



Demobilisation and Community-based Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Maniema, Orientale and Northern Katanga Provinces

1st Quarterly Report to World Bank MDRP
Period 1 October – 31 December 2003
Province Orientale

Overall Goal/Purpose

To effectively demobilize and reintegrate former child soldiers in Orientale, northern Katanga and Maniema Provinces, based on the design of an integrated program to help children leave the armed forces and resume their development within a family and community environment that follows international norms and lessons learned from past and ongoing child soldier demobilization programs

Overview

IRC is one of three international NGO's acting in concert to research, design and implement a program for the demobilization and community-based reintegration of former child soldiers in Maniema, Orientale and northern Katanga Provinces, DR Congo. IRC, along with partner organisations CARE and IFESH, commenced the preparatory phase of the programme following the arrival of the NGO Group Coordinator in September 2003, however this report covers the first three months of implementation from the retro-active start date of 1 October 2003. The official start date of the programme is 9 December, as per the contract, and December is therefore Month One of the implementation period, as detailed in the PIM.

Activities

Research and Analysis

Subsequent to the first field visit by the NGO Group Coordinator to all of the programme sites, IRC invited Marie de la Soudière, Director of the IRC's Children Affected by Armed Conflict Unit, to visit Kisangani, Bunia, Aru and Mahagi and meet with key actors involved in DDR in Orientale province along with selected communities, potential partner organisations and former *enfants associés avec les forces et groupes armées* (EAFGAs). Between 26 October and 11 November 2003, the IRC team composed of Marie, Denise Ulwor, Social Coordinator and Micheline Engiteyo, Program Manager at Zomfi Refugee Camp met with representatives from CARE, ICRC, MONUC, UNICEF, UNDP Save the Children UK, Caritas, ADECO, War Child Holland, Belgian Red Cross, members of local NGO network RODEPO, local NGO, CIP (Centre d'Intervention Psychosocial), former and current EAFGAs and their families.

The above assessment visit, as with all other fact-finding missions, was conducted not only with a view to advising on the implementation of activities, but also to learn more about the root causes of the problem and thereby seek to ensure the durability of the solutions proposed and prevent future (re)recruitment. With regards to the successful reintegration of children into their families and communities, Marie highlighted the danger of setting up residential centres for EAFGAs at a time when insecurity prevents the majority of them being returned to their families within a short period. UNICEF's and other UN and INGO's policy promotes family-based care over residential care for separated children if at all possible, and IRC is proposing to test a system of interim community based care to verify whether this a viable alternative system within the context of DRC.

Transit Care of EAFGAs

As mentioned above, IRC plans to pilot interim community based care as opposed to residential transit centres. The plan to find suitable substitute families willing to take in a child for an interim period will be carried out following the training of newly recruited IRC agents and the arrival of the program manager. The families will receive modest food compensation for the child and at the same time day activity centres will be established so that the EAFGAs will have access to psychosocial activities such as literacy programmes, guided group discussions, theatre, music, dancing and sport, all under the guidance of trained animators. Other non-EAFGA children from surrounding areas would also be invited to attend the day centres in order to facilitate the transition to civilian life for the EAFGAs.

There are currently 3 residential centres (Centres de Transit et d'Orientation, CTOs) for EAFGAs in Bunia; one run by Caritas and funded by UNICEF, which can accommodate up to 500 children, another funded by UNICEF and run by COOPI, which is specifically for up to 35 female EAFGAs and the third run by Save the Children UK, financed by the World Bank and with a capacity for 50 children.

Despite the proliferation of CTO's in and around Bunia, IRC will open day activity centres for children who will be placed with temporary host families in order that the children are occupied and receive support and some education. Plans to open two day centres in Bunia, and one each in Aru, Mahagi and Kisangani at the end of February 2004 are being finalised. Consideration is also being given to the establishment of similar day centres in Bafwasende and Tshopo.

Family Tracing

War Child Holland supports local and international NGOs in DRC with the psychosocial training of staff working with vulnerable children. Their approach to the rehabilitation and reintegration of the children is very much that of IRC's, which is to focus on supporting coping mechanisms and resilience of the child and his/her community or another environment the child finds him/herself in, rather than dwelling on potentially traumatic events experienced in the past. Given that IRC's capacity to train the newly hired staff is limited, War Child Holland agreed to provide training for them along with staff from other NGOs implicated. The training took place from 16th to 18th December 2003, with 5 participants from each of IRC, Caritas and Save the Children UK and 7 from COOPI. Subjects covered included welcoming children into transit/day centres, positive communication techniques, the role of centre supervisors/animators and how to plan and structure activities for the children.

Staff and Recruitment

IRC opened it's office in Kisangani in 2000 and so has been present in Orientale Province prior to this intervention, implementing programmes in the field of water and sanitation and primary health care. At the beginning of December 2003, IRC's Social Coordinator travelled to Bunia to open the IRCs sub-office there, which will facilitate the sensitisation of communities to the return of children, advocacy with armed groups to access the children, arrangements for interim care to children released to armed groups or self-demobilised, support to family tracing for EAFGAs and community reintegration of EAFGAs.

Following a recruitment campaign, five social agents were hired in December 2003. They will be based from the Bunia office, but will work throughout the region depending on the location of local partner organisations. The recruitment of further office, logistical, finance and specialised staff for both Bunia and Kisangani sub-offices will take place in January 2004.

Results by Objective

Objective One

Develop a profile of the situation of child soldiers in or originating from Orientale, North Katanga and Maniema provinces, and evaluate the good faith of all accessible armed groups to provide access to and develop DDR programs for these children.

The key purpose of the first component of activities, to determine as precisely as possible the number and profile of EAFGAs in Orientale Province, has proven difficult in the first month of the programme. We have been able to build up more information relating to the varying patterns and timing of child recruitment, which show that there are vast differences within the boundaries of the province. For example, it appears that many of the children have been with the RCD in the Tshopo district (Kisangani and surrounding area) for many years, whereas much child recruitment in Ituri took place in the last two years, and some of it as recently as April 2003. None of the children interviewed in the CTOs in Bunia had been with armed groups for over two years; on the other hand in Kisangani most of those working with EAFGAs have been doing so since 1997.

It has been extremely difficult to build a full profile of all EAFGAs in Orientale Province up to this point, however IRC continues to advocate for further details, information, names, numbers and, most

importantly, access to the children. IRC hopes to begin placing children as soon as the temporary host families have been identified, community sensitisation activities begun and day centres established.

Objective Two

Assess the current capacity of families and communities to facilitate the reintegration of children returning from armed groups, and identify and develop potential partners and resources needed for successful reintegration and prevention of recruitment, through an action-oriented process that will include pilot activities.

Based on assessment visits by IRC's Director of Children Affected by Armed Conflict Unit, other IRC field staff, international and local actors, opinion is still divided as to whether children will be easily and readily accepted back in their homes and communities or not. A number of factors can affect this, including the side of the conflict the child was associated with in relation to that of his/her community, whether the atrocities that child may have committed are known to his/her community, whether these were committed against his/her own community or far away, and the general social and economic environment the child will be returning to. IRC's experience with similar groups elsewhere has shown that the latter is certainly not the least of the factors impacting on the level of community acceptance.

The implementation of activities and preliminary results relating to this objective will be further detailed in the next reporting period.

Objective Three

Design a comprehensive demobilization and reintegration (DR) program for child soldiers in selected provinces within the framework of the national demobilization and reinsertion program as it evolves.

Activities and results for this objective will be detailed in the next reporting period.

Objective Four

Implement the comprehensive DR program in northern Katanga province, in close collaboration with the national program, UNICEF and other key actors for a trial implementation period of six months and produce a proposal for a second implementation phase in year two.

Activities and results for this objective will be detailed as implementation occurs.

Constraints

- Access to EAFGAs in military camps is still extremely limited, with even MONUC unable to obtain regular access. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to establish the number and profile of the children
- Logistical progress with regards to the establishment of the Bunia office and subsequent launch of activities from this base, has been impeded by the lack of a bank in Bunia able to facilitate the transfer of funds from Kinshasa. IRCs finance department in DRC are investigating solutions and hope to resolve the problem within the next reporting period.
- The timely implementation of activities is dependent on the ability of IRC programme staff to travel to project sites, including Aru and Mahagi. As with other NGOs, IRC relies chiefly on MONUC flights for travel, however MONUC has a limited possibility of goods transport and delays and cancellations are frequent. In this reporting period many flights to both Aru and Mahagi were cancelled, preventing programme staff from meeting with local NGOs in both towns. However, the team are contacting Air Serve and Aviation Sans Frontières, two humanitarian operators who may be able to assist in the future. Travel within Bunia is also difficult, with most hire cars in such a dilapidated state that they cannot be relied upon for long journeys, and with no petrol stations all fuel must be purchased on the black market.

- MONUC forces have not yet been deployed in many towns throughout the district of Ituri. NGOs must therefore inform MONUC of their intentions to travel in unsupervised areas a week in advance in order that the security situation can be confirmed. Sporadic gunshots can be heard in Bunia almost every day and the situation is still unstable. However, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) received an 'acte d'engagement collectif des forces politiques et militaires de l'Ituri' on 25 December 2003 which was signed by the heads of the FAPC, FNI/FRPI and UPC/RP. The groups collaboratively pledged to facilitate, support and promote access to vulnerable people, ensure security of humanitarian actors and facilitate the circulation of humanitarian staff. In addition, IRC's Social Coordinator noted an improvement in the general security situation in Bunia between her first visit at the beginning of November 2003 and whilst setting up the IRC office throughout December.
- Delays in recruiting the Program Manager have meant that some activities could not commence as planned. However, the IRC team led by Denise Ulwor have ensured the continued progress of the programme and the Program Manager is due to arrive at the beginning of January 2004.
- The training provided by War Child Holland did not cover techniques for tracing and family reunification, IRC staff will therefore require further training in this area. IRC's Social Coordinator has already been able to provide some training based on the 'Principes Directeurs Inter-agence' and War Child Holland is due to provide further training in the next reporting period, in which IRC has asked them particularly to focus in this area.

Adjustments

Following the IRC team assessment visit at the end of October, it was agreed that a sub-office should be established in Bunia to facilitate the extensive activities to be conducted in the Ituri region. MONUC provided information relating to the location and distribution of various armed groups within the region and it was ascertained that whilst there are a considerable number of armed forces with EAFGAs in Aru and Mahagi, there are no NGOs working in the field of child protection in either town. With a field office in Bunia, IRC will be able to coordinate staff, materials and activities both in Bunia and in the towns of Aru and Mahagi. The establishment of an office in Bunia was included in the revised budget submitted to World Bank in November 2003.

Coordination and Networking

Child Protection Network:

In the absence of the PDR Programme Manager, IRC's Social Coordinator represented the IRC in the child protection network in Bunia, composed of UNICEF, MONUC, IRC, SCUUK, CARITAS and COOPI. The network began holding the following weekly meetings in December 2003;

- Meeting for the heads of child protection agencies
- Meeting of different centre supervisors
- Meeting of reunification teams from all agencies, to facilitate the exchange of information
- Different transit centre supervisors/staff to share information and ensure that children aren't moving from one centre to another.

Local Partners:

In Kisangani discussions with CIP and other potential partners, such as member NGOs of RODEPO, are underway. In Bunia, Aru and Mahagi the identification of and partnership with local groups will take place in early 2004.

Demobilisation:

IRC programme staff continue to advocate for information pertaining to and access to EAFGAs. It is expected that the FARDC in Kisangani and FAPC in Aru, along with other armed groups, will both cooperate early in the new year.

Activities planned for the next reporting period

- Training of tracing and reintegration staff on methods and techniques for identification, evaluation, registering, tracing and verification of families, reunification and monitoring.
- Identification of 50 temporary host families in Bunia
- Contact with local NGOs operating in Bunia, Mahagi and Aru to discuss and establish partnerships and guidelines for day centres, host families and family reunification.

- Recruitment of a logistician, finance manager and office managers.
- Orientation of Jonas Mfouatie, PDR Programme Manager, due to arrive in DRC in early January 2004.
- Preparing stocks and distribution of demobilisation kits.
- Establishment of the Database: the plans, and particularly the budget, for the database will be revised following discussions by the DDR sub-group. A plan of action will also be determined. It is hoped that this process may start by the end of the next reporting period.
- Start of pilot activities, planned for late February 2004, and will centre around the temporary care, family tracing and reunification and community and socio-economic reintegration of around 300 EAFGAs demobilised in Ituri and other areas in Orientale Province. The specific objectives of the planned pilot activities are;
 - Distribute demobilisation kits meeting UNICEF standards to 300 EAFGAs.
 - Select, train and support 120 host families for the temporary care of EAFGAs
 - Reunite 300 EAFGAs with their families and communities of origin.
 - Strengthen the capacity of communities to welcome and accept EAFGAs and ensure their social reintegration.
 - Test different methods and techniques for reintegration to find those which work best within the political, economic and cultural context of DRC and which represent durable solutions.

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