



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

2nd Quarterly Report to World Bank MDRP
Period 1 January – 31 March 2004
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. This report covers the second three-month period of implementation from 1 January 2004. The official start date of the programme is 1st December, (December 1st is the official start date of the programme) and December is therefore Month One of the implementation period, as detailed in the PIM.

Activities

Staff: Recruitment and Training

The IRC DDR Program Manager, Jonas Mfouatie, arrived in Kinshasa at the beginning of January 2004 and was then accompanied to Bunia by the NGO Group Coordinator. Since then, the program manager has been dividing his time between the sub-offices in Kisangani and Bunia, travelling between one and the other as the needs of the program demand.

The recruitment and subsequent training of staff begun in the previous reporting period continued, with the administrative and logistics supervisors from IRC's Kisangani office providing support in the form of selection and orientation of the administrative and logistics staff for the newly opened Bunia office. The Program Manager conducted interviews for the locally engaged project managers for Bunia and for Kisangani at the beginning of February and the successful candidates travelled to their respective posts to commence on-the-job training the following week. In February the team in Bunia was completed with the recruitment of a finance officer and seven further social agents. In addition, 3 Social Assistants, 5 Social Agents and a nurse were recruited and trained to facilitate the implementation of activities in Kisangani and the surrounding areas.

An IRC consultant (Pino Lena) was in Bunia between 6 January and 27 February 2004, with his terms of reference being to evaluate the socio-economic capacity of the community to reintegrate children associated with armed groups. The consultancy found that the situation is rather difficult, as there is also the need to kick-start economic activities in the communities of reintegration. It was also recommended that the community decide and manage all areas of micro-project socio-economic activities. This finding has however to be weighed against the possibility that the children themselves, should they have the opportunity and will to do so, might opt to do activities other than those selected for them by the community. A general recommendation in relation to the Ituri Disarmament and Reintegration Plan, which is taking a lot of project time, was that the IRC should consider defining their strategy of conformity, identity and involvement with the other actors (MONUC, UNICEF, UNDP and other stakeholders). IRC should have a role in decision-making in case that the rest of the planning actors decide on an action that is detrimental to the progress and quality of implementation of the project.

The second training on the transitory care of EAFGAs in Ituri, originally planned for February, eventually took place from the 10th to the 14th of March at Mahagi, with the support of War Child Holland. IRC social agents and local partners from Mahagi, Kpandroma and Aru took part.

IRC Technical Advisor Cindy Dubble visited carried out a rapid assessment mission to Kisangani and Bunia at the end of March to evaluate the program, identify any gaps and to make recommendations to increase the quality of the program. Some of the recommendations are:

- Clarify specific roles, management lines, and communication channels within IRC
- Clarify the role and communication lines between IRC and the Consortium Coordinator
- In re-orienting program implementation and planning for year two, emphasis should be given to a comprehensive, holistic approach to program implementation. Whenever possible, community sensitisation, reintegration strategies, and community-based protection structures should be in place prior to the reunification of children.
- At the national coordination level, mechanisms for reunifying, reintegrating and following-up children from one province to another should be agreed.
- Transfer human resources and technical expertise to reinforce the training and monitoring of staff at field level.

IRC programme staff made the most of Cindy's visit, by participating in a two-day workshop on lessons learnt in the field of DDR and children (welcome, temporary care, family reunification and community reintegration) and the evaluation of the implementation of IRC standards and guiding principals within the DDR program in DRC.

Demobilisation

At the beginning of this reporting period, IRC participated in meetings with armed groups, and in coordination with MONUC, UNDP and UNICEF. January also saw the arrival of a contingent of 190 Belgian military instructors in Kisangani as part of 'Project Future', a program of support to the formation of the new 'Brigade Intégrée et Unifiée'. They will be involved in training this new Brigade, after all the children in the ranks have been removed and registered for reintegration, and this action has been taken into account in the contingency plan. Following a meeting between IRC, a representative of the Belgian troops and Lt. Col. Ekuba Marcel, Commandant of the Ituri Brigade, it was agreed that those combatants under the age of 18 will be identified and put in the hands of IRC to benefit from the DDR program. At this point the operation was planned to commence on 9 February and IRC extended the contingency plan to include taking responsibility for these first cases from this date whilst waiting for the details promised by the local military authorities in Kisangani. In February, the 'Brigade Congolaise Intégrée' identified 99 children and IRC began verification activities.

The Government adopted the Operational Plan for Disarmament for Ituri on 20 February 2004, after the drafting and discussions by the Sub-group Ituri Working Group (UNDP, UNICEF, MONUC, IRC, SCUUK, AAA, Malteser, USAID (OTI), WFP and others). The official launch of the operation, has not yet taken place. Also in February 22 EAFGAs from the armed group FAPC needing care in Aru were identified. IRC successfully, processed the liberation of a 17-year-old female EAFGA who was in sexual slavery with a military officer of the FAPC in Aru.

The 1st Battalion of the Ituri Brigade finished their training with the Belgian military in mid-March, following which a Government mission visited Ituri to study the feasibility of deployment. A 2nd Battalion then commenced training.

After the IRC verification activities of the 99 children identified in February, 31 EAFGAs were released by FARDC in Kisangani on 23 March. These children have already been placed with host families and received placement kits. The release was delayed by the attempt by the Minister of Defence to arrange a ceremony of release. Following pressure from UNICEF, MONUC and the international diplomatic community in Kinshasa, the children were finally released on 23 March.

Transit Care of EAFGAs

Temporary Host Families:

To date, a total of 228 host families have been identified, registered and sensitised for the care of EAFGAs in Orientale province (123 at Kisangani, 62 in Bunia, 23 in Aru and 20 in Mahagi). This number will shortly increase with the deployment of IRC social agents to Isiro and Bafwasende. The program manager visited Isiro at the end of this reporting period, to install the IRC team, evaluate the local partner identified and to advocate for the release of EAFGAs by the local political-military authorities. The IRC team then immediately began the task of registering and sensitising the host families, in collaboration with the local partner, APEJEN in Isiro.

Day Activity Centres:

By the end of February, the IRC teams had identified six sites to house day activity centres to provide the EAFGAs with access to psychosocial activities such as literacy programmes, guided group discussions, theatre, music, dancing and sport, all under the guidance of trained animators. There will be two centres in each of Kisangani and Bunia, with one in Aru and a sixth in Ngote-Mahagi. At the end of March, the first day activity centre was opened in the village of Makiso, Kisangani, in collaboration with local partner GIPAD, and the 31 liberated children have already begun to attend.

Family Tracing

Throughout this reporting period IRC has made preliminary contact with child protection organisations in Kisangani to develop formal frameworks and networks for tracing, transitory care and general child protection. In March 5 family reunifications took place in Kisangani, and a further 7 positive searches have been registered and the logistical arrangements are being made for family reunifications.

Database : NGO Group Activity

The plans, and particularly the budget, for the database have been revised following discussions by the DDR sub-group. A plan of action has also been determined, starting with the identification and subsequent visit of a technical consultant who will within a period of three months carry out a feasibility study, including a workshop with members of the DDR sub-group to determine needs and information relating to security, confidentiality, logistics, data collection and entry. The consultant will also work alongside a national member of staff, who will be responsible for the database after the departure of the consultant, to construct an appropriate database and train staff from all NGOs involved in its use and maintenance. It is hoped that this process may start by the end of April 2004.

IRC also submitted a request for financial support for the Database to UNICEF and has since then been approved.

The NGO Group's consultant Christian Michaud conducted training to strengthen capacity of staff for tracing and to develop forms for tracing. He was in Kisangani and Bunia 15 March to 29 March.

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.

Throughout this reporting period, the program manager, along with his team, have focused on building on strengthening their relationship with the various armed groups in order to obtain further information with regards to the numbers, names and details of EAFGAs in Orientale Province. Their efforts, which have been conducted in close collaboration with MONUC, have proven successful.

In January the armed groups declared a total strength of 26,650 combatants in the Ituri district. At Opiengue, South-East of Kisangani, CRD (le Conseil de Résistance pour la Démocratie), a Mayi-Mayi

group, declared 5,250 combatants, amongst which 2,500 women and children. The authorities of the 9th Military Region in Kisangani have verified and registered only 300 combatants, amongst which 53 children, as identified by a local NGO. A report from the humanitarian section of MONUC signalled the presence of approximately 300 child soldiers in the forest and located on the outskirts of the mining areas of Bafwasende, where a UN military observer team has been deployed.

As of February 2004, the number of EAFGAs in Ituri is estimated at 6,000. According to the 9th Brigade of the FARDC, the areas where the highest concentrations of EAFGAs can be found are; Kisangani (Rive Gauche), Bafwasende, Isiro, Ubundu, Buta and Watsa, however no verifiable statistical information to this effect is as yet available.

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.

The start of pilot activities for socio-economic reintegration, planned for the end of February, has been postponed until IRC has received released EAFGAs in Bunia. Since there have so far been no children identified, verified, liberated or reunified in Bunia, pilot activities there will be commenced later.

Between 16 and 21 February, 5 consultative sessions (1 at Mahagi, 1 at Aru, 3 at Bunia) took place involving the IRC's consultant and representatives of the community and civil society organisations, to discuss the socio-economic reintegration options that best respond to the needs of the communities to which the EAFGAs will be returning.

IRC provided logistical support to a group of 5 researchers including a consultant from consortium partner organisation IFESH, who carried out a study on the capacity of communities to facilitate the reintegration of EAFGAs. Aru, Bunia and Kisangani were visited. Amongst other things, the group highlighted the negative effect of the deteriorated conditions of the road network on reintegration activities. Another point raised related to the length of the funding from the World Bank in relation to the expected needs and activities and sustainability of these after the funding ends in two years. The report found that the proposed implementation period of two years would not be sufficient.

Following visits to the local partners identified to fully evaluate their capacities; the IRC found that they all require further technical and organisational development training. IRC will focus on this 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.

Following the visit of a delegation from the government and representatives from the international community, the launch of the national Disarmament and Community Reintegration plan for Ituri has been postponed until 3 May 2004. UNDP/MONUC have already begun sensitisation activities in order to explain the plan to the armed groups. However, their sensitisation methods do not conform to the realities on the ground, causing some confusion and a lack of understanding by the targeted groups. In addition, five reassembly sites to be opened progressively have been proposed for the cantonment of the armed groups in the framework of the CTPC/PNUD program for national Disarmament and Community Reintegration in Ituri.

On 4 March IRC organised a meeting in Kisangani with the various governmental and international partners involved to facilitate dialogue on the demobilisation and care of EAFGAs, to share the newly adopted operational framework for the DDR of children and to get the process of liberating the children by

armed groups in Orientale province underway. IRC Social Agents in Bunia also participated in a training session organised by UNICEF on the DDR operational framework for children at the beginning of March.

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

- Some logistical problems continue to impede progress, such as the delays in receiving items imported from outside the country due to problems with the Congolese customs department. Where possible, all essential equipment is procured locally to limit the difficulties arising from this situation.
- The funds allocated for activities relating to the community reintegration of EAFGAs are very limited, and in order to properly implement IRC will have to seek additional funding from other sources. IRC still awaits feedback from the World Bank on the budget amendment request submitted last February.
- Difficulties with regards to movement of staff and communication, particularly for those who have been deployed to the interior (Aru, Bunia, Bafwasende and Isiro). The program team have had to borrow motorcycles from the IRC health programme in Kisangani and make further provisions to guarantee regular communication by telephone with staff in the field. The installation of a radio base and satellite antenna at the Bunia sub-office in March will go some way to improving this.
- The IRC team in Kisangani has experienced problems in finding a host family to accept the care of one particular child because he has physical characteristics associated with Rwandans; many people still feel bitter towards Rwandans due to the occupation of Kisangani by Rwandan forces during the war.
- The staff of the local partners selected are not grasping the principals and standards of child protection. They are very interested in the area, but have never worked with demobilised kids, only with displaced children, refugees and street kids. As mentioned above, they are in need of further training and support, which IRC will focus on providing in the next reporting period.
- The instable security situation throughout Orientale Province, but particularly in Ituri, has continued to pose a continued threat to the smooth operation of activities. Early in the New Year, the various armed groups and forces in the surrounding environs of Bunia still reigned in the absence of MONUC, however in February MONUC deployed troops to 11 locations outside Bunia where 29 guardrooms were established, following which the security situation stabilized somewhat. Yet in spite of this effort, in February alone several incidents were registered between MONUC and hostile armed groups, with further reports of looting and acts of organized crime throughout Ituri. Major incidents included the reported but unconfirmed massacre of a hundred civilians at Gobu (Ituri), the attempted assassination of the Commander of the 9th Military Region in Kisangani and the death of a UN military observer at Madro (Ituri) during a skirmish between MONUC and the Congolese military. In mid March MONUC began combing Bunia and the surrounding areas for hidden caches of arms. This operation ended in some arrests and the destruction of some military camps. More recently, the Moroccan contingent of MONUC have been redeployed to Bunia to replace the Uruguayan force in order to reestablish confidence between the blue caps and the population.

Adjustments

The major adjustments to planned activities have been in relation to the unpredictable nature of the program. The IRC team are flexible and remain ready to react accordingly to each situation as it presents itself.

Coordination and Networking

Child Protection Network:

The DDR Programme Manager has continued to represent the IRC in the child protection network in Bunia, composed of UNICEF, MONUC, IRC, SCUK, 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 January two potential local partners were identified at Mahagi and Aru, and by March a total of six local NGO partners had been identified and signed a 'Protocole d'Accord' with IRC. These are; ADECO in Aru, CRENA in Mahagi, FfePM and Espoir pour Tous in Bunia and ADDA and GIPAD in Kisangani.

In general, civil society is very active within the region, and the IRC team has talked to several extremely active women's groups. However, it has been noted that there are not many youth organisations in existence.

Demobilisation:

Since the arrival of the PDR Program Manager, IRC has established and maintained good relations with the different armed groups and forces, including the UPC (Bunia), FAPC (Aru and Mahagi), the Brigade Intégrée Congolaise pour l'Ituri and the 9th Military Region of Kisangani. Furthermore, various meetings to develop the preparatory activities for demobilisation have been held with UNDP, MONUC and UNICEF since January.

In addition, in March an agreement was signed between IRC and the World Food Program (WFP), who have offered to support the program by providing assistance in the form of food distributions to the transitory host families. The international NGO COOPI then assisted IRC in the delivery and storage of 4 tonnes of food supplies delivered by WFP, which were subsequently transferred to Mahagi and Aru to respond to the needs of the host families who will shortly be welcoming and caring for EAFGAs.

Activities planned for the next reporting period

- Opening of day centres at Isiro and Mahagi-Ngote
- Organization of joint evaluation missions on the situation of EAFGAs, with UNICEF, OCHA, MONUC and the authorities of the 9th military region of the FARDC.
- Continue to advocate for the release of EAFGAs known to be with the FAPC in Mahagi and the surrounding areas.
- Placement of EAFGAs released by FAPC with host families in Aru.
- Recruitment of a nurse and remaining guards needed for the Bunia sub-office
- Purchase of placement kits for EAFGAs staying with host families.
- Procurement of motorcycles to facilitate movement

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