoming in Northeast Africa*, James Currey, 1996), mostly in Sudan. 82,000 people voted in foreign countries other than Sudan and Ethiopia in the 1993 referendum (Styan, in Allen, p86), giving a rough approximation of the non-Horn diaspora at that point? Say 150,000 incl children?

abroad or in Eritrea. It currently *does* seem possible to visit Eritrea - ie obtain visa and entry clearance – from London, even if you are *not* fully up to date with payments. However, full back payment is immediately demanded if any service is required.

- (2) The second component are other payments to the GoE. These include loans and Bonds to the GoE. There are also fees paid on the ForEx accounts which some migrants established, particularly in order to purchase property.
- (3) Thirdly there are the core demands for family expenditure. These have risen sharply in recent years as the economy has contracted and inflation has risen. As already noted, domestic savings, and taxation on the domestic economy (sales taxes, income taxes etc) are indirectly dependent upon these flows.
- **(4) Finally, there are the de-facto fees that are now being paid in order to get relatives out (punitive remittances, see section 3 ?).**

Evidently a family in the diaspora will remit significantly more than simply the 2% to the government, the whole purpose of remittances being to sustain relatives in country, and - increasingly - to facilitate the departure of family members from the country.

- **A plausible way to envisage the flows is to consider some hypothetical figures. If 10k Eritreans abroad earn \$50k each, their total income is \$500m. If they remitted 1% of their income, this would yield \$5m; 2% = \$10m; if 10% = \$50m etc.**

Thus if 100,000 Eritreans remit say between 6-10% of a lowly OECD salary [say \$50k or £30k] this would yield a total flow of remittances into Eritrea of \$3-500m. This includes remittances comprising all four of the categories of listed above.

## • 2.2 Operation and trends of system.

The GoE has v. effectively run a highly regulated parallel exchange rate; this has been the case since 1991, with several modification since the introduction of the Nakfa in late 1997 <sup>10</sup>. Between the end of the war and 2005, alongside the BOE, the GoE allowed some private exchange, albeit in a market dominated by the agency owned by the party, 'Himbol Financial

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<sup>10</sup> See Styan, ch.10 in in, Plaut, M. Jacquin Berdal D. (eds) *Unfinished Business*, 2005.

Services' <sup>11</sup>. This effectively acted as 'market setter' (the IMF report, apparently oblivious to the politico-economic realities of Eritrea, appeared perplexed in 2003, as to why, given the potential for profit, there were not more such agencies)

• **Changes to Forex control since 2005** Regulation changed sharply in 2005. As part and parcel of gradual squeeze on any private sector activity. One can discern several, self-reinforcing trends here:

- a) Increase in PFDJ economic activities: April 2003 decrees, thence June 2005, enhancing business restrictions
- b) Lack of forex to purchase imports
- c) Exodus of private businessmen (initially of those Ethio-Eritrean businessmen originally expelled from Addis in 98/99, thence indigenous capitalists?).
- d) Far less private funds (loans, investment etc) arriving from diaspora sources.

• **The black market.** There appears to be disagreement over existence and functioning of black market, rates of above the official/Himbrol rate (Nakfa 15 to 1 USD) are reported on offer, or have been recently, in Khartoum, Dubai, Jeddah? On the one hand there are those who report parallel rates of Nakfa22. On the other there are many people who maintain that, in the generalised climate of fear and suspicion, it is now simply too dangerous to engage in private currency transactions.

• **Shortages of Forex.** In most contexts significant shortages should be manifest via movements in the parallel market, but this isn't the case due to the clampdown (above). Thus such shortages can only be surmised via the availability, or otherwise, of imported goods. The lack of vehicles and recurrent fuel shortages since at least late 2004, factories being at a standstill etc all suggest that even the GoE faces severe forex shortages. Recent reports related that Asmara Brewery (often hailed by GoE as success story, being profitable etc) is denied forex for imported inputs and is likely to lay-off staff, following other such industrial plants.

As noted, there has also been a progressive tightening or controls, and successive clampdowns on forex infractions, including the arrest of prominent businessmen in November 2006 <sup>12</sup>

This suggests that the current conjuncture can be characterised by two factors:

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<sup>11</sup> For the Jan 2005 Legal Notice (101/2005), see <http://www.shabait.com/cgi-bin/articles-new/exec/view.cgi?archive=5&num=2839>. On Himbrol, including current nakfa rates, see, [http://www.ertra.com/tmt/faq\\_eritrea.htm](http://www.ertra.com/tmt/faq_eritrea.htm)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/4392/3/>

### **A. A Growing sense of internal economic crisis and forex constraints**

In fact some in the seminar argued that the crisis is now so deep that in fact there is no demand for forex. This is simply because there is nothing to buy on domestic markets. Not only has the franca-valuta mechanism ceased, but any motivation to import, through legal or illegal channels, has gone. There simply is no private sector activity.

**B. The 'externalisation' of the economy and the flows of foreign exchange.** Several of those interviewed suggested that the collapse of the domestic economy is so severe, that Eritreans who can now attempt to keep their forex transactions *outside* the country where and whenever possible. Thus payments for rents, trade, school fees, transport, medicaments etc *within* the economy may be being made between relatives *outside* the economy.

This is enhanced by the fact that so many private business agents are operating outside the country. They have ceased trading with Eritrea, turning back to trade via Addis, or the burgeoning networks of Eritrean capital in other SSA capitals (Luanda, Kampala, Nairobi etc, even Kinshasa now apparently boasts several Eritrean businesses...) as well as OECD and Dubai etc.

### 3 • Migration and financial suasion, control and coercion, 'exporting people'

- We noted already the 'control' aspect of the 2% GoE 'clearance' system, surely unique in SSA. Evidently this also provides an astonishingly efficient system of surveillance, which Eritreans migrants appear unable to either escape, or bribe their way around...

- We noted above large numbers, particularly of 'Sawa' youths, leaving. This has been focus of much diaspora, and GoE, attention in the past year<sup>13</sup>. However, there also appears to be a significant forex aspect to this. Data suggests around 1000 people per month fleeing to Sudan in late 2006/07. It is unknown how many migrate/flee to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

- Currently the 'fees' for escaping are reported to be c. USD 200-500 (Nk3,000-7,500). These evidently have to be supplied by relatives outside... thus there is an important economic dimension to these 'chains of migration'. However, such 'fees', or bribes to escape do not

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<sup>13</sup> By 2007 the relocation of Sawa to a less accessible spot in the lowlands had been mooted.

appear to be ultimately going to private agents, but to the GoE, often via security and military networks. Once a youth 'escapes' from Sawa their families are then fined Nk50,000 (USD3,300) both as a 'punishment and deterrent' and ostensibly to cover the cost to the state of the escapee. Threaten relatives with jail... thus establishing a sort of 'fee' of around USD3000 for each escapee.

- Some Eritreans now see an extreme form of cynicism and opportunism emerging; the GoE is able to extract extra remittances from those abroad as they 'buy' their young relatives out, they then have pump more funds in order to avoid elderly dependents being arrested. Meanwhile the GoE knows that in time those youths who do 'escape' will themselves begin remitting, simultaneously increasing financial flows into the country, while decreasing demographic and political pressures at home.
- It is not so much that this is v significant in terms of overall sums; (even if 20,000 youths 'escape' this amounts to an additional c\$50m ...) However, what of how that money 'works' within the system? Particularly if it goes into the military. Its importance is heightened by reports of increasingly autonomous networks within the military. The latest news relevant to this is the establishment 'free zone' in Tesseneye, one of the key conduits for those fleeing to Sudan.

Thus these networks and circuits of fees/forex appear to be part of an opaque 'privatisation' of GoE agencies. Of course they've been 'private' in the sense they used markets for the state. But where does this then shade into private gain which does NOT go to the exchequer, or when you cease believing in the exchequer? Or indeed when it is the only way to purchase fuel or food for your troops? There are currently no overt signs of such disintegration etc, However, how long can such trends continue for ?

- Actual journeys, traffickers via Khartoum. The most detailed and graphic evidence is from recent reports on Eritreans and others fleeing via Libya <sup>14</sup>. Eritreans' plight in Libya highlighted by the stand-off with Malta in July 2006, and further publicity in early 2007 <sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Human rights Watch, *Stemming the Flow: abuses against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees*, September 2006. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/libya0906/libya0906webwcover.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> On Malta <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5197590.stm>. On Kufra <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6492961.stm>

## Conclusion and Futures

- **Corrosion of legitimacy** and of the GoE's economic coherence. The centrality of economic flows to the coherence of the dwindling core of the PFDJ seems undeniable. The economic influence of the Red Sea Trading Corporation etc is evident, but what is less clear is how its networks of finance overlap with, or depend upon, forex via the diaspora continuing to flow through GoE coffers. What happens, both economically and politically, as the system ceases to be oiled by forex?
- **'Self reliance'** takes on a different meaning, the economy itself is increasingly reliant on the migrants and their cash.
- **Future role of remittances** Not so much economic survival, but 'economic revival'; it is inescapable that remittances will play a key part in whatever happens next. The evolution of the EPLF/PFDJ and its relationship to the diaspora and their finances is explicable only because of the high degree of voluntarist legitimacy that the Front had. The current administration no longer has such political or moral legitimacy, but it has, for the time being at least, firm control of the machinery of remittances. Given the experience of the past few years, it is far from sure that any subsequent Eritrean administration will have anything like the same legitimacy or control.

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**Appendix 2:**

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**'Border Conflict' - 1998- 2000 and its Psychological Impact on the Youth<sup>16</sup>**

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**08/07/2006**

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<sup>16</sup> *The paper was revisited on March 2007 to reflect the current situation in Eritrea*

# Table of content

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>MAP</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>29</b>
1.1 General	29
1.2 Background	30
1.3 Political and economic impact	31
<b>2. Objective of the Study</b>	<b>33</b>
2.1 Context	33
2.2 Problem statement	35
2.3 Rationale for the research	38
2.4 Methodology	39
<b>3. Finding</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 Context and aim	41
3.2 Conceptualization of demobilization and reintegration	46
3.3 Finding from the first demobilization and reintegration program	48
3.4 Demobilization Approach	56
3.5 Pilot Phase of Demobilization	58
3.7 Case Study of Psychological victims	65
<b>4. Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1 Conclusion	73
4.2 Recommendations	74
<b>Reference</b>	<b>75</b>



## Abstract

After 30 years of armed struggle for independence, Eritrea enjoyed only seven years of peace and stability before another war with neighboring Ethiopia resumed in May 1998. In this short peaceful interval tremendous efforts were made to establish and develop the basic institutions of the new state that is, rebuilding the infrastructure and rehabilitating the social and economic bases.

Unfortunately with the return of a war these achievements had been to a large extent reversed. The reversal of positive development in general applies to all sectoral activity but especially to the youth who were mobilized/remobilized and armed. Currently more than 230,000 - 250,000 soldiers are under arms out of which the majority are youngsters. Present Eritrea offers a rare opportunity to probe and examine the two demobilization and reintegration exercises occurring within a decade and its social and economic impact in the same country but in very different political context.

When the so called 'border war' started in 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia veteran combatants who were demobilized in 1993 and had just embarked on reintegrating themselves into the mainstream of society were again remobilized thus, their civilian life was completely disrupted. For example, the members of National Service who had taken basic military training since 1994 were ill prepared for the new intensive war of attrition and their new tribulation left many of them disoriented and exposed to psychological disorder.

Cessation of hostilities, or at least the ebbing of widespread-armed conflict, provides an opportunity for war-torn peoples and countries to rebuild their societies, economies, polities, and start reconstruction. This is certainly applicable to the Eritrean context because demobilization and reintegration of combatants in 2007 is as crucial as it was in 1993. Here at least two main reasons can be mentioned why reintegration of former combatants is fundamental for rehabilitation/reconstruction and economic revival of the Eritrea economy. First, social ties [for the veteran] with their families or origin had been dislodged and their diverse experiences made it difficult to settle into the sort of 'normal' life, which they might otherwise have had. Second, since soldiers form a sizeable group, Eritrea's political stability and economic development depends to a large extent on their successful reintegration of former combatants/soldiers into the mainstream of the society.

The 'border war' experience has a profound impact on social and emotional development of combatants in general and members of National Service in particular. Unlike the relative rather conducive era of armed struggle, military environment and **regression of political will by the ruling elite** during the 'border war' inhibited the development of social values which had started to germinate and take root in post-conflict Eritrea. The brutal war experience and the abuses they are undergoing under their own leaders have seriously traumatized a sizeable number of veterans and National Service combatants. If the ruling elite fails to tackle the psychological problems faced by members of National Service and hard core combatants and genuinely embark on demobilization and reintegration thus reduce its force drastically economic development will only be a mock. The ruling elite are hemorrhaging the country and are draining the meager resource on military expense which is direly needed to revive the economy. Down the road this is hampering the economic and social revival of the country and definitely will haunt Eritrea for foreseeable future both economically and socially in which its negative impact will glow more with the elapse of time.

The 'border conflict' stopped in December 2000 and currently the country is back to square one. Majority of the Eritrean armed forces needs to be demobilized and reintegrated into civilian society. But contrary to the immediate needs of the country the ruling elite declared

on May 2002 a new campaign to undermine the demobilization and reintegration program designed in 2001 to elongate its control on the military institution. The newly declared campaign 'recovery and economic development' was initiated on mid of 2002, and was baptized as ***Warsay/Yikaalo***<sup>17</sup> ***campaign***.

The author feels timely to thoroughly study the past demobilization and reintegration experience and draw lessons learned or not learned. The study is a humble contribution towards reintegration exercises of combatants in general and the youth in particular by focusing mainly on social aspect of their life.

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<sup>17</sup> *Warsay* mean a young soldier usually member of National Service. *Yikaalo* means a former veteran fighter who had participated in the armed struggle to liberate Eritrea.

MAP

**Regional Administration of Eritrea**



# **‘Border Conflict’ – 1998 to 2000- and its Psychological Impact on the Youth**

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 General**

Eritrea, Africa's newest state, situated in the northeastern corner of the Horn of Africa, gained its de-facto independence in 1991, having won an outright military victory against 30 year long Ethiopian occupation. Eritrea's independence was sealed by a referendum in April 1993 after a UN monitored referendum, in which 99.8 per cent of the population including the people in Diaspora favored independence.

As the result of intensive fighting and atrocities against the civilian population committed by the Ethiopian State, hundreds of thousands of people fled their villages or homestead both within and outside the country. Many people moved to more secure areas, mainly in the liberated areas (i.e. become internally displaced), yet more crossed the borders to Sudan, Ethiopia, the Middle East and other western industrial countries, seeking security and protection. Others however remained in their villages despite permanent threat.

The death toll at the end of the war – 1991 - was estimated at more than 200,000, among them 65,000 fighters. In addition 70,000 civilians and fighters were injured and had suffered from various disabilities. Children who lost either one or both parents are estimated at 90,000.<sup>18</sup> More than 800,000 Eritreans had fled the country, 500,000 to the Sudan and 300,000 to different destinations in industrial countries and the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> In 1991 there were 100,000 displaced people inside the country, who needed immediate attention.

The end of the Cold War and a decade of economic deterioration created an atmosphere, favorable to downsize military capacities or capabilities. Countries emerging from armed conflict, but also the ones, who were at peace, were exploring ways to reduce their military expenditure with a view to shift scarce resources towards redressing persistent poverty. In this rapid changing situation integration of ex-combatants in general and the young combatants in particular constitutes a vital element in the transition from war to peace, recovery and economic development.

In May 1993 just after independence the Eritrean government decided to demobilize 60 percent of its 95,000 combatants. Until 1997 nearly 54,000 combatants were demobilized out of which 13,500 were women combatants. Different economic programs were designed to help ex-combatants reintegrate into the civilian society. Psychosocial interventions were markedly absent in the process of demobilization and reintegration programs. Nevertheless the process of reintegrating former combatants in Eritrea with its entire shortcoming was evaluated as a success story.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately with the return of an outright war situation in 1998 these achievements had been to a large extent reversed or nullified. The 'border war' affected not only the demobilization and reintegration programs but also the

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Foreign affairs, 1994 Asmara, Eritrea.

<sup>19</sup> Eritrean Relief Agency, 1991 Asmara Eritrea

<sup>20</sup> For more on this see Kees Kingma (2000) 'Demobilisation in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Development and Security Impacts'. Macmillan Press Ltd, London.

rehabilitation, recovery and economic development efforts which was derailed when younger National Service were drafted into the front from their assignment in the civil service. Besides, veteran ex-combatants were also re-mobilized and currently more than 230,000 - 250.000 soldiers are under arms.

Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a peace agreement on December 12, 2000, calling for the permanent termination of military hostilities and the peaceful settlement of the boundary issue through the establishment of a neutral Boundary Commission to delimit and demarcate their common border. On April 13, 2002, the Commission announced its ruling. Eritrea had accepted the ruling but Ethiopia after playing hide and seek game for couple of month had officially declared on the fall of 2003 that it will not be abided by the neutral boundary commission verdict and the process of demarcation is taken hostage. To-date the 1000 kms boarder with Ethiopia is still not demarcated.

Though the situation in the ground is no peace no war it is useful to thoroughly study the past demobilization and reintegration experience of 1993 – 1997 with view to compare it to other Africa experiences and draw lessons, thus, prepare the ground for the forthcoming genuine demobilization and reintegration exercise in the foreseeable future to revive the economy.

## **1.2 Background**

The 'border conflict' between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which started on May 6, 1998, was fought at high humanitarian and economic costs. In Eritrea, some 1.1 million people were displaced and substantial damage was inflicted on social and economic infrastructure. Loss of agricultural output and port revenues, decline in private sector activity, combined with a doubling of military spending put the economy under severe stress. During the two years of war the Government of Eritrea (GoE) mobilized a large number of men and women into the rank and file of armed forces, thereby constraining the availability of labor force in all sectors.

In November 2000 as a commitment for peace GoE announced to demobilize 200,000 of its combatants in phases. The government of Eritrea asked World Bank and UNDP to play the leading role in the conceptualization of the demobilization and reintegration program. According the National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration program (NCDRP)'s objective of the demobilization component was to reduce the 300,000 - 350,000 military personnel by approximately 200,000 over a 12-18 month period and design different programs and to implement them within five years.<sup>21</sup> The objective of demobilization and reintegration program was to help the country to recover from the so called 'boarder war' damage by creating opportunities to demobilize combatants/soldiers. According to the proposal developed by the end of 2001 implementation was conceptualized on phased approach that start as Pilot program so that experiences could be gained to tackle the bigger demobilization and reintegration program effectively. A Commission was set up in 2001 and was entrusted to co-ordinate this huge task of demobilization and reintegration program by decree.

Following the signing of the Peace Accord in Algiers, on December 12, 2000, GoE asked the international donor community to launch a multi-donor assessment

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21 NCDRP Document Presented to the Donor Community in September 2001 Asmara Eritrea.

mission to prepare a comprehensive Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DRP). A donor pledging conference was launched in October 2001. The donor community by in large were enthusiastic and committed to fund 130 million, which was two-third of the money needed for the whole demobilization and reintegration program.

After devastating war the task of recovery is usually tedious, because rehabilitation includes resettlement and reintegration of not only combatants but also returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), which had to be prioritized and coordinated with the overall rehabilitation programs of the country so that recovery and economic development could kick in. Out of the total estimated population of 3,088,454, about 31 percent (961,404 persons) had been internally displaced or was directly affected by the war. Currently 70,000 IDPs are still living in shift-camps. In addition, more than 1.4 million drought-affected persons were requiring food assistance in 2004. In total, 72 percent of the Eritrean population in 2003 is receiving either full or partial food assistance.<sup>22</sup>

The Irony is the Eritrean government had stopped the food aid and asked the NGO or bilateral organizations to leave the country. The elite argue that food aid makes the population lazy and instead they said the way out is self-reliance. Yes in a way food aid might have a trade-offs but revisiting the Eritrean development contour tells another thing. The Eritrean People Liberation front and the current ruling party had utilized food aid properly by putting mechanism such as food for work or implementing other service rendering projects (digging bore-hole, building clinics, schools, terracing ... est.). The ruling elite is shying from this only to hide its repressive face from the international community and to suffocate the weak civil society so that it can not grow to be check and balance.

### **1.3 Political and economic impact**

Eritrea is suffering a substantial economic stress since the 'border conflict' which started in May 1998 and is still continuing because of poor management of the elite to-date. The direct war damages influences, humanitarian needs for the internally displaced; forces mobilization of more than 300,00 - 350,000 men and women at its early stage; demands increase in military spending, results decline investment in private sector. Loss of agricultural output and port revenues, a decline in private sector activity, and a doubling of military spending, have put the Eritrean economy under severe strain. There was an average growth of 7 percent in the years 1994 - 1997; however the real GDP growth rate fell significantly during the 'border war' and reached negative 9 in 2000. Inflation went from 1.3 percent in 1997 to 26.8 percent by the end of 2000. The budget deficit increased to 59 percent of GDP in 2000 from 5.6 percent in 1997. Currently border war waged from 1998 - 2000 is still threatening Eritrea's efforts of poverty reduction. Eritrea is one of the poorest countries in the world with US\$ 210 per capital.<sup>23</sup>

The mobilization and maintenance of the troops enlisted for the war had also contributed negatively to the fiscal stress. The maintenance costs with regards to the wage bill (not included individual food and household allowance) were

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<sup>22</sup> The government of Eritrea and UNDP drought appeal in mid 2003

<sup>23</sup> World Bank Aid Memoir February 2001

estimated at an average of US\$ 60 million per year. This expenditure is a significant drain on the meager national budget. The absence of a significant proportion of the labor force from active economic life had/has negatively impacted the economy. Over the last three years many government offices, public and private enterprises had come close to a standstill for large part of the manpower, including staffs in key positions were mobilized to the frontlines and still they are in the front or absconded and are refugees in other countries.

The Government's Damage Assessment team estimated the cost of destruction to households, public infrastructure and private establishments at US\$564 million, greater than the nation's GDP at the time (US\$509 million in 2000).<sup>24</sup> The war affected nearly 2.2 million people, of whom an estimated 1.1 million were directly displaced. The bulk of IDPs were elderly, women or children, and many were forced to live in camps for much of 2000 and into 2001.<sup>25</sup> The 'border conflict' primarily affected two regions, Gash Barka and Debube. Together, the two regions contribute nearly 70 percent of the nation's grain production.

There has been reasonable progress in stabilizing the economy through the first quarter of 2001. Inflation fell from 26.8 percent at the end of 2000 to 13.5 percent in June 2001 due to tight fiscal policy that limited recourse to domestic bank financing of the deficit. The budget deficit fell from 48.2 percent of GDP for 2000 to 35.8 percent of GDP on an annualized basis at the end of the first quarter. Nevertheless, the high budget deficit and inflation shows that the task of stabilizing the economy remains an ongoing process. The key will be reducing defense expenditure. Defense expenditure has fallen from US\$ 227 million in 2000 to US\$ 162 million on an annualized basis in March 2001, but at 21.8 percent of GDP still offers considerable scope for reduction.<sup>26</sup> However, this can happen mainly through demobilization not through other miracle.

Besides its political and economic reasons, the process of demobilization and reintegration program of ex-combatants is vital for the recovery and economic development of Eritrea. Successful demobilization and reintegration efforts can build mutual confidence among former adversaries; thereby reducing the risk of renewed hostilities and can create grounds for the youth to engage once again in productive activities. Experience of many war-torn societies indicates that when effective demobilization and reintegration programs were not or could not be implemented effectively, fragile peace arrangements could be jeopardized and conflicts re-ignited and thus taxes the youth of the countries involved in conflict heavily.

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<sup>24</sup> University of Asmara finding of war damage 2002 Asmara Eritrea.

<sup>25</sup> ERREC Needs Assessment 2001 Asmara Eritrea

<sup>26</sup> Ibid



## **2. Objective of the Study**

When initially conceptualized and implemented in 1994 the National Service Program was vital to the overall economic recovery of Eritrea, as it called upon male and female Eritreans between 18 and 40 years of age to contribute 18 months of unpaid labor towards recovery of their country. The first batches of the National service in 1994 were enthusiastic for they felt that they were contributing positively towards **Nation Building** efforts. When the first round of National Service finished their 18-month service they were released and replaced by new military training entrants.

This process continued till the end of 1997 and all in all five rounds of National Service had done their duties effectively. After taking military training for four to six month members of National Services were assigned into different line Ministries so as to gain invaluable experience that could in the long-run help them to reintegrate into labor market force. The youngsters have not only provided the much-needed human resources but youngsters were also exposed to rural/urban setting. According to their place of origin youngsters had broadened their horizons of understanding the Eritrean way of life especially the rural setting which was also creating social capital in the process.

In 1994 National Service was genuinely argued that such kind of interaction could stimulate a stronger sense of belonging, **National Identity** and love of work among members of National Service particularly the young recruits/draftees. But currently in the pretext of 'border war' National Service of 18-month service is indefinitely taken hostage by ruling elite with no specific date of ending. The whole demobilization program is currently on hold with no significant demobilization activity. Seven years after the cessation of hostilities those mobilized/remobilized to defend the country are still serving forcedly with nominal salary in different sectors of the country while the regular army is paid lucratively, which also include other benefits. It is very hard to imagine let alone understand how this setting is expected to create a harmonious society based on equality that is eventually expected to work towards the recovery and development of the country.

In order to minimize implementation mistakes in the process of second demobilization analyzing the current process of demobilization and reintegration while still at its conceptualization stage is vital. The objective of this study is to understand and assess the process of demobilization and reintegration of different categories in post-conflict Eritrea. The paper charts out the study of 1993-1997 experience and puts it as hindsight.

### **2.1 Context**

The liberation struggle started initially as a guerrilla warfare, which was fought by highly motivated volunteers with the aim of gaining **National Independence and Sovereignty**. The recent border conflict, which started in May 1998, and that ended in December 2000 was a conventional interstate war fought by draftee/conscripts. There is clear differentiation between members of the first demobilized combatant's categories and the current combatants slated for demobilization. The members of the liberation front were highly disciplined and politically highly Marxist indoctrinated. After liberation no tangible education was/is going on by the ruling elite to obliterate the militaristic and ridged Marxist attitude

developed during the armed struggle to prepare them for civilian life.

When the 'border conflict' started National Service members were recruited by force and were given military training ranging from one to six month dictated by the military situations on the ground. Unlike the first demobilization which was done by trial and error now Eritrea has properly documented its own demobilization and reintegration experience plus there is ample lessons learned from other countries to draw on to minimize implementation mistakes. What currently is missing is that there is no **Political Will to Demobilize** combatants/soldiers.

The study has thoroughly reviewed the experience of the first demobilization exercise 1993 – 1997 and had draw lessons to help assessing the conceptualization of the second demobilization program:

- ❖ evaluates the overall past training programs and income generating activities for ex-combatants in general and the youngsters in particular; how were they initiated; their funding; administration/finance; management; selection criteria and follow-ups;
- ❖ assess what coping mechanism are put in place to mitigate ex-combatants problems of reintegration;
- ❖ assess the role of civil society in helping youngsters to adapt into the new reality they found themselves in;
- ❖ looks how psycho-social problems of the young generation is addressed;
- ❖ analyses the problems faced by young women recruited in the boarder conflict and the process of their reintegration into the society;
- ❖ assess behavioral and attitudinal change of the young soldiers and its effect on health; and
- ❖ based on the finding conclusion and recommendation are given.

## **2.2 Problem statement**

The young Eritreans who were doing their National Service were suddenly drafted to the front to confront the invading Ethiopian force. But youngsters were ill prepared for an intensive 'border war'. National Service had no prior proper military training that matched the action they encountered in the fronts. The Eritrean loss in Zalambessa was staggering. In the in-depth interview conducted with veterans and members of National Service the battle of Zalambessa was mentioned frequently to elaborate the ill preparation of Eritrean armed forces. As one key informant explained the battle of Zalambessa was:

*He said, "corpses were lying all over the street, many of them with their heads and limbs missing, others with their intestine pouring out. Some were just bloody messes, chunks of flesh and arms and legs were hanging on the trenches. Since it was raining the open trenches were clogged with bloody water, human flesh, and rubble".*

The battle for Zalambessa was Herculean and the attack had lasted for three days. Combatants/soldiers were forced to retreat in disarray and casualties were very high.

The author was motivated to conduct a follow-up study by the finding of survey of March 2001 which was organized by NCDRP. The finding of the survey was alarming to say the least.

*The finding reveals that 13 percent of the combatants openly acknowledged that they are suffering from psychological or psychosocial related stresses and problems.*

The Eritrean society as any other society has a taboo toward mental disease and tries to keep the problem hidden among family members or close relatives. Since 13 percent members of National Service openly admitted that they are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) the real percentage can roughly be estimated as more than 35 to 40 percent.

Life doesn't always prepare us for traumatic events. Following exposure to traumatic events individuals often develop PTSD, or lesser forms of this condition - with symptoms ranging from nightmares to headaches; flashbacks, withdrawing from people, profound sadness, anxiety, anger, guilt, fatigue, pessimism, sexual problems and emotional numbing. Sizeable members of Young National Service are suffering from PTSD. Unless tackled properly many, perhaps most of these people who are currently wrongly blamed for laziness and put in different *Tehadso*<sup>27</sup> will secretly languish in this camps and are developing variety of distress from which they will suffer for their life.

Like in many other cultures, Eritreans often simultaneously hold parallel 'modern' and 'traditional' explanatory models for mental distress. 'Traditional' stress healing are expressed as hitting on the skull, possessed by evil spirit, epilepsy, tropical malaria, and other traumatic events. 'Traditional' treatment may include holy water (water through the nose – *Minseai*- or splashed – *Mitsefaei*) by traditional healers who may prescribe for example a ritual with a sheepskin (Baja) or fumigation with incense (*Meitan*). Medical services are often used after 'traditional' treatment has failed and as a last resort for peoples' problems.<sup>28</sup>

The Marxist front was not entertaining traditional healer's wisdom. The author had eye witnessed in 1997 highland Eritrea in which traditional healers being witch hunted and humiliated in front of their constituencies. Thus indigenous coping mechanism of stress was weakened, especially in rural Eritrea. Modernization was wrongly conceived as a panacea for all social evils. Historically, community leaders or family elders usually assist their members suffering from psychosocial problems and traditional healers with mental health problems.

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<sup>27</sup>Tehadso is a Tigrina word for rehabilitation. Individual members of army who falloff from the ethos of military is send to Tehadso. Currently the tentacles of its structures go down up to battalion command and use it to suppress dissidents within rank and file of the military structure.

<sup>28</sup> Focus Group Research Report on Mental Illness in Sub-Zone of Segheneyti. Ministries of Health and Labour and Human Welfare. St Mary Neuropsychiatric Hospital, March 14, 2001.

Mishandling of psychosocial problems among the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) combatants goes back to the era of liberation struggle in which such psychosocial problems were wrongly dealt only in relation to **Laziness or Cowardice** by character assassination *Akisu*<sup>29</sup> than digging for fact so as to understand and be able to address the root cause of the problem. During armed struggle era it can reasonably be argued that lack of expertise was the main bottleneck, but now is high time to address the issue properly. The NCDRP is intentionally playing down the March 2001 survey finding by saying "**the finding is claimed but not verified**" which is denial syndrome that is unfortunately highly entrenched in the secretive fighter's society.<sup>30</sup> Unless this issue is unraveled properly demobilization and reintegration program can not be successful.

The reintegration process of returnees would not be complete if it does not take into account their fears, hopes, and attitudes about adjustment or maladjustment within new environments. Adjustment refers here to the individual's (or group's) ability to live and perform various social roles and activities without suffering excessive or unbearable psychological stress. The story of psychosocial (trauma) is the tale of the indomitable and indefatigable human spirit to survive and adapt.

Other significant context that influences the success or failure of demobilization and reintegration process is the way a conflict ends in a given country. The Eritrean liberation war had ended with an outright military victory of the EPLF, without any outside interference, and the immediate departure of all Ethiopian occupation forces. But, the 'border war' between Ethiopia and Eritrea came to an end only as a result of a long process of international mediation and military defeat of Eritrean forces in the third offensive.

The demobilization and reintegration program of February 2001 is also marked by a significant change of attitude of the Eritrean civilian population as well as of the international community. In 1993, the Eritrean civilian population was readily accepting the heroes of the liberation war, to whom they owed national independence, sovereignty and dignity, got a preferential treatment, allowing them to compensate at least partially for their sacrifices. The support that was readily coming from the community in 1993-1997 served as a cushion for former combatants and eased demobilization and reintegration problems. In the second demobilization and reintegration program, **Community Support** is markedly absent due to economic and political situation prevailing in the country.

Since the start of the 'border conflict' economic and political situation of the country had changed dramatically. Currently, the civilian population is also convinced that the whole country has to be compensated for all its 'border war' sacrifices. For example, spouses or fathers who were forcedly drafted to the front left families behind [without any support to fend their own survival] now demand substantial help to be on their two feet. The study explores current situation in Eritrea by mainly focusing on the youth and analyzes the problems created by lack of **political will** to implement demobilization and reintegration program.

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<sup>29</sup> Akisu is an Arabic word which means non functional especially for weapon.

<sup>30</sup> National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration Program, Eritrea 2001

On the political context the monolithic EPLF started to polarize by the fall of 2001 into **Reformist and Government Supporters** and had created a new political situation never heard in the history of the front. The ruling elite were ill prepared to handle the new ordeal wisely and reacted irrationally. Than creating a platform for dialogue [to sort-out problems] the ruling elite started cracking down reformist who happen to be higher government officials of the ruling party and individuals whose only crime was speaking their mind during the hiatus of free press.<sup>31</sup> Being a member of EPLF the author vividly recall, that there was no history of political tolerance developed inside EPLF during the prolonged-armed struggle. Political differences were usually dealt either by character assassination of the individual/s or blaming the individual/s as scapegoat for whatever went wrong under the sun.

The ruling elite used September 11 incident as appropriate time to crack down and silence the reformist in the pretext of 'national security' and put eleven of the fifteen members of National Assembly who signed the petition letter behind bars. Besides, couple of elders who asked platform for dialog and more than fifteen journalists who were members of private newspapers is imprisoned with out being charged and from the fall of 2001 the country is effectively military state. The new political situation unfolding in Eritrea has created a new dynamism to the second process of demobilization and reintegration. Though the negative impact is easy to see and predict the real political, economical and diplomatic harm remains to be felt tremendously in the near future.

Therefore the so called second demobilization and reintegration exercise is being implemented in a very sensitive political situation. The success or failure of the whole demobilization and reintegration program depends mainly on the **political will** and commitment of the ruling elite. Political will was not an issue in the first demobilization and reintegration program of 1993- 1997 and in general can be evaluated as economic success story. But now **political will** is the bottleneck that is holding the demobilization and reintegration program hostage in order for the ruling elite to stay in power.

To date, the ruling elite had demobilized around 65,000 combatants and the biggest of this chunk are disabled, chronically ill, pregnant or lactating female combatants. The Irony is that the ruling elite are still recruiting nearly the same number in name of 'National service' youngsters in its rank and file. The donor community had shy away from supporting the demobilization process since 2005 and is currently embarking on reintegration projects based on community development in general. The ruling elite brings excuse to the table for every failure it encounters and use the 'border war' to waive any issue that lead for democratization. The answer for **Every Burning Issue** is "it is not its time until we demarcate our boarder with Ethiopia".

### **2.3 Rationale for the research**

The success of reintegration of ex-combatants in war-torn societies depends to a large extent on the climate of peace or violence prevailing in the community into which former combatants/soldiers are expected to reintegrate. The cessation of armed conflict can present an unprecedented opportunity for war-torn countries to rebuild their political institutions, augment their economic assets and embrace

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<sup>31</sup> During the 'boarder war' (in 1997 2001) the ruling elit had allowed free press and dossed all of them when they start to air for reform.

reforms that have been elusive in the past. Once the dust of fighting starts to settle many issues come to the forefront, but one of the many recovery interventions that beg solution is genuine demobilization and reintegration of combatants/soldiers and usually, without demobilization there is no recovery and Eritrea can not be an exception.

The study presents the finding of demobilization and reintegration program and focuses on the problems encountered by combatants in general and young members of National Service in particular. The 1993 – 1997 demobilization and reintegration are analyzed critically so that lesson could be drawn. Then, the study charts out the reintegration of the young soldiers within the broader program of rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict Eritrea. The country was expected to demobilize 200,000 soldiers in phases starting on October 2001.

#### **2.4 Methodology**

The study was conducted in February - April 2003 and continued to the fall of 2006 after the author was forced to go to exile and left the country for good. He had the opportunity to discuss with former National Service members who has absconded the rank and file of the army in Nairobi, Kampala, Kigali and Washington DC. Names are not mentioned or given pen names for obvious reason – security of the individual and his/her family. It utilized different methodological approaches - qualitative analysis, participatory rapid appraisal assessment (PRA) reinforced by group discussion and key informant interviews so as to gain insight as well as knowledge of the current situation of ex-combatants in general and young National Service members in particular. In order to have a back ground for the current study the author had presented his comparative study on the reintegration process of former combatants and refugees in post-conflict Eritrea as a literature review which was conducted in 1998 -2001.<sup>32</sup>

In the study of 2002, in-depth interviews were informal with semi-structured questioner as benchmark. Benchmark questionnaires were prepared to allow young soldiers to raise issues of their concern. 400 ex-soldiers 'between' 20 – 30 of age were randomly selected from the list of 200,000 individuals slated for demobilization. Valuable information were culled out but for the security of the individuals the author is not in liberty at this stage to write about it but time will come to share the points raised at some stage. The study is also enriched by interview with personnel who were/are directly or indirectly involved with the reintegration programs who are currently working with the government, the 'Youth Association', the 'National Union of Eritrean Women', private sector and international agencies or organizations. The author conducted focus group discussion with former members of the army who are leaving as refugees.

The data source drawn for the analysis is both secondary and primary. The secondary data source includes reports from line Ministries – Such as the Ministry of Defense, Health, Agriculture, Local Government, Eritrean Relief Refugee Commission (ERREC), NCDRP documents, reading from selected academic, journalistic and different materials written in relation to Eritrean youth and demobilization and reintegration programs. The primary source covers interview of

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32 For interested individuals the finding of the study is published by the Red Sea Press in 2004 "Wake Up. Hannal Reintegration and Reconstruction Challenges for Post-Conflict Eritrea"

youth and individuals related with youth activities and focused group discussions conducted with key informants.



### **3. Finding**

#### **3.1 Context and aim**

The 30 years long liberation struggle was typical guerrilla war fought by highly motivated volunteers with the aim of gaining national independence and sovereignty, the so-called 'border war' between Ethiopia and Eritrea fought from May 1998 until December 2000 was a conventional interstate war. It had similarities with other wars in Sub-Saharan Africa in its regional dimension i.e. co-opting or co-operating with opposition groups or secessionist movements thus contributing to the ongoing instability in the Horn of Africa by arming dissidents and attempts to undermine positions of adversaries. The proxy war that unfolds recently in Somalia is a live example in which the fact in the ground is still fresh in our mind.

But 'the boarder war' was unique in the **sense that it was the only recent armed conflict in Africa fought by regular armies according to the rules of conventional interstate war without involving civilians as combatants**. Some commentators relate the action to that of First World War situation because massive numbers of soldiers were killed in the wave of assaults. Although the exact number of loses is contested by dissidents and independent annalists, the government of Eritrea announce the list of names of 19,000 soldiers killed in action on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2003.

The greatest difference between the war of liberation and the 'current border war' is certainly the way the armed conflict came to an end. The Eritrean liberation war had ended with an outright military victory by the EPLF, without any outside interference, and the immediate departure of all Ethiopian occupation forces. The so-called 'border war' between Ethiopia and Eritrea only came to an end as a result of a long process of international mediation, and after the Ethiopian army had defeated the Eritrean army and occupied large parts of Southern and Western part of Eritrea. The Peace Accord provides an opportunity to deploy 4200 strong UN peacekeeping force along a 25 kilometers **Transitional Security Zone** inside Eritrea, after withdrawal of the Ethiopian army, which was – more or less - completed by the beginning of March 2001. These by itself have its own dynamism in the process of recovery, which is beyond the scope of this study.

The caseload of internally displaced people (IDPs) is much higher than it was during the liberation struggle. During the recent war 1.1 million Eritreans – that is more than one-third of the total population – have been forced to leave their homesteads to be located in the war zone or areas occupied by Ethiopian troops. Contrary to the good harvest of 1997, Eritrea had experienced its fourth consecutive year of prolonged drought since 2000, thus increasing the number of people living on relief aid to 57 percent of the entire population.<sup>33</sup> Eritrea had seen a bumper harvest in 2006 but reviving the agriculture sector especially the replenishment of the live stock will need at least another two good seasons to kick-off to the stage it was in 1997.

Also the heavy damages inflicted by the Ethiopian troops in the invaded regions of Southern and Western region need to be repaired and land mines had to be

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33 ERRECHumaniterian Appeal of 2003 Asmara Eritrea

cleared before returnee start working on their own fields. This unresolved returning of IDPs and old case load of refugee problem in particular will hinder the revival of the economy. The bread basket of Eritrea Western Low Land is still not free from land mines and encroachment of Ethiopian soldiers or Eritrean insurgency armed by Ethiopia. More than 75,000 Eritreans were evicted from Ethiopia, separating fathers from their women and children and creating a population of abandoned and homeless children and frustrates the recovery demand of the country.

The context in which the present demobilization and reintegration exercise is implemented is also marked by a major change of attitude from Eritrean civilian population and the international community approach/mitigation to conflict. In 1993, the Eritrean civilian population was readily accepting the heroes of the liberation war, to whom they owed national independence, sovereignty and dignity, thus got preferential treatment, allowing them to compensate at least partially for their sacrifices. In 2001 the situation of the whole society had undergone rapid change.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the world had changed tremendously in its approach concerning conflict mitigation and resolution. The Eritrean liberation struggle can be considered as the last of a series of wars shaking the yoke of colonialism, which was generally seen as a legitimate undertaking. In this context the leaders of successful liberation wars like Yoweri Museveni from Uganda, Meles Zenawi from Ethiopia and Isayas Afworki from Eritrea was applauded as a 'new breed of African statesmen'. These proved wrong when it comes to the transition process of power to civilian government and acted exactly like their predecessors.

The 'border war' with Ethiopia spawned deep political and economic crises, which will haunt Eritrea for the coming decades in its rehabilitation and recovery endeavors. The ever-deepening crises entailed unprecedented human-rights violation, which shattered all hopes of democratization. It was naively thought that the autocratic elite government will eventually democratize Eritrea and crown its people with life of dignity, freedom and justice but unfortunately it had squarely proven wrong in the last 15 years of '**Provisional Government**'<sup>34</sup> and its political legitimacy is deteriorating drastically specially in the last three years.

After the signing of peace agreement with Ethiopia, internal politics got sour between those who championed democratic change (implementation of the ratified constitution, election, rule of law, accountability and to work on meritocratic base) and questioned how the three-year war were conducted. The reformist raised the following questions in the proceeding of 'national parliament'. Was it possible to avoid the war or cut it short once it had started? Does the 'provisional government' of Eritrea have exhausted all venues for peace? Had the government prepared all resources needed to defend the country? Were human and military resources properly utilized? Why was election not conducted? Why was the ratified constitution not implemented? It is a futile attempt to find answers to the million questions related to the war situation but is worthwhile to explore issues already raised by reformists so as to avoid future pitfalls.

Initially most of the members of Central Committee of the ruling elite were for

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<sup>34</sup> The current ruling party is a 'provisional' government and had not conducted a single election since the country is liberated.

change and reform, but only 15 individuals had actually signed the **Reform Document**.<sup>35</sup> Out of the ones who signed the open letter for reform and change eleven are put behind bars since 18 of September 2001 and to date with out being charged individually. All **Private Newspapers** are shutdown and more than 20 journalists', student leaders and elders who tried to mediate between the reformers and the president are all detained without charge. The disappearance of political motivated individuals is increasing on daily base and thousands are languishing in fox whole GOD knows where and only time will tell the number and currently it is estimates in tens of thousands. Despite enormous pressure from several human rights groups, no formal charges have been presented against all those detained so far. The where about of political prisoners remains unknown including to their families? The ratified constitution of 1997 is not yet implemented and the long awaited promise to hold election is shelved somewhere in the president office covered with dust.

The credibility and legitimacy that was dearly earned and owned during the prolonged war of liberation is unfortunately now history only to be remembered as nostalgia. Generally there is no support by the majority of the Eritrean population to the ruling elite. For example, nowadays people are terrorized and are in a stage of complete withdrawal. It is very hard to find individual/s that airs their concern openly for fear of jeopardizing their personal safety or that of their families. For their credit, veteran combatants were at least known for their outspokenness during the era of struggle. Now it is very hard to believe this were the some people who had waged people-centered war in the 70s and liberated their country.

The ruling elite views repression as a viable alternative to the legitimacy it had lost. As an outcome the government is not getting feedback from the general population. Years had elapsed since it had started listening to it-self only thus its days are numbered Military courts, "lynch justice," and unofficial prisons are established. Intimidation, illegal arrests, assassinations and "disappearances" had increased – perpetrated either by official security forces or disguised military security from the five zonal administrations. The regime recognizes its best chance for survival is by engaging in indiscriminate reprisals, often resulting in massive human rights violations against regions, identity groups or political opponents. We can say with certainty that Eritrea is a police state governed by small group of elites who mostly comprise new entrants to the hierarchy with no power base of their own.

Public discourse is limited to official views or those of a few different political factions. Expression of opposing views is forbidden. Non-violent resistance and political demonstrations are banned. It is illegal to get together more than three without asking for approval from the ruling party. Hardly few institutions and procedures exist for fostering discussion of different social, economic, and political alternatives. The absence of open public debate reduces the scope of peaceful conflict management, since opinions cannot be peacefully exchanged. The political system receives no information about the degree of acceptance of its decisions and continues to apply erroneous policies which potentially worsen the conflict.

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<sup>35</sup> Nearly all members of the ruling party agreed that there is a need for change and revisit what went wrong that the country intered in the war of attrition. When it come to signing the document that spells dearly what should be done to go forward only 15 individuald signed the reform document and send it to the president.

Deviating opinions may be expressed only by irregular and unpredictable conduct outside of established mechanisms.

The situation is deteriorating on daily base and economic and political situation is getting desperate. It is only a matter of time that Eritrea slides to the rank of Failed State. For example, the majority of the population who had sent their breadwinners cannot afford cooking and is surviving on one-day meal taking only bread without other ingredients. The subsidized bread currently costs one Nackfa in 2003 compared to 20 cent before the 'boarder conflict'. Now this opportunity is not available and you have to cue the whole night if lucky to get five breads of loaves per family and it is rationed. In the in-depth discussion elders who prefer to remain anonymous share their worries and related the current situation unfolding in Eritrea to the last demise days of Mengistu in 1989-1991.

During the 'boarder war' nearly 10 percent of the entire population or more than 50 percent of working age of the population were mobilized/remobilized. The percentage is even higher for men, as they form 80 percent of the fighting force. This drainage of the labor force had a tremendous negative effect on the economic and social life of the country, which in certain sectors can be explained without exaggeration as a standstill. Besides to fund the war effort the country is [in large parts of scarce material and financial resources had/is] diverting resources from productive sectors to the military. Demobilization and reintegration is meant to reverse this trend and free up all kind of resources for development but unfortunately is not taking place.

The ruling elite had demonstrated its commitment to demobilization only on paper. In reality, nothing is done to address the demobilization and reintegration of combatants concretely. It is argued that without the boarder demarcated implementation of demobilization is next to impossible. But if there is political will you can demobilize and reintegrate combatants into the society but if need arises you can remobilize them again. That was what had happened in 1997.

Former combatants were demobilized but when security situation demanded their presence they throw down what they had acquired since their demobilization and rushed to the front to defend their country on their own accord. Than building on the commitment of the society the ruling elite is paranoid and is running the country as if it is in a war situation or running a shop. If one observes the Eritrean National Television all programs are geared towards war. This by itself have a psychological impact on the population in general and the young generation in particular for they are brought up in militaristic atmosphere with pictures of dead soldiers littered all over the fields.

Generally the young generation is feed up with the war mongering of the ruling elite and is clearly verified in the in depth interviews conducted with the ones who had absconded the rank and file of the Eritrean Defense Force. As a result thousand youngsters and veteran combatants are absconding from the front and are asking asylum in the neighboring countries including Ethiopia and a sizeable number had already reached Western countries and had applied for asylum. A country, which was considered hope of Africa only five years ago, is now suffering from **Basic Human Right which is lack of rule of law and constitution**. Unfortunately, the

young nation will also suffer from brain drain for foreseeable future because any one who got the opportunity to go out of the country is not willing to return.

### **3.2 Conceptualization of demobilization and reintegration**

According to the NCDRP documents the main objectives of demobilization and reintegration program were:

- **to contribute to economic recovery and fiscal stability through reallocation of public resources from military to social and economic investments;**
- **to support demobilization and reintegration of up to 200,000 soldiers into sustainable productive activities, in a phased program expected to begin with pilot program in November 2001 and continue by phases for 24 month and finish the whole demobilization within five years; and**
- **to mobilize and strengthen the capacities of local implementing partners, such as government ministries and departments, local and international NGOs, private sector firms and community organizations, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of services to demobilized soldiers.**

#### **Target groups**

The 300,000 Eritreans who had been mobilized by general conscription during the recent war came from different categories:

- 40,000 soldiers of the regular army,
- 40,000 re-mobilized ex-fighters (out of 54,000 demobilized during 1993 – 1997),
- 220,000 people who had been in the National Service (those who were doing their national service when the war broke out, plus those who had been trained before), militia or retired fighters who were considered as reserve army.

An estimated of 200,000 soldiers were listed to be demobilized progressively, with priority treatment for chronically ill, disabled and female soldiers. With the intensity of the recent war the caseload of disabled soldiers is expected to be very large. In order to target the beneficiaries of demobilization and reintegration program properly a representative sample of 3000 soldiers was selected randomly. The finding was:

- 54 percent are between 20 and 29 years of age;
- 16 percent are between 30 and 34 years of age;
- 49 percent are married (95 percent of spouses of respondent undertake household activity with no monetary income);
- 73 percent are heads of households and the average family size is 5,9;
- 47 percent are single;
- the main skills were farming 28 percent, driving 17 percent, masonry 16 percent, carpentry 10 percent;
- 16 percent consider themselves disabled; and
- 13 percent claim that they have psychological problems.

The survey indicated that if discharged:

- **36 percent would want to go farming (40 percent own livestock, 52 percent have access to farm land and, of those 53 percent own the land and 44 percent indicated that the land is family owned);**

- 28 percent would continue with their old job (77 percent had worked before being mobilized);
- 73 percent would return to their families and relatives for assistance, 43 percent to private organizations and 27 percent to friends (94 percent of respondents live with their parents or families);
- 10 percent would want to pursue higher education; and
- 10 percent wanted training (54 percent indicated that they had skills and 45 percent indicated that they do not have skills).

**The major information that they required is:**

- 61 percent employment opportunities;
- 42 percent access to land;
- 32 percent housing;
- 30 percent education opportunities.

The general assessment is that most National Service members are literate and have a home to return to. Many have skills and pre-mobilization work experience as well as access to land. At the same time, very few own any asset other than land and livestock and the incidence of disability and illness appear high. But social re-integration is expected to be very hard. As indicated above the ones who openly acknowledged they are suffering from psychological problems are 13 percent. Since psychosocial problem is not acknowledged by the very organization that is supposed to help then the task of social reintegration will be very hard.

When the finding of the survey was interpreted in 2001 it was presented It was interpreted by the NCDRP as **claimed but not verified**.<sup>36</sup> Taking the denial nature of the ones who suffer from psychological or psychosocial problems the finding is disturbing to say the least. If we take into consideration the counseling and rehabilitation capacity of the country [only one psychiatry doctor and four psychiatry nurses are available currently] the problem that is currently looming into the country is overwhelming. The legacy of post-conflict had already started to be seen in Asmara and most big towns of the country. The number of disoriented former soldiers and the number of suicide rate and alcoholism is increasing steadily. When the author raised the psychosocial problems looming in the country with the ruling elite, response was not encouraging. But this acute social problem cannot be denied indefinitely for it is there and needs to be prioritized and addressed immediately in line with the endeavor of recovery if the aim is to make difference.

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<sup>36</sup> 2001, National Commission for the Demobilization and Reintegration Program for donor conference Asmara Eritrea.

### 3.3 Finding from the first demobilization and reintegration program

#### **Marital status and family relationship**

The divorce rate is very high compared to the ratio in the community. One of the main reasons for divorce was inter-cultural marriage. During the armed struggle, usually the couple did not live together as they were assigned to different units in different places and often spent not more than a couple of days together during common leave. Also there were no material problems they had to attend to for EPLF took care of everything, even if it was not much that was provided.

*Marital status and sex of ex-fighters*

Sex	Marital status				Total
	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	
<b>Male</b>	22 (6%)	180 (48%)	1(0%)	35 (9%)	238(64%)
<b>Female</b>	1 (0%)	94 (25%)	4 (1%)	35 (9%)	134 (36%)
<b>Total</b>	23 (6%)	274 (74%)	5 (1%)	70 (19%)	372 (100%)

Source: Mehreteab 2001

Another reasons for divorce lies in problems encountered with in-laws. In the field the fighters had learned to disregard ethnic and religious differences, but unfortunately their civilian relatives had not reached that stage and often-rejected sons and daughters in-law for not belonging to their ethnic or religious community.

#### **Expectation and reality**

During the long years of struggle for freedom combatants had build up strong expectations of 'decent life'. They believed that all their problems would be solved once Eritrea attained her independence and their expectations concerning professional and social opportunities were especially very high. The explanation mellowed to the combatants was that **all problems would be solved once Eritrea attains its independence** and no one had prepared the former combatants to face up to what is awaiting ahead. After liberation the majority of combatants are facing problems in leading their living and their expectation of a reasonably decent livelihood is vanishing in front of their eyes. More than half of the interviewed ex-fighters (56 percent) responded that their expectations were not matching with reality.

*Ex-fighters' Expectations Matching Reality*

Expectation match with reality	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	143 (38%)	19 (5%)	162 (44%)
No	95 (26%)	115 (31%)	210 (56%)
Total	238 (64%)	134 (36%)	372 (100%)

Source: Mehreteab 2001

Their lack of fulfilling own expectations is creating disillusionment, which is vividly experienced especially by many veteran combatants.



### **Reception of local community**

When they first came 'home', ex-fighters remember the attitude of the civilian population towards them - as one key informant from Senafe elaborates it, "It resembles a honeymoon". Everybody was euphoric, those who came back and those who received them, all showed how happy they were although they might express it differently. The homecoming of their sons and daughters who fought for the country's independence was a great event for all community members. Nevertheless, from the beginning some former fighters were not warmly welcomed. They vividly remember that some family members were not keen to have them back. Because they feared sooner or later would have to share housing, land, and other property.

Another fact that must be taken on board is that returning fighters and to lesser degree refugee often feel guilty for not having been able to meet the high expectations of their family or relatives who had missed their support for so long. According to Eritrean custom the expectation of elderly is to be taken care off especially in their old age by his/her sibling/s. Abraham, a key informant, put his feelings in the following way, which represents the dilemma former fighters find themselves in after independence:

*All these long years of armed struggle, Teckle had survived with this feeling of guilt and not shouldering responsibility for his family. When they were given money for the first time in 1991<sup>37</sup>, he spend it to buy cloth for his father and mother and felt good that for the first time in his life he was able to repay the love and affection they gave him (Massawa, 19 December 1998).*

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<sup>37</sup> Every individual fighter was given 500 Birr in 1991 to buy civilian cloth.

### **Finding own place in the society**

Former combatants slowly had learned from their bitter experiences to choose what suits them best to reintegrate into the civilian society. The author had discussed with one veteran combatant who is leading his life as an entrepreneur in Keren. From the many in-depth interviews conducted it became clearer that the former fighters who were brought up in the cash-less society are slowly catching up. Haile Teklemikael is a veteran fighter who joined the armed struggle in 1975. He is married to a fighter and has three children. Both were demobilized in 1994. Before their Demobilization they were living in Asmara. They got 20,000 *Birr*<sup>38</sup> for their Demobilization money. He had discussed with his wife how to use their severance money.

After long discussion the first thing they agreed was that they could not make a living from their scarce resource by living in Asmara. Haile said, 'Asmara is for those who have money and support from family or relatives'. We have neither of them, so Haile decided to go around and look if there is any thing he can do. Before Demobilization he was working in Keren and decided to start his feasibility study in the place he knows better. When Haile was looking for the possibility of promising investment he found out that there was no glass workshop in Keren. Returning to Asmara he took three weeks training as an apprenticeship in a known glass workshop and mastered his new skill (Keren, 23 April 1997).

Haile is working in the glass workshop since 1995 and it seems that he is doing fine. When the author discussed with him in March 1999 he reported that although currently other glass workshops are open they are still earning a modest income. This illustrates how former fighters are slowly making tangible progress towards their economic reintegration into the market economy.

From the above paragraph we understand that Haile had done feasibility study [on his capacity] and secured a job that suits him best. But the invaluable experience gained during the armed struggle is neither recognized nor accredited and is hindering former combatants' mobility to secure jobs that can help them reintegrate into the civilian society in the process. For example, when Haile was asked what grade he was? His response was fourth grade. Haile was fourth grade in 1975 that was the year he joined the armed struggle. How is his experiential learning to be categorized or accredited? Is it logical that skill only to be measured by the parameters of formal categories of education? Here the formal categorization fails us terribly. On top of this shortcoming if programs are designed based on criteria used for formal education criteria something is wrong with the whole formulation of the system. In order for the new nation to benefit from the experiential learning of its nationals, this area needs a thorough study as how to utilize the human resource and unless it is done soon than later it will be wastage of a rich resource. Unfortunately the scope of such study is beyond this paper but is an interesting area of study.

### **Land problem**

In rural Eritrea, arable land is allocated on the basis of membership of a particular

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38 Birr was the official Ethiopian currency in the independent Eritrea till they issued their own currency in mid 1997

community. Membership is based either on common descent or residence. Access to arable land in terms of ownership or usufruct and is regarded as an inalienable right of every recognized member of the communities concerned. When the author was asking whether returnees could get land in their village, usually the response was: “yes, there is always land for our own people, meaning those who had fled their village.” But it was often added that there was no or little land available for returnees who are newcomers. But according to ERREC documents there is no land problem and is a testimony how far is the ruling elite detached from the society.

Nevertheless former fighters who returned to their villages found it difficult to obtain land in highland. One option was to move to an agricultural settlement in the lowlands and thus eventually creating demographically generated tension. A few others chose to form a ‘work-team’ and go into sharecropping. But many ex-combatants remained in towns because they have no access to land, posing both demographic and structural generated problems. There is scarcity of arable land, and that trying to sort out the problem involving the society the ruling elite issued a political decree in 1994 that states all land belong to the state. In a nutshell this is land mine that can explode any time and have the potential of destabilizing the country from its roots and should be dealt now than later. Issuing decree can never be a magic solution and the ruling elite should revisit the land proclamation to redress the mess before it is too late.

For example, returning refugees from Sudan to Eritrea, more than 85 percent of refugees and majority of former combatants originally from highland had settled in fertile lowland areas at the desecration of the ruling elite. They have become more numerous in lowlands and changing the demographic composition of former inhabitants. Symptom of tension is there and is getting deeper with the insensitivity of the ruling elite. It is a matter of time before things go out of hand.

The fact that in some regions due to an influx of large numbers of returnees and scarcity of land, many young combatants, especially from southern zone (Senafe area), immigrate to the Arab Gulf States in search of work which is leading to demographic imbalance. Consequently, agricultural production at home has been declining because women do not traditionally participate in all these activities. On the other side the remittances of emigrated family members is the basis of survival of many Eritreans, although according to the key informants the amounts tend to diminish:

*Our families and relatives were sending money to keep us alive, but now situation had changed. There is peace in the country and you can work. Besides they have their own life to look and they want to return home. But this can be done only if they have money, so they need to save in order to make it and this is understandable (interview in Akordet with key informant Salih Suleman 13 March 1999).*

In the tradition of various ethnic groups involuntary absence from one’s community does not result in loss of land rights. But according to the legislation enacted in 1994, all land is now vested in the State. In the long term the enforcement of this law in a country where land is not just a source of livelihood, but above all a source

of identity, is disruptive. When returnees were asked to rank the problems they had encountered after their return, 69 percent ex-fighters related the main problem to lack of securing land.

When the author was discussing with anonymous higher officials about the reason for this decision, the answer he got was, “the government wanted a once-and-for-all solution to the problems associated with land use, but as you know it was obvious that the decree will not work. The attachment of the Eritrean peasant to land is legendary and it is impossible to find an all-encompassing solution with out involving the population.

### Perception and attitude

Even in homogenous society tension can arise for variety of reasons, difference in age, sex, wealth, status. In the case of a heterogeneous society such as in communities or areas where local people had to accept the presence of former combatants, it can be the outcome of poor communication, false perceptions, or/and incompatibilities of cultural and religious practices and values, and, of course, conflicts of interest.

*Current Perception of Returnees of the Host Community*

Sex	Ex-fighters perception			Total
	Bad	Medium	Good	
Male	44 (12)	62 (17)	132 (35)	238 (64)
Female	53 (14)	56 (15)	25 (7)	134 (36)
Total	<b>97 (26)</b>	118 (32)	157 (42)	372 (100)

Source: Mehreteab 2001

The frequency of tension between former combatants and members of the host society is a good indicator of their tolerance, acceptance and ultimately their reintegration. The above table shows that 26 percent of former fighters rated their situation as bad.

### Family relation

Family relations are a vital element of social cohesion and are highly valued by Eritreans in all walks of life. Whereas most refugees left as families, at least as a group of family members, fighters were forced to cut all relations with their families, often for the whole time and spent the good part of their life in the field. Therefore one of the important problems faced by former fighters is the loss of ties with family or relatives leading subsequent disorientation. For many former fighters, the EPLF had effectively replaced the family. After demobilization many fighters felt being abandoned, or even **subjectively felt sent away from their warm house EPLF to the cold outside world**. This sentiment is especially strong with former female ex-fighters.

*Ex-fighters' family contacts and their personal perception*

Personal perception after demobilization	Contacts with family during struggle		Total
	Yes	No	
Bad	14 (4%)	83 (22%)	97 (26%)
Not good or bad	24 (6%)	94 (25%)	118 (32%)
Good	20 (5%)	137 (37%)	157 (42%)

Total	58 (16%)	314 (84%)	372 (100%)
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Source: Mehreteab 2001

The above table shows that the great majority of ex-fighters [84 percent (314)] had no contact with their families during the armed struggle.

After long years of absence and a drastic change in values and life style, it seems quite understandable that many ex-fighters felt detached from their families. In the informal discussion conducted with former ex-fighters it was emphasized that the situation at the initial stage of independence the communication conducted between combatants and the community was as if in different wavelength. But with time it was fine tuned and currently a harmonious society is developing which creates platform for reintegration. That doesn't mean that there are not rooms for improvement.

### **Comradeship**

The basic training of fighters sought to build group cohesiveness and equality at the expense of individuality, and did so through a front that made prior family identities irrelevant. The following comment from a former barefoot doctor, describing his feelings for his wounded comrade, can illustrate this:

*All I could think of was how I could get her to a safer place and attend her injury. It didn't occur to me that I was exposed. All my heart was focused on how to save her life. If I try to remember the past incidents it is hard even for me to grasp why I acted that way. I think we were a mutual survival society. The readiness to act on behalf of the other gave us new energy, blood and life. Without reflection of what are at stake you subconsciously act without thought of self-perseverance and yes it is incredible to believe it now but it was there. I still believe that it will stay forever with me for it is what life with a comrade means to me (Suleman Tumsah Hargigo, 12 February 1999).*

The sacrifice of life in the spirit of comradeship ensures a measure of immortality as the fallen live on through the memories of survivors. Meaningful ties with comrades on the front line empowered fighters to act when action seemed impossible. The belief was that one **'couldn't let the other men/women down'**, that is when the action got tough. Everyone was expected to sustain commitment even under fearful circumstances. Veteran ex-fighters most frequently list essential skills as teamwork, self-discipline, and the ability to cope with adversity. The following comment elaborates it more.

Most veteran ex-fighters share a similar perspective. As many said:

*Each and every individual has his part to play. If not, the whole situation falls apart. The motto was, you win or die and perish together (Summary from interview conducted 1999 with different veteran fighters in Akordet).*

Demobilization leads men and women of the same unit along different pathways in the post-war era, entailing less contact and producing wide social differences and less commonality in interests. Varying material condition and work experience also favor friendship instability over the course of life. But there is also a strong sense of social solidarity and belonging, despite demobilization and dispersion. There are

collective portraits, a common memory. Their story extends back in time toward the historical context of the armed struggle.

Berhane is a veteran ex-fighter who was demobilized in 1994. On top of the demobilization money he received, his brothers and sisters helped him to start up his metal workshop. His earnings are decent compared with the average Eritrean income and he has 75,000 Nackfa as working capital. He commented:

*Although economically I am doing fine, after demobilization I felt some how drifting apart. I am missing the life in the trench for in it I remember the caring of my colleagues. The love and affection they gave me is irreplaceable by economic gain and this you cannot get it even in your dream when you have changed to a civilian. I always felt at ease with my colleagues for they were ready there when I need help. You get help even before you ask for it, but in civilian society it is the other way round. People ask, 'how was life in the jungle'? As far as I am concerned the armed struggle was/is home to me, but the civilian life is indeed a jungle which I do not have any clue about (interview with veteran fighter Umeredin Omaro Demas, 14 September 1999).*

In order to minimize misunderstanding and to iron out the difference arising from experience and accommodating platform has to be set up where these issues could be discussed. The problems faced by former fighters, ex-refugees and members of host communities must come out in the open, so that they can help in developing a common understanding. Such a process might help in developing tolerance within the society, which by itself is the sign of a healthy environment, which can promote the reintegration of former combatants by breaking the barrier of misunderstanding. It should be understood that **whatever money is poured into assistance programs cannot set right the misconception created by difference of experience.**

If trauma and resulting depression is not properly addressed scattered social ties can limited economic capacity can become an obstacle to good communication. When ex-fighters lack self-confidence and support, they might feel isolated. This can mark the beginning of a tendency to take the law into own hand. The consequence may be a reversal of reintegration and nullification of prospects for creating a coherent nation.

Economic opportunities are pivotal to the adjustment of returnees to conditions of civilian life. They certainly facilitate the rate and the scope of integration. However, they don't suffice. To achieve integration social and psychological aspects have to be taken into consideration. The role of extended family or peer-group affiliation should play a role of safety net. This dimension was not given due consideration when designing the first demobilization and reintegration programs.

### **Lessons learned (1993 –1997 programs)**

- ❖ In the conceptualization of second demobilization and reintegration program, social reintegration is considered as important as economic integration, which was not properly addressed, in the first demobilization and reintegration program.
- ❖ The institution in charge of Reintegration II has a clear-cut structure and a clearly defined responsibility: it is a co-coordinating /supervising structure not intervening in practical implementation, whereas *Mitias* was entrusted with multi tasks of implementation, facilitation, lobbying and coordination demobilization and reintegration program.
- ❖ In the present demobilization and reintegration program starting from the beginning gender aspects are conceptualized and mainstreamed in the overall demobilization program. After the establishment of the NCDRP in May 2003, the commission had deleted the gender section from the chart. The argument for doing so is argued that all projects will be engendered and thus there is no need to have special unit for gender. These will be faired in the process of intervention.
- ❖ The training component of the present demobilization program is to be developed according to the needs of the labor market. Due to a total lack of labor market information designing of training was ad hoc to say the least. In the second demobilization program qualifications acquired through informal training will be recognized but how is to be accredited is not clear.
- ❖ Government institutions will not have monopoly in the implementation of demobilization and reintegration but seeing the development so far the author is skeptical. It is envisaged that NGOs and the private sector will contribute to recovery according to their comparative advantages.
- ❖ The first demobilization and reintegration exercise was based on the result of an extensive survey carried out before the start of the activity. A similar exercise is under way so that the various components of the DRP can be designed according to the actual profiles of the soldiers to be demobilized.

### **Lessons not learned or not used (1993 –1997 program)**

- ❖ Up to now there is no comprehensive national framework for overall recovery, which would have to be, worked out by the government.
- ❖ An integrated approach comprising Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (the so-called RRR or triple R approach) and addressing all categories of war-affected people is still lacking.
- ❖ Integrated approach comprising Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration if implemented properly could lead setting up responsive institutional arrangements with specific target group approach. In the reintegration process of Eritrea a number of organizations had designed community-level interventions aimed at specific target groups such as ex-refugees, internally displaced people, deportees or ex-fighters. Many of these interventions of 1993-1995 are similar if not identical in nature and target to that designed by others institution, which exist side by side with other vulnerable group in the same geographic locations. It was this problem that forced the merger of ERRA and CERA who were taxing the same basket. If repatriation and demobilization involve different actors

and have to follow distinct patterns, the situation changes afterwards, in the reintegration phase. Once the refugees have become returnees and the combatants have been demobilized their needs are not so different any more and can often be addressed by one program under one authority.

- ❖ External technical assistance is still mandate driven, target group oriented and given in a Piece-meal which is hampering the establishment of the above-mentioned national framework. Demobilization and reintegration support programs experiences of 1993 emphasize the importance of self-help and community support for successful reintegration. Currently this kind of intervention is getting lip service only. In reality participation of beneficiaries and local communities in designing programs was and still is missing. The support measures offered do not build on the personal coping strategies of the people and the ruling elite are not bothering to revisit their own experience. The main argument that readily comes from the ruling elite is "the government always knows better what is good to the combatants" what combatants should do is only to follow instruction from the top.

### **3.4 Demobilization Approach**

As soon as the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) liaison officers and military observers were in place and the deployment of the UNMEE peacekeeping force had started, the GoE announced its readiness to prepare the demobilization and reintegration of its army. Willing to build on international experiences and best practices it asked in December 2000 for international technical and financial assistance for the forthcoming Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DRP). The government's request came at a critical time, at the appropriate moment to grasp the opportunity that the potential peace dividend presents.

The DRP was expected to facilitate the reallocation of public resources from military expenditures to productive and social investments, thereby free up resources for development, while demonstrating the government's commitment to the peace process through the effective preparation and implementation of the DRP. A multi-donor assessment mission did the conceptualization and preparation of the DRP during a workshop held in Asmara 'between' 15 January to 8 February 2001; together with representatives from the Eritrean line ministries and various national institutions. The Multi-Donor Assessment Mission was composed of 20 team members, among them four Eritreans.

On the request of the GoE the World Bank acted as team leader, in close collaboration with UNDP. The mission received technical and financial support from the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, the Embassies of Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway, as well as from Consultant Trust Funds from Belgium and Switzerland (GoE, 2001). The objectives of the multi-donor assessment mission were to:

- ❖ provide technical assistance to GoE for preparing and implementing the demobilization and reintegration of Eritrean soldiers into civilian life; and
- ❖ prepare a DRP proposal with GoE to be submitted to Eritrea's development partners for financial and technical support.



According to the draft of the DRP of February 5, 2001 the approach of the DRP is meant to be holistic:

Integrated assessment and planning will be required at regional level to ensure that the return, resettlement and reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returnees and demobilized soldiers is closely coordinated with the rehabilitation programs, mine clearance activities and the restoration of basic services (GoE, 2001).

The fact is that up to now there is no **National Framework** for the overall recovery of the country to unfold. The declared intention is to plan integrated assessment for reintegrating returnees into the society but this is obviously impossible without **Comprehensive National Framework**. The ruling elite need to do its homework and to be honest they were more serious in designing the PROFERI program of 1993 but now it seems they had lost their sense of orientation.<sup>39</sup> Many interventions that are currently undergoing at community level are similar if not identical in nature and targets. It is important to note that many of the components of the economic reintegration package are the same as many of the kinds of assistance envisaged for reintegration of other war-affected groups. The reintegration exercise of 1993-1997 clearly had demonstrated it. But the sad thing is the ruling elite are not ready to learn this invaluable experience.

If repatriation and demobilization involve different actors and have to follow distinct patterns, the situation changes afterwards, in the reintegration phase. Once the refugees have become returnees and the combatants have been demobilized their needs are not so different any more and can often be addressed by one program under one authority (Mehreteab, 2004).

Unfortunately the lessons of 1996 are not taken on board and currently we have a duplication of institutions and activities that militates decisive responsibility for reintegration of refugees and combatants. But in 1996 it must be remembered that the two institutions for the very problem were forced to merge and formed ERREC and although weakened is still functional. What currently needed was to enhance the capacity of ERREC to develop a national co-ordination commission that accommodates the different intervention of bilateral, multilateral and NGOs reintegration interventions for reintegration of ex-soldiers and ex-refugees and utilize to the maximum the meager resource Eritrea is endowed currently.

The project proposal for the social and economic reintegration program that was conceptualized and developed by the Eritrean government with the help of UNDP and World Bank is a very helpful document that had incorporated the lessons learned from the first demobilization exercise 1992-1997 in Eritrea. But it failed to conceptualize a national framework that harnesses the overall reintegration program. In the last three years the spirit of the document is either diluted or marginalized and is to be further tested during its implementation.

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39 For interested individuals read the study is published by the Red Sea Press in 2004 "Wake Up, Hanna! Reintegration and Reconstruction Challenges for Post-Conflict Eritrea".

### **3.5 Pilot Phase of Demobilization**

After the pledging conference the main task of the program was to start with pilot phase of demobilization and reintegration with a manageable number i.e. five to ten thousands soldier and test all the instruments developed to implement the program. The starting date of the pilot phase was announced and the date set was November 28, 2001. After getting experience from the implementation of the pilot phase and amend the mistakes or change the implementation approaches [if need arise] and to proceed to start the first phase with 65,000 to 70,000 soldiers. Thus the experience gained from the pilot phase is very crucial in designing and implementation of the first phase.

To dismay of every one who was keen to see the demobilization program off the ground the government of Eritrea announced it had already demobilized 20,000 soldiers from its army and had also started the pilot phase of demobilization.<sup>40</sup> The implementation of pilot was supposed to comprise soldiers from all categories and needs to be representative.

The Commission for demobilization and reintegration announced in early 2003 that it had demobilized all female soldiers who were working in the civil service and their number is estimated as 3000. The fact was they were asked to sign a letter of commitment to work for two years in the institutions they are currently working. This announcement and implementation of 'demobilization and reintegration' left every one interested in genuine implementation of the program disillusioned. How come demobilizing women soldiers who were working in the civil service sector and ask their commitment to work for two years in their former institution could be considered as demobilization. We consider soldiers to be demobilized as soon as they have been disarmed, receive their formal discharge papers and have officially left the military command structure. If strings are attached to demobilization then it is not genuine endeavor.

In the conceptualization of the program it is clearly stated that it is supposed to be a learning ground for the coming phases of demobilization. The impacts of this mistake is influencing negatively the whole demobilization and reintegration program and need to be corrected before it is too late. Further on as early as 2000 the government comes with a decree that it is embarking on reconstruction and development of the country and made it clear behind the line that it is not ready for demobilization. The government of Eritrea named the development and reconstruction program "*Warsai Yekaalo*" (new and veteran soldiers respectively).

There is no written project document that can help interested individuals to understand the "*Warsai Yekaalo*" program and nobody can tell for sure what it means. One thing is clear, although it means different thing to different people depending in which side they are it ruled out the proper implementation of demobilization and reintegration program as envisaged in the conceptualization of February 2001. *Hadas Eritrea*, the only government newspaper in print in the country propagates the *Warsai Yekaalo* project as a development intervention with no specific program, target or indicators to measure it. Nowadays the ruling elite

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40 The National Youth of Eritrean Youth wrote in its official news paper in the fall of 2001 20,000 combatants were demobilized. Being secretary for the commission the author consulted the authorities and the feed back he got was they were told by the president office.

baptizes everything as *Warsai Yekaalo* campaign and remain to be seen what it will accomplish in the process.

In some official publication of the media the “*Warsai Yekaalo*” program is also stipulated and portrayed as equivalent to implementation of demobilization and reintegration program. The main argument put forwarded is comparative advantage *Sawa*<sup>41</sup> military training institution can give to the training of former soldiers. *Sawa* military training center has the capacity to take big number of the demobilization and reintegration trainee. It is not clear how the government of Eritrea want to reconcile a military training center with civilian training center especially when it comes to funding the training component of the program from donor’s money. Multi Trust Fund Eritrea is lead by the World Bank, which is pledged by the donor communities to help Eritrea get out from war ravaged economy so as to embark on recovery.

The program of “*Warsai Yekaalo*” has shattered the dream of demobilization in general and had negatively influenced the young soldiers’ perception in particular because it asks the commitment of the soldiers to work for the recovery of the country with nominal remuneration for unspecified time. In an in-depth discussion conducted with young soldiers who want to remain anonymous said ‘**we are not seeing any light at the end of the tunnel and the only option left for us is to abscond from the front and go to neighboring countries to pursue new life in exile**’. Others elaborate that they had committed themselves to wait until the border with Ethiopia is demarcated.

There are an increasing number of young graduates who were granted scholarship by the government in foreign countries who are currently not willing to return. Besides a sizeable number of young soldiers had lost their life in the event of crossing the deserts of Sahara or ended up in the prisons of neighboring countries. Unless the issue is addressed from its roots this will haunt Eritrea for foreseeable future for it is loosing the cream of the society.

The National Youth of Eritrean Youth and The National Union of Eritrean Women are not doing much because of their unspecified mandate and role conflict that entraps both organizations. Both are trying to serve two masters - the government and their clients the youth, which is impractical to implement. The political bankrupt of the ruling elite is getting clearer. While the paper is in process of being published Mr. Muhyedin Shengeb, the Chairman of the National Union of Eritrean Youth & Students has defected from the People’s Front for Democracy & Justice (PFDJ), Eritrea’s ruling party, and is in the process of seeking political asylum in the United States.<sup>42</sup>

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41 A military training installation built in early 1994

42 As reported in Gedab News on May 9 2004

### **3.6 Reintegration Components**

The social consequences of uprooting for an individual might be estrangement and alienation from family, friends and close community, the loosening of kin ties and leads to breaking down of support networks. In the villages, from where most combatants originated to which they returned the boundaries between family and the surrounding community are fluid and family ties are interlinked. In the field community support networks was replaced by that of the fighter's network and will take time until combatants establish new web that can tie them with the society again.

Before we consider the issue of social reconstruction and economic recovery, it is necessary to broaden our view of war and its social consequences. However, the difficulty in understanding the social consequences of war is that they tend to be less visible and less tangible than economic and political damages and changes. This leads to the assumption that rehabilitation of war-torn society boils down to economic interventions. Violence and war leave behind much more damage than is met by our naked eye. The deep damage to victim's attitude also is equally important because they leave scars on the human mind in the form of trauma, guilt and hatred, which usually trigger thirst for revenge.

Social reintegration starts with the establishment of contacts between returnees and their host community. It is through interaction between groups that barriers are removed, attitudes changed and differences ironed out. Common interests are recognized and accommodated only if interaction takes place. Appropriate policy measures and administrative support may facilitate this process, but cannot replace it. Here mutual adjustment of groups in Eritrea refers to the values, norms and attitudes developed by an individual by participating in the armed struggle; staying in exile, or by remaining in occupied territory. Except for the stayers, this meant undergoing a process of uprooting for refugees, which was followed by a similar experience when they left either exile or to the EPLF armed forces and similar process, will apply when returning to the mainstream society. This does not mean that the community of stayers did not undergo changes, but they were spared the experience of uprooting.

#### **Social reintegration measures**

According to the documents of NCDRP social reintegration measures consist of first line counseling offered as soon as the demobilized soldier arrives in his/her respective Sub-Zoba/Zoba. It covers the local arrangements, i.e. the role of the local DRP offices and services from Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MLHW). For example, peer group counseling of MLHW is expected to develop a training program and the University of Asmara is expected to be an important counterpart of it. Writing programs in paper and implementing them are two different things. Asmara University is short of staff to properly conduct university training let alone take another burden and MLHW had no capacity to meet this huge task.

In the conceptualization of the second demobilization program it was envisaged to train more than 500 councilors on different levels of the community. MLHW needs to be strengthened to deal with the problem at hand but first it had to acknowledge its shortcomings and keenly work on it. The author had discussed with the

authorities and the response he got in March 2003 was dismaying. The written response of the MLHW was **"there is no psychosocial problem to worry about in Eritrea and our institution has adequate capacity to deal with it"**. The response is unrealistic for a country that had undergone 30 years of war with staff capacity of one psychiatric doctor (now in prison) and two psychiatric nurses. Unless the ruling elite accept the reality in the ground and start tackling the issue seriously the problem could go out of hand and will have dire conscience.

Since there is an urgent need to address the psychosocial reintegration of ex-soldiers, NCDRP in cooperation with MLHW and other relevant organizations should carry out tangible activities with properly developed indicators that can measure interventions conducted. In the conceptualization of demobilization and reintegration program of February 2001 it is clearly stipulated that:

Specialized counseling and referral services should be delivered in co-operation with governmental and non-governmental providers in the following areas.

- ❖ Technical and skills training linked to the needs of the labor market;
- ❖ Employment opportunities within both public and private sector, including public works;
- ❖ Psychosocial and family counseling;
- ❖ Counseling of HIV/AIDS, and malaria prevention;
- ❖ Counseling on the rehabilitation needs of the war-disabled;
- ❖ Counseling on the specific needs of women ex-soldiers and female family members of ex-soldiers.

So far there is no tangible program being implemented in relation to preparation of social reintegration to meet the challenge looming in the country. NCDRP commission argued that the majority of combatants slated to be demobilized is a member of National Service and was not separated from his/her family for a long time. Psychological problem is not an issue (March 20, 2002 *Hadas Eritrea*<sup>43</sup>). According to the NCDRP commissioner's interpretation the survey finding is claimed not verified finding and is not a useful document to plan with.

### **Economic reintegration activities**

Apart from special counseling activities as mentioned before, the NCDRP offer skills development and training programs linked to promotion of employment and self-employment, micro-enterprise support schemes and rural development activities, on the information provided by the labor market and economic sector analysis. The program specifies that all project providers should at least take 50 percent of their participants/clients be demobilized soldiers. In case of disabled demobilized soldiers, family members should have access to all programs.

In NCDRP working document it is identified that large-scale economic sectors are currently experiencing a serious lack of adequately trained workforce and labor pool. Likewise, the micro and small sector (considered the fastest growing employment sector) is greatly under-skilled. Thus demobilized soldiers without mastering the needed skills will have significant difficulty entering into the shattered economy, which has little absorption capacity – particularly in the medium and

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<sup>43</sup> *Hadas Eritrea* is the only local newspaper published by the state of Eritrea.

large-scale formal sector. The reconstruction of the country and the regeneration (and growth) of the economy will require a training system that is market responsive and stimulates increased production and enterprise – particularly in the micro and small sector. From the above points and first demobilization 1993 - 1997 experience it is clear that the one sector that will absorb sizeable number of combatants is the informal sector. But the policy that is working in the country is not conducive because it asks every one to have a license even if the work is only a subsistence endeavor.

The main problems of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system currently are:<sup>44</sup>

- ❖ the capacity to train at a scale needed by the economy currently does not exist and will not be able to cope with the anticipated intake of demobilized soldiers;
- ❖ there is a severe dearth of TVET instructors in all institutions with many instructors still being mobilized in the army;
- ❖ most staff have inadequate formal preparation for their teaching and insufficient contact with and experience in the industry/economic sector;
- ❖ there is a severe lack of training equipment particularly of modern technology;
- ❖ institutions are short of training consumables and are thus unable to provide effective practical;
- ❖ there are no text books available for technical subjects;
- ❖ there is a need to update curriculum and regulations;
- ❖ no capacity exists to train specifically for the micro and small scale economic sector;
- ❖ there is an absence of a national system of certification and assessment which limits comparisons between different training sources and determination of the level of skills acquired; and
- ❖ in general quality in the system is greatly in need of improvement.

It is clear that, unless capacity within the system is rapidly increased, it will not be able to provide for the immediate and substantial challenge faced by the Eritrean economy especially in the immediate period of reconstruction. There is no other way out than to demobilize. The international communities stopped development aid to Eritrea starting from the fall of 2001. Currently Eritrea is getting only emergency aid and as a result all the development projects are derailed. Although the government of Eritrea is claiming its development programs are implemented according to their plan, lack of development aid is hampering the recovery endeavor of the country by enlarge and reintegration program of returnees in particular.

### **Gender dimension**

As experienced during the first demobilization and reintegration exercise women faced much more difficulty compared to their counterparts in trying to re-adjust after having laid down arms. This applies especially to veteran female guerrilla fighters who participated in protracted struggles for national independence and social revolution. According to NCDRP demobilization of women soldiers is expected to encounter minimum difficulties. But this approach is short sighted

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44 2001, National Commission for the Demobilization and Reintegration Program for donor conference Asmara Eritrea.

because women had changed drastically by participating in army life and most interestingly society's attitudes had changed towards them. For example, getting married or finding a love one is harder after staying in the army for they are stigmatized by the society generally and their peer group particularly. In order to assure smooth reintegration of demobilized women soldiers, and to help ease problem of widows and spouses are facing, the NCDRP need to address the gender issue as follows:

- ❖ Full integration of women in all planned program components;
- ❖ Affirmative action to encourage women's participation in all program components;
- ❖ Introduction of special measures to respond to needs and constraints arising from women's special family and community responsibilities, with special consideration for particularly vulnerable women.

The Ministry of defense *Sawa* section and *Segen Construction* had trained more than 2500 women combatants in different technical field and they are working efficiently in the public sector. It is good that they had been trained but that doesn't mean that they will be efficient unless they are remunerated. This positive intervention must be guarded during the process of demobilization because other similar experiences had also documented, once demobilization starts the first category to be lay-off are women. It is bad enough that the one veteran-woman who had sacrificed a lot during the armed struggle were not given this kind of accommodation. Such kind of intervention is a positive for it gives an opportunity for women combatants to gain skill but need to be properly remunerated and enhanced by giving them extra training to be more competitive. Unfortunately the finding of the study pointed out that the issue of mainstreaming gender is once again sidelined as usual.

Despite its good intentions the conceptualization of demobilization and reintegration program in Eritrea has a major flaw. There is neither a comprehensive concept nor an integrated strategy for the overall post-war recovery process in post-war Eritrea for the ongoing programs or projects are targeted group and/or sector oriented. The government of Eritrea did not come up with an integrated strategy through which different organizations and donors can come together effectively behind a Government-lead recovery vision of the transition period. The first demobilization and reintegration support program had also suffered from the same an-integrated approach. It is argued that programs or projects will be co-ordinate at field level, but it is doubtful whether as to say co-ordination of the lower limbs is possible without co-ordination at the head.

The Eritrean Government attempted to modify conventional programs in accordance to its preference for principles of co-operation and partnership. The idea behind this intervention is to ensure the war-born sense of self-sufficiency and independence will not be lost amidst bureaucracy and aid conditionality. In 1993 the Government of Eritrea established a national execution plan through which the integration program of returnees and related development projects were to be implemented. This was to involve the line ministries rather than UNHCR or NGOs. The emphasis was on capitalizing on the experiences gained during the long armed struggle in identifying issues and carrying out development programs. But in the current demobilization and reintegration program it is indicated that implementation of projects or programs will be on the base of comparative advantage. This is a positive trend, which gives space for NGOs to play a role in the recovery program. **The irony is all self-reliance or self-sufficiency points are completely forgotten in the process of the second demobilization program.**

The international actors (NGOs and donor agencies) are not going to provide a solution to the entire problem Eritrea is facing. They can provide small additional resources and will impose their political conditions. In order to decide what works and what does not there is a need to have an overall strategy of reconstruction rehabilitation and reintegration program. A policy framework should be worked out charting out:

- ❖ a description of the target group and its features;
- ❖ the integration strategy;
- ❖ time framework;
- ❖ elements of the program;
- ❖ Institutional responsibilities and budget.

Thus the government can maneuver even if what is being offered by donor is a short-term and piecemeal approach. An overall framework is essential for the following reasons:

- ❖ **to provide a basis for deciding what fits and what does not either in the long or short run and act accordingly; and**
- ❖ **to accept conditions when necessary and when it is important to the overall strategy.**

**It must be equally remembered that the short-term nature of donor funding of rehabilitation programs does not easily lead to achieving sustainable rehabilitation efforts that are directed toward sustainable peace and development. Because of lack of long-term resource commitments by the international community many rehabilitation programs are little more than crisis management interventions. They are neither conceived nor implemented as sustainable programs.**



### **3.7 Case Study of Psychological victims**

The author had conducted in-depth with members of National Service, veteran combatants and their families. The main pattern of their feeling shows the following:

- ❖ shattered, broken, wounded or disillusioned feeling;
- ❖ their responses shows that they will never be the some person or they could not put together their self;
- ❖ they feel bruised to the soul, devastated, drifted apart or worst completely crashed;
- ❖ isolated, hopelessness, broken down and no future in life;
- ❖ feel completely different person, for example, they say before their current situation used to be happy but now life is miserable with no hope;
- ❖ they feel that they are dead from inside and totally different from their surrounding; and
- ❖ generally feel they are going crazy or losing their mind.

## **Case one**

### **Event Re-experienced**

PTSD can be viewed as a fear of the unpleasant memories of the traumatic event that repeatedly intrude into one's awareness. Intrusive recollection can occur in the form of thoughts, images, or perception. These intrusions are unwelcome, uninvited, and painful. Berhane Haile is a veteran combatant who joined the armed struggle in 1975. During the strategic retreat<sup>45</sup> he was a front line combatant in the Eastern Front. The Ethiopian fighting jets were in the sky the whole day shelling heavily the retreating force. As a result he had seen members of his unit being blown from his side or mutilated by the heavy artillery. Initially it didn't mean anything but with time it start returning back as nightmares. He said even in his deep sleep he can identify the jet fighters from passengers and it triggers the feeling he had in 1978.

Flashbacks are particularly upsetting form of re-experiencing the traumatic event in this case air bombardment. Haile said, "During the flashback he sees a battle recurring, begins to hear sounds of battle, and feels hot, sweaty, and terrified". He try to help his colleagues but without success. When everything fails he wants to run to avoid injury but his legs fail to carry him. Because of fear of flashback once awoken Haile is afraid to go on sleeping. Intrusive thoughts and accompanying arousal are so unpleasant. People with PTSD desperately try to avoid all reminders of the trauma. Haile was not comfortable to speak openly about his experience even 22 years.

When memories are so painful, it makes sense that one would try to numb them. However, one cannot numb painful memories without also numbing joyful memories. One must suppress all feelings in order to numb painful feelings. So people with PTSD often avoid even pleasant activities, including those that were pleasurable before the trauma. In the in-depth discussion Haile keep on repeating that he is not the same joyful person and he have problem of having fun. He can not tell his experience for fear of judgment. To connect with others, people need to be emotionally open. This is difficult when one is still struggling to contain memories of the past.

## **Case two**

### **The Banishing of Memories**

The attempts to wipe away the memories of war existed as early as the First World War. After the war, families and communities expected the soldiers to continue with their lives and forget about war. In some hospitals ex-soldiers were told, "they should endeavor to banish all thoughts of war from their mind "(Rivers, 1918). This intervention proved to be futile and instead exacerbated their war trauma symptoms. The first person to highlight the role of repressing war memories was W.H.R Rivers (1918).

In his presentation titled "On the repression of war experience", Rivers pointed out that it is not as much the war experiences that cause most distress for ex-combatants, but the attempt to wipe away the memories of war and the "painful affective states" associated with them. Rivers addressed this problem by encouraging the ex-combatants to talk about their war experiences and the emotions associated with them. Rivers noticed considerable

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45 Strategic retreat of EPLF was conducted in the fall of 1978 when the Ethiopian government trained more than 300,000 soldiers and push both fronts from the towns they had captured earlier.

improvement in most of his patients. His principle of facing the painful memories and anxieties associated with war has formed the basis of most successful interventions with ex-combatants.

Solomon Berhe joined the armed struggle at the age of 19 in 1983. He is the youngest of the family and despite having three brothers in the liberation front he decided to join. But once in the army he was not up to its standard. Life was beyond bearable and one evening he told his close friend that he is absconding to Sudan and if he is willing can join him. His friend told him that it is a good idea and asked him where they can meet. They set the departure time to be 2:00 in the morning. Berhe collected his personal effect and some food and waited in the place they had agreed.

His friend told every thing about their plot to the unit leader and accordingly set an ambush to capture them. Berhane met his friend in their arranged time and place and after they traveled for nearly 20 minutes they were asked to stop by the members of their unit. Initially Berhane thought the discovery of their plot was bad luck but with time it became clear that his friend had sold him out. Berhane was sent to the *Halewa Sewra*<sup>46</sup> and after staying for six month for indoctrination and punishment was sent back to his unit. In our in-depth discussion he remembered with remorse the day he was born and joined the struggle. After a couple of month his elder brother visited him in his unit and asked to talk with him alone. His immediate head allowed them to discuss any place they want. Berhane's elder brother was a battalion commander and asked his brother if it is true that he had tried to desert? When he told him that it was true his response was "from now on words don't consider me your brother". If you try to desert for second time your colleagues will not execute you but I will finish you myself.

Berhane feel detached and no one understands his problem. He told the author that there are times when he contemplates to committee suicide. He can not talk about his experience to his friends or close friends for fear of judgment. The secret and fear of being shunned he said is affecting his relation negatively. Berhane is no longer feeling comfortable in social setting and avoids gathering at all cost. If he is forced to attend social gathering Berhane didn't get any pleasure out of them. Of course, to connect with others, people need to be emotionally open. This is difficult when one is still struggling to contain memories of the past.

When asked how he see himself 10 years from now? No matter how good life seems he feel that trouble is coming so there is no future for him. If people are struck in the past and preoccupied with unresolved pain, guilt, anger grief, or fear and desperately trying to block their feeling they will often lack the energy or interest to plan for the future. Feeling numb and closed down Berhane wrongly assumes that he had lost the capacity to feel or be compassionate, intimate or tender. During the field life members of the front are encouraged to suppress their feeling. For example, after a unit participates in action usually there is a possibility to have martyrs. In order not to feel gloomy and be able to forget the colleagues they lost in action they play *Guaila*.<sup>47</sup> However, at some point the healthy experience and expression of grief and pain must occur if one is to become a healthy emotional person otherwise they will end being bumout.

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46 Halewa Sewra is a place for rehabilitation. Individuals who do not abide by the rules of the front are sent for indoctrination.

47 Guaila is traditional dance in Eritrea

## Case three

### Playing down psychological interventions

The perception society and the returnees have of each other is crucial to the success of any reintegration program. It's natural that people who sacrificed a lot for the social and political emancipation to get the recognition they believe they deserve in terms of improved standard of living, educational opportunity and other benefits. The problem arises when there are too few resources to compensate returnees at the level they believe they deserve. Most often the result is resentment. But resentment is a two way street. Once idealizing them as liberators, society begins to see returnees as elites who have monopolized the country's economy and political life. Even if the reality is different, the perception that "everything is for the fighters" breeds societal resentment, which in turn breeds resentment among ex-fighters who find society ungrateful and forgetful of their sacrifice. To the extent people who bore arms once can do it again, resentful ex-fighters pose a serious danger to political stability and social cohesion.

After independence more than 5000 former combatants were assigned in line ministries. A considerable amount of effort and money was put into offering vocational training courses in order to help them develop skills to enable their full reintegration into society. As a result more than 12,000 former combatants had benefited from such interventions. But very little effort was done to include psychological interventions in this reintegration process.<sup>48</sup>

Salma Mohamed Osman joined the armed struggle in 1976. She was demobilized in 1994. Her reason of getting demobilized was having 3 children otherwise she is physically fit. Militarily she was one of the best and reached the rank of platoon leader in mechanized unit. In the in-depth interviews conducted in sessions it became clear that she is suffering from war trauma stress. She was not open to share her war experience and the author only got her divorce from her colleagues but was not mentioned by Salma in the process of discussion.

After getting demobilized she had embarked on more than eight different jobs within six months and spent the 10,000 *Birr* of reinsertion package without any tangible result. In our discussion she was blaming the government, relatives and friends for not helping her. Since she can not take care of her own children her family took over. In the process of in-depth discussions it became clear that part of the reason for losing jobs and inability to handle reinsertion packages was war trauma. In this case some of the consequences of war trauma include difficulty concentrating at tasks, difficulty managing feelings leading to outbursts of anger and aggression. Salma was having difficulty in sleeping.

There is a need to create a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* type to collectively acknowledge the pain and impact of 30-year war. This could enable the nation to understand the pain and suffering citizens of the nations are undergoing and contribute positively towards removing myths and stigma around trauma. To-date little is heard about the traumatic experiences of combatants. The memories of war are still kept only in the minds of the soldiers, who are daily struggling to cope with own problems alone. Eritrea still

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48 2000, Mehreteab, Amanuel. 'Reintegrating ex-returnees and Ex-fighters in the Process of Reconstruction in Post-conflict

Eritrea. unpublished Ph.D. thesis University of Leeds.

doesn't understand the pain and impact of war on her citizen in general and former combatants in particular. As a result, war experiences and soldiers are still mystified and stigmatized.

#### **Case four**

Sahle Asmerom Berhe was born in *Aregit Mekrem* in 1985. He moved from his village to Mendefera to continue his high school study. Just when he was returning from school he was stopped by military police and asked for his identification. Since he was not having his school identification card he was drafted forcedly to *Sawa* in 1998. Although his parent with student identification were unable to secure his release. After one month military he was assigned in division 35 as an ordinary combatant. Sahle had participated in battle but the one he keeps on returning was his third offensive experience in *Dedae Lailay*.

Ethiopian soldiers supported with fighting jets and helicopter gunship was attacking their position. For three intensive days his unit was able to retain its ground and even won strategic position. On the fourth day their immediate commander told them that they are short of ammunitions and instructed every combatant to economize. As a result their firing power decreased drastically. Exploiting this advantage the Ethiopians changed their tactics and started attacking in waves and captured two strategic positions that can enable them to cordon the whole unit. Instantly a command was issued to live in highly fortified position and they were forced to retreat in disarray. In the incidence 12 out of 15 were killed. While telling the story Sahle keeps on saying with remorse 'only the coward like me made it'.

Normally, when the brain perceives a threat, it sets off a chain of physical changes that prepare the body for fight or flight. Messages are sent via nerves and blood-borne hormones to various organs of the body. Muscles tense, the heart beats faster and more strongly and the rate of breathing increases. The brain becomes sharper and able to react more quickly. This is called stress response. Since Sahle is usually re-experiencing the trauma in the form of nightmares and flashbacks. Flashbacks are particularly upsetting form of re-experiencing the traumatic event. In flashbacks, we feel that we are going back in time and reliving the trauma.

Time and again we see traumatized people feel shame and guilt, whether they are responsible for the event or not. Although shame and guilty are similarly defined in the dictionary, guilty usually implies a feeling of responsibility, and shame has come to mean a feeling of badness, of worthlessness to the core. In our case Sahle is experiencing survivor's guilt. Often shame and guilty are experienced as a result of what the survivors see as an inappropriate behavior. In our in-depth discussion Sahle revealed that he couldn't sleep without drinking alcohol. The main reason for his alcohol abuse could be that he is keeping his pain inside - unexpressed and unprocessed.

#### **Case five**

Due to the longstanding negligence of psychosocial and mental health care by former rulers the population addresses local healers for help.<sup>49</sup> The war, the displacement, fear of insecurity, persistent poverty and premature death are life stresses which have caused an array of complaints and symptoms. Some of them can be adequately handled with the help of existing coping strategies including the help of healers, whereas others are so serious that they are not easily managed by traditional methods. Moreover, people often feel their

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49 Primary Health Care Policy and Policy Guidelines. The State of Eritrea, September 1998.

distress as physical pain and go to health facilities. The health staff has limited knowledge of mental health or psychosomatic illness and often sends the people home saying they are physically fine and offering no other explanation or giving them unnecessary drugs.

During the prolonged-armed struggle EPLF was against traditional healers and effectively weaken their capacity in name of modernization. Like in many other cultures, Eritreans simultaneously hold parallel 'modern' explanatory models for their mental distress such as stress, hitting on the skull, tropical malaria, traumatic events or low socio-economic status. Due to the border war the economy of the country is under sever stress and people start going to traditional healers to seek help. Traditional treatment may include holy water (water through the nose – Minseai- or splashed – Mitsefaei) by traditional healers who may prescribe for example a ritual with a sheep skin (Baja) or fumigation with incense (Meitan). Medical services are often used after 'traditional' treatment has failed and as a last resort for peoples' problems.<sup>50</sup>

Sirack was born in 1971 in Asmara from well to do family. His five elder brothers joined the armed struggle and all of them are martyrs. The family of Sirack was very protective when it comes towards their only son. As an outcome Sirack was a spoiled child. He had failed two times in grade eight and was a drop out.<sup>51</sup> When Sirack was roaming around the military police picked him in the streets of Asmara and drafted him to the newly opened military training in *Gahellaie* in 1999. After taking three weeks military training was assigned to the central front. The day he and his colleagues reached the site units were preparing to go to the front and all were quickly assigned to different units. Asked whether he knows the name of his unit his response was 'I don't know'.

The author spoke with his family in *Adi Raisi* a traditional place of healing water suburbs of Asmara. When the author asked the parents why they brought their son to *Adi Raisi*? His colleagues from the army told us that they had done every thing in their capacity but failed to help Sirack. When our relative told us that plenty of people who had the some problem like our son were treated in *Adi Raisi* and had recovered we ventured for it. Therefore we are here to try our luck and hope it will workout. Whatever it takes the family was ready to do to help their only son to recover. The author was also informed that plenty of National Service members were visiting the site to get cured.

In the process of reintegration process there is very few preparation of psychosocial professionals in working in Eritrea with former combatants or returnees. As a result there has been a lack of advocacy in the country on the traumatic experience of combatants. With the tendency of denial in the general population and ruling elites former combatants are left to their own coping mechanisms. The lack of aggressive preparation to tackle the looming traumatic problem in the country means the lack of dearly specialized skills needed to work with former combatants.

### **Case six** **Stigmatization**

Merriam Ahmed Barole was born in Senafe in 1975 from poor Saho family. Her family can not afford to send their daughter to school. Despite their economic problem they managed to send their two boys to school. Being the elder daughter of the family she started taking

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50 Focus Group Research Report on Mental Illness in Sub-Zone of Segheneyti. Ministries of Health and Labour and Human Welfare. St Mary Neuropsychiatric Hospital, March 14, 2001.

51 According to the rules of ministry of education any one who fails in any class more than once is not allowed to continue his studies.

responsibility at the age of 12 because her father passed away of tuberculosis complication. She and her mother were producing *Wocho*<sup>52</sup> for living. In the fall of 1997 Merriam was abducted by military police while going to the market. The family of Merriam was expecting her to return with some staple food but she cannot make it home.

In Moslem society in general and Saho ethnic group in particular is a taboo for girls to join the army. The Saho elders went to the administration office to complain about the incidence. No one was willing to listen to their complains. The youngsters of the Saho community took the law into their hand and clashed with the military police that were guarding the abducted individuals. The youngsters were not lucky to free their sisters but suffered physical bruises under the hands of the military police. Merriam and her colleagues were immediately sent to military training in *Sawa* the same date of the incidence.

After getting military training for two month she was assigned to division 18 and stayed until she was medically released. When the author was discussing with Merriam in his first encounter thought she was medically unfit in the army and teased her that it is good she is back to take care of her family. Merriam's response was, 'yes I will do my best till I pass like my colleagues'. The author returned to Senafe after six month and had the chance to see Merriam again. When initially the author asked to see Merriam her relatives didn't want to tell where she is. But by coincidence the author met her when she was returning from the hospital. At that time Merriam had developed the full-blown symptom of HIV/AIDS and sadly understood the meaning of her comment in his first encounter.

The author went with Merriam to see where she is staying and to find out how was she able to be infected by HIV/AIDS. After so many encounters the author was able to win the confidence of Merriam and in the process she confides to him that one of her colleagues had raped her. She didn't tell any one but when she started showing symptoms were sent to medical center her test result was positive. The medical person told her that she is infected by HIV/AIDS and can no more stay in the army and gave her release paper to go to her family.

Merriam keep on saying that she was a cursed child that was why she is infected by HIV/AIDS. Since it was clear that her disease is *itseme*<sup>53</sup> no one wants to talk or come near her for fear of contamination even her close family. She was completely isolated and stigmatized by the community she was living in. Merriam told the author that a lot of rape was going on during military training. She knows this fact from her colleagues that were victimized but no one wants to talk about it openly for fear of being stigmatized. Merriam passed away early 2003 and didn't have the honor to be buried in war hero's cemetery. The ruling elite is denying the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country in general and the soldiers in particular. But for some one who have the eye to see and ear to listen is enough to visit the war hero's cemetery in different parts of the country. The author had done a small survey for one month in Asmara and found out that on daily base five to seven soldiers were buried in the fall of 2002.

## **Case seven**

### **Suppressing war memories**

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52 *Wocho* is a tradition night doth produced from sheeps wool.

53 *Itseme* is a tigre word meaning do not call its name. This was a name given to HIV/AIDS by the community not even to call some one who is positive HIV/AIDS medically identified by its real name.

In EPLF members of the front are expected to suppress their feeling even towards their family members or love once. Alem Solomon was born in 1980 in Asmara from well to do family. He was very bright in all walks of life and usually stood first not only from his class but also from all the sections in Denden Secondary School. Every body who knows him closely said with confidence he will make it to the university with straight A. unlike Alem his girl friend was not good at class and failed in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade two times and was dismissed from class. When they were having fun on mid of summer 1999 military police were conducting gifa<sup>54</sup>

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54 Gifa is a tigrina word for ransacking and is a frequent activity in Eritrea by the military institution after the boarder conflict.



## **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

Despite the important role of social factors in the life of any individual, especially in the case of people who have been uprooted several times, reintegration programs usually consist exclusively of, or concentrate on, economic reintegration, thus repeating the mistakes of development policies centered on macroeconomic improvements. This was also the case in Eritrea. Programs were oriented more towards dealing with economic problems than resolving social and psychological issues. It was believed that ensuring livelihoods for former fighters and refugees was of foremost importance, and if this were achieved, all other problems would gradually become less pressing. Interviews with former fighters, in particular, have provided persuasive evidence that an integrated approach is needed.

The demobilization and reintegration of ex-fighters represent a great challenge for Eritrea. Since it constitutes an integral part of the overall transformation of Eritrea from a war-torn to a reconstructed country, both the opportunities and the constraints that exist in present-day Eritrea shape this process. But unfortunately the Eritrean Government is not showing political will and as a result the youth is taxed more than his/her fair share.

Given the complexity of rehabilitation in post-conflict situations, it is also important to rethink through whom rehabilitation aid is channeled. NGOs, for instance, have been relatively successful in rehabilitation initiatives in the aftermath of natural disasters such as droughts. But the focus of rehabilitation initiatives has often been on specific operations that have lacked the kind of coherent, integrated framework needed for realistic sustainable macroeconomic and household livelihood rehabilitation. More than anything else successful development requires development of an integrated strategic framework that identifies priority areas, allocates appropriate resources for them, and relates interventions to the achievement of the twin objectives of peace and development.

The primary task in a post-conflict situation is to understand the costs of the war and to establish priorities for economic and social recovery. At the macro level, priorities for economic rehabilitation should include macroeconomic stability and economic reform in order to reverse the extreme macroeconomic disequilibria that characterize highly distorted war economies. These arise partly from flawed pre-war economic policies pursued by governments. Achieving macroeconomic stability is essential for the transition from highly distorted, survival-oriented war economy to a more household-friendly market and livelihood-oriented economy and for providing the basis for sustainable economic recovery and growth. However, models of economic reform in peacetime may be inappropriate and even counter-productive in post-conflict reconstruction unless macroeconomic policies encourage peace building and political rehabilitation. At the micro level, it means providing support to households to rebuild their livelihood systems, paying greater attention to the new role of women in the aftermath of war.

Since the implementation of demobilization and reintegration program is derailed indefinitely the young generation has given up hope. Although to find exact figure is very hard the exodus of the young generation is continuing in an alarming way for safe haven. A country with out the young generation is very troubling. The ruling elite than addressing the issue of PDST from its roots is good at character assassination or calling names, but in the end it will tax the development of the country heavily.

It is normal to wish to flee from painful memories. Yet these memories continue to peruse us, much like a little barking dog chases a person until that person stops, turns, and faces the dog. Only a remembered trauma can be worked through and then let go. Most of the suffering ex-combatants experience is due to the lack of psychosocial interventions offered to them, their families and communities. This is clearly stipulated by the denial of acute problem of psychological or psychosocial problems largely looming in Eritrea by the ruling elite.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

- ❖ **There is a need to create a new institution that can address the reconstruction rehabilitation and reintegration of the entire vulnerable group under one authority.**
- ❖ **Special attention should be paid to the psychosocial needs the different categories of demobilized soldiers (veterans, national service and women... etc.).**
- ❖ **The participation of beneficiaries and local communities in the designing of concrete projects (economic as well as social and political) should be encouraged.**
- ❖ **The special needs of the women soldiers should not only be addressed by specific support measures but should be mainstreamed in the overall recovery program.**
- ❖ **In order to be able to take informally acquired skills into due consideration, a methodological framework for their appraisal will have to be worked out before the different training curricula will be worked out.**
- ❖ **In order to prevent outside assistance from undermining or even killing own capacities, it is necessary to redefine the principles of a national policy aiming at self-reliance as well as the sectors and the space where external assistance would be needed.**
- ❖ **The most important and urgent task is to work out a comprehensive national framework with an integrated approach, which would give the basis for an appropriate institutional set-up encompassing all categories of support measures from relief to development.**
- ❖ **ERREC must be left to work only on emergency related programs or projects for which it has the necessary competence and experience of rehabilitation and reintegration for more than 25 years. Programs or projects should be handed over to institutions that deal with reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration.**

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### **Appendix 3**

HORN OF AFRICA GROUP<sup>55</sup>  
At Chatham House  
A one day seminar on 20 April 2007 10.00 – 16.30

#### **ERITREA'S ECONOMIC SURVIVAL**

##### **Programme**

10.00 – 10.15: Welcome and opening comments (Tom Cargill/ Sally Healy)

10.15 – 11.15: **The historical framework**

Gunter Schroeder (Independent Scholar): 'The Eritrean economy in historical perspective'.  
Discussant: (Richard Reid)

*11.15 – 11.30: Coffee Break*

11.30 – 13.00: **A mobilised nation - benefits and burdens**

David Styan (Birkbeck): 'The uses, abuses and future of remittances in the Eritrean economy'.  
Amanuel Mehreteab (UNDP): Border Conflict and its Psychological Impact on Youth (Presented by Richard Reid)  
Discussant: (Trish Silkin)

13.00-13.45 *Lunch*

13.45 – 14.45: **The contemporary state**

Gaim Kibreab (South Bank University): 'PFDJ Business Interests and the demise of the Private Sector'.  
Discussant: (Gunter Schroeder)

14.45 – 15.00 (Tea Break)

15.00 – 16.00: **Eritrea in the global economy**

Christopher Eads (EIU): Eritrea's macro-economic position.  
Discussant: (David Styan)

16.00 – 16.30 **Closing comments** (Sally Healy).

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<sup>55</sup> The Horn of Africa Group is a collaboration between four London based institutions: Chatham House, the Royal African Society, the Rift Valley Institute and the Centre for African Studies at London University.