

The Angolan Reintegration Strategy: an interview with General Antonio Francisco de Andrade, Director General, IRSEM, Angola

N&N no. 4 – March 7, 2008

Angola has often been regarded as one of MDRP's great successes. When comparing successes across programs one must look at the fundamental differences and commonalities between them. There is no all encompassing success formula; still, it is possible to learn from each program's experience.

In order to learn from the Angola Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Program – ADRP, and its implementing agency, the Institute for Socio-Professional Reintegration of Ex-combatants – IRSEM, the MDRP secretariat has asked its general director, General Antonio Francisco de Andrade to answer some questions. These are his answers.

Can you please give us a brief history of the origin of IRSEM?

Such a question calls for a reflection on the Angolan Peace Process. The Institute for Socio-Professional Reintegration of Ex-combatants – IRSEM, was created under the auspices of Resolution n° 7/95, of April 14, 1995, and was based on the Government's necessity to create an agency that specifically takes care of the socio-professional and economic reintegration of the former military within the context of the peace process. Its main goal is guaranteeing that the demobilization and reintegration process is sustainable and perfectly fitting within the government's programs.

The government took into account the desire of national and international institutions for the implementation of projects that support the reintegration of the demobilized. IRSEM is the basic institution through which the government of Angola guarantees the participation of civil society in the process of reintegration, and in this way contributes toward the consolidation of peace, reconciliation, harmonization, and national cohesion.

It is also important to note that IRSEM is a successor to the *Gabinete Interministerial de Apoio aos Desmobilizados das Forças Armadas – GIAMDA* (Interministerial Cabinet for support to the



General Andrade,
Director General, IRSEM

News & Noteworthy

Demobilized from the Armed Forces). GIAMDA was created under the Presidential Resolution of November 15, 1991, with the vision of the implementation of the ex-combatants reintegration process.

In the execution of its mission, IRSEM has always been at the forefront in the implementation of Government reintegration programs and projects. During the last few years and in the context of the Luena Memorandum of Understanding, is the Angola Demobilization and Reintegration Program – ADRP and other government supported programs that work towards the reintegration of those demobilized through previous Angola peace processes.

Throughout the years, what have been IRSEM's greatest challenges?

The political instability that took place after the internal post-election conflict in 1992 was the real Achilles' heel for the continuation of IRSEM's activities. Furthermore, the circumstances caused the majority of those demobilized to rejoin the Armed Forces of one or the other side of the conflict.

The conflict's setting itself deteriorated access to where ex-combatants were located, thus restricting the reintegration activities to the main urban centers where one could still develop some activity for the target group.

Looking at the reintegration of ex-combatants within a country that was at war was a significant challenge in all aspects. The facts speak for themselves; one can see and feel the weight that these challenges placed over IRSEM under such circumstances.

Along with these set backs is the fact that the Angola peace process experienced three demobilization periods until hostilities came to an end. Now, one of the great challenges is the issue of the distribution of

support by a program like the ADRP. Although the ADRP prioritizes the ex-combatants who are eligible through the Luena Memorandum of Understanding, it also assists those demobilized by previous processes. Furthermore, the majority of those licensed under the Memorandum have already been demobilized under the Bicesse and Lusaka process but, as previously mentioned, were once more lead to join Armed Forces.



Sewing workshop supported by IRSEM

At the moment, one challenge comes from the fact that, for the first time in its history, the Angolan government has taken on the complete political implementation, administration, and execution of the

Demobilization and Reintegration Program – ADRP. This was done by asking the International Community for additional financial support in order to complete reintegration activities in a country that has recently come out of a devastating armed conflict that destroyed practically all infrastructures. From highways to communication systems and other means vital to the coordination and monitoring of a

News & Noteworthy

process like the reintegration of ex-combatants in a vast and multi-cultural country like Angola.

The progress, the challenges, and the economic conditions in general, significantly affect any reintegration process.

To summarize, among the biggest challenges faced by IRSEM are: mobilizing implementing partners and keeping them capacitated; timely mobilization of financial resources and of adequate consultancy; and involving institutional partners in an active manner.

In what way has MDRP's regional approach benefited IRSEM?

Above all, the Program's regional aspect benefits IRSEM in the exchange of experiences and in the common perception of regional problems by the World Bank and MDRP donors. This contributes to some flexibility in the Program's implementation.

Within the MDRP context, Angola has been considered one of the great successes. To what do you credit this achievement?

As previously stated, contrary to many other MDRP countries, Angola already had a national agency geared towards the assistance to ex-combatants, which facilitated in the refining of its reintegration program.

Furthermore, Angola had already had two previous peace process experiences, Bicesse and Lusaka. During these, reintegration activities took place and provided much learning for IRSEM itself as well as the government.

In this context, the great successes achieved are due to several things. Essentially, the maturity and conscience of Angolans towards the negative effects of the war as well as their desire and determination to reverse the situation, allowing for the consolidation of peace and national harmonization. Along with that is the idea that Angolans took control of the situation through national ownership; from conception to pilot phase and effective establishment of the ADRP by the government. The Government took complete responsibility for the program's implementation, political administration and monitoring of the cantonment, disarmament, demobilization, and reinsertion processes, definitely contributed to the program's advancement.



General Andrade addressing MDRP partners

News & Noteworthy

It is also important to note that the experiences of previous reintegration processes had allowed for a change of mentality and attitude among the beneficiaries themselves, including their desire to become reintegrated. This was joined by the undeniable, unconditional and complete giving of the agency's employees who, with the enforcement of active consultants, greatly aided the program. Even without any additional program pressure, they don't limit their efforts to always develop and ameliorate the administration mechanisms, execution, and monitoring. With this, and despite the weakness of their institutional capacity to respond to the program's magnitude, they greatly influence the improvement of the quality of supervision.

The participation of civil society and private sector in the identification and services rendered towards reintegration is another fact that improves the quality attained. When problems arise, permanent dialogue with the World Bank team to find the best solutions allows for the overcoming of challenges relatively easily.

Finally, the program's approach to research from the base to the top is, without a doubt, a predominant part of the implementation success of the reintegration support projects.

Even if the ADRP is a success, what could have been done to improve its quality of delivery?

The lessons learned and the recommendations by outside evaluations suggest an amplification of the program's objectives and its integration into an articulated strategy at the national and local level, within a social and economic development perspective. Presently, ADRP's emergency activities may be considered outdated. It is suggested that more be put into sustainable projects that are more conducive to development in general.



Program beneficiaries working in the field

All the while, we believe the quality of the program's implementation would improve if certain aspects were looked into. Firstly, ADRP's planning with regards to the geographic differences of soil types in relation to agricultural components, labor availability, and access to market, all of which varied by Province.

Also, a better coordination of simultaneous work at the partners' level, and with programs being executed by other organizations and agencies related to ex-combatants. This is important for vulnerable groups who need better communication with specialized partners.

Furthermore, in order to bring about sustainable development to the reintegration process, it will be necessary to have simultaneous complementary opportunities through the inclusion of ex-combatants into other government development projects and those of other organizations.

News & Noteworthy

Lastly, a more defined and balanced compensation system for program staff and financial incentives to the employees of implementing agencies who are directly linked to the program. This would create an element of motivation towards greater dedication to their activities.

What are some of the lessons IRSEM has learned?

There have been several lessons learnt and good practices in the execution of ADRP. Having initial steps based on research and taking on a local reintegration strategy are both very important. Yet, the establishment of a larger partnership sphere is also very useful.

On the managerial side, there have been two essential aspects. One is the creation of an information system for effective administration. The other is the implementation of beneficiary follow-up mechanisms in the post reintegration services phase.

How do you expect to apply the lessons learnt in the future reinforcement of the reintegration programs that are going to be implemented by the government?

The above lessons will be of great use in the government's future actions, for previous experiences make for added value. We don't expect that the lessons be mechanically imitated, but that they would be adapted to the context and dynamics of future activities.

Despite the short implementation period for a program like the ADRP, considering its magnitude and the circumstances, we must recognize that we had significant gains. In fact, we have shared our experience with other MDRP countries from the region who are also implementing reintegration programs.

Naturally, as we share these positive experiences, we also look to make greater use of these practices in the operational reinforcement of reintegration programs, as is the case with the recently approved government program for the reinforcement of ex-combatant reintegration. This program aims to support the economic and socio-professional reintegration of the demobilized in previous peace processes who, due to inherent dynamics of the political and administrative process, were not yet taken in by any reintegration program.

What are the main challenges that lie ahead?

The past and present have given us a vision of potential future challenges, for which we offer potential measures that will improve the services to be offered to the Angolan society in general. The intention is to contribute to the large challenge poverty alleviation.

Despite visible development, Angola is still recuperating from the destruction caused by civil war, and the improvement of conditions has resulted in a greater number of reintegration opportunities. Improvement in health and education, and improvement in the condition of highways and other infrastructures, both positively influence the process of ex-combatant reintegration but there are still many challenges with regards to the country's economic situation.

Within this context, the increase of IRSEM's operational capacity at the central and provincial level and its legitimization as public agency, are certainly challenges. Along with those are the need to improve and

News & Noteworthy

make adequate use of the management information system – *Systema de Informação para a Gestão, SIG*, and its accessibility to all actors involved with the reintegration process and respective monitoring mechanisms. Also, a challenge is enforcing the collaboration and coordination with other institutions and government programs.

In terms of financial challenges, it will be important to invest on the agricultural modernization to sustain the agro-industrial development of the ex-combatant projects. We will also need to reinforce support to vulnerable groups, especially those ex-combatants with disabilities, promote ex-combatant initiatives geared towards association/cooperation, and improve and simplify the procedure for approval and processing of projects.

Finally, we will also have the challenge of developing and intensifying the implementation of projects for ex-combatants who choose an urban setting. The program's initial strategy prioritized the development of agriculture and husbandry in the rural setting. In turn, it rejected activities that required education or socio-professional capacity and thus, it did not recognize the professional capabilities acquired during war by a majority of ex-combatants who today inhabit the urban market. This makes support to urban income generating activities, such as micro-credits, both necessary and urgent.



Ex-combatant in Angola

Generally speaking, are Angolans aware of IRSEM's work?

Yes, despite financial constraints, IRSEM has always divulged its activities relative to its social goal. This is done through magazines, information pamphlets, and interviews. Within the ADRP, there is a component with this specific goal, the *Programa Nacional de Informação, Sensibilização, Aconselhamento e Referência – PRONASAR*. This program's material covers, above all, the "ex-combatant reintegration" phenomenon, in order to improve Angolan society's general understanding, rather than only providing them with information on government actions.

In your opinion, what is their general view of ex-combatants returning to their communities?

In order to facilitate the social reintegration of ex-combatants into the communities, the above mentioned program (PRONASAR) has and continues to provide sensitization activities to ex-combatants and communities of return. Angolans are certain that peace is definitive and the government develops parallel assistance in the communities, in order to avoid potential stress in resettlement areas.

The fact that the majority of ex-combatants have remained in the communities of their choice is a strong indicator that these communities welcomed the ex-combatants with open arms, in the spirit of the consolidation of peace and national reconciliation.

News & Noteworthy

For you personally, what has been the most gratifying part of your work with IRSEM?

It is very rewarding to see that ADRP actions really contribute to the effective reintegration of ex-combatants and their families, as well as to vulnerable groups in the communities, and create a positive social impact in the places of implementation.

As an example, in addition to the socio-economic reintegration of the program's beneficiaries by being able to generate income to sustain oneself, there has also been the matriculation of children into the school system, the alphabetization of adults, and health support, through the building and restoration of schools and medical facilities, other community works such as irrigation canals and diverse services that also contribute to the improvement of peoples' lives.

As the MDRP comes to an end, what are your views on the future of IRSEM?

A transition and sustainability strategy of the actions implemented by the ADRP is being prepared and will be submitted to the Government. IRSEM will be called to participate in future government actions devoted to ex-combatant reintegration. This will probably be done with an increase in its institutional capacity both at the Central and Provincial levels, making it into a legitimate public institute.

What are your hopes for Angola during the next few years?

The past five years of peace have resulted in great expectations for the socio-economic development and growth of the country.

One can already see the efforts implemented by both the government and other branches of the society. This is a time when all external support is welcomed.

In this context, we hope for a peaceful Angola, where all Angolans feel included and live together in harmony and national cohesion.

For more information on MDRP, please visit www.mdrp.org or contact Bruno Donat, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at info@mdrp.org.