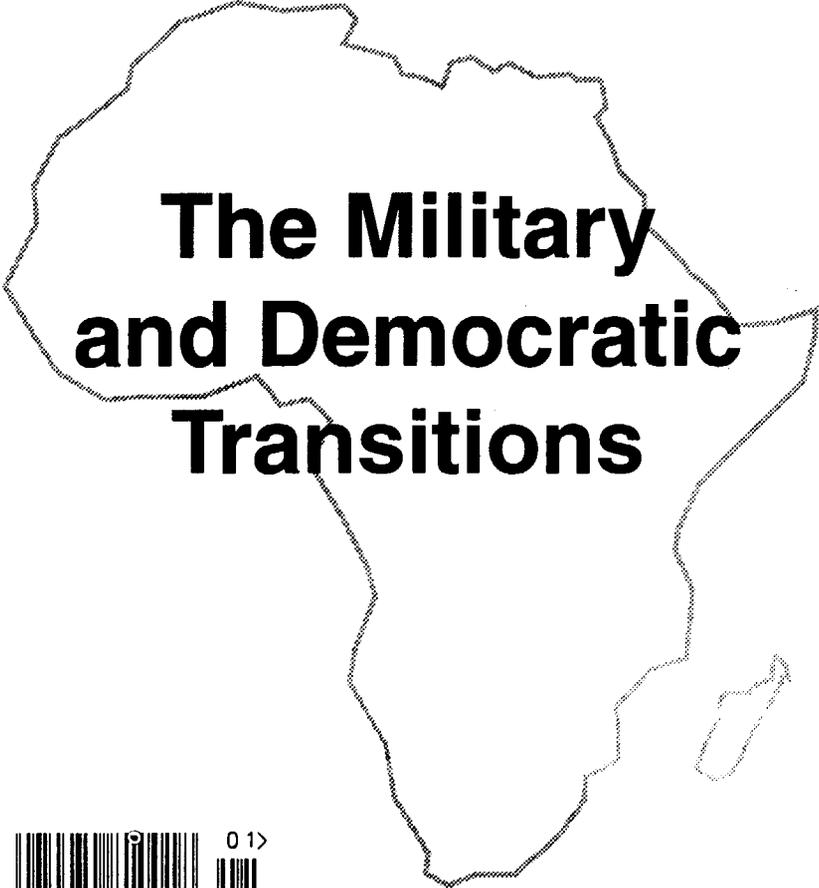


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## *The Demobilization and Reintegration of Soldiers: Perspectives from USAID*

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### Overview

With the resolution of many civil conflicts in the developing world, the demobilization and reintegration of soldiers has emerged as an important issue for donors. The transition from civil war to development is not easy because disarming combatants and reintegrating them into civilian life is politically sensitive and fraught with risk. Successful combatant demobilization signals the opposing parties' willingness to comply with the peace accords, thereby contributing to the transition from governing through force to governing through democratic institutions. In cases of a peacetime demobilization, the government reaps the long-term benefit of reduced public expenditures on the military, thereby releasing resources for development efforts.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is rapidly acquiring expertise in the demobilization and reintegration of soldiers, having undertaken efforts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique, Uganda and Ethiopia. Not all of USAID's efforts are success stories, nor have all countries made successful transitions, but USAID is learning from both the successes and failures. This paper highlights some of the more important issues that USAID and other donors have faced in early efforts to support the demobilization and reintegration of soldiers.

### Definition of Terms

The demobilization and reintegration of soldiers represents two heavily interdependent phases on a continuum. Broadly speaking, there are two types of situations. First, there are the cases where parties to a conflict have signed a peace accord with neither side achieving a military victory, as in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola, and Mozambique. Second, there are the cases where one party has won an outright military victory, and is demobilizing the losing party, as

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in Ethiopia, or is reducing the size of its own army, as in Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. While there are many cross-cutting issues common to both post-conflict and peacetime demobilizations, there are also certain characteristics specific to each situation.

Demobilization is the process of converting a soldier to a civilian. A soldier is in the process of demobilizing when he or she has reported to an assembly area or camp, has surrendered his or her weapon and uniform, but is awaiting final discharge. Observers are usually present to ensure that weapons are in fact surrendered and stored in a secure location. Personnel in assembly areas usually register the soldiers for receipt of benefits, whether cash or in-kind. A soldier is demobilized when he or she has received discharge papers. Reporting to an assembly area is not always a component of demobilization, even in a post-conflict demobilization. The Nicaraguan Resistance in Honduras, for example, demobilized as they crossed the border into Nicaragua, without the intermediate step of reporting to an assembly area.

Reintegration is the process of facilitating the ex-soldiers' transition to civilian life. In many cases, particularly those where soldiers fought in long-lasting civil wars, soldiers have been socialized in the military and know no other lifestyle. Since the combat skills that they developed to wage war have no value in a post-war economy, ex-soldiers can become a destabilizing element within society. Without a way to earn a living, ex-soldiers could put their combat skills to ill-use. Reintegration programs thus help ease the transition.

USAID has encountered many obstacles in supporting the demobilization and reintegration of soldiers. As detailed in the rest of the paper, these obstacles include legal prohibitions on USAID funding for foreign militaries, policy dilemmas concerning support for demobilization, and operational hurdles in implementing demobilization and reintegration activities.

### Legal Obstacles

By law, USAID is prohibited from providing support to foreign militaries. Because demobilization involves the military, USAID easily runs into gray areas. In Mozambique, for example, government and Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) soldiers reported to separate assembly areas where they registered for assistance and waited until they were either demobilized or entered the new unified army. USAID recognized early on that supplying the assembly areas

with minimal supplies and food was a prerequisite, or there would be little incentive for soldiers to remain in the encampment. It encountered legal obstacles because some of the beneficiaries were to join the new army, thus providing incidental support to the military. Legal staff in USAID resolved the issue, after six months of discussion, by capping the percentage of USAID assistance to the camps to the percentage of soldiers that were expected to demobilize.<sup>2</sup>

With the issue resolved, USAID/Maputo provided health care for all residents of the assembly areas, and supplies such as pots and pans, tarps, and tents. Reports from the field indicate that the assistance was highly valued and contributed to the well-being of their residents. Assisting disabled soldiers would have entailed USAID's working directly with military doctors, an activity that was determined to contravene U.S. law.

In a peacetime demobilization, the process involves only those to be discharged. The legal issues are still present, but are easier to manage. In that case, the Ugandan government established the Ugandan Veterans Administration Board (UVAB) to oversee the process. The UVAB has a clear mandate, is legally defined, and is controlled by civilians. This mandate ultimately cleared the way for USAID to provide support to the demobilization process. The experience from Uganda indicates that, in a peacetime demobilization, having a civilian institution as a partner facilitates overcoming legal obstacles.

### Policy Issues

The post-conflict demobilization process is very fragile because it requires two or more parties who don't trust each other to lay down their arms and give up their armies, the two things that have made them powerful. Demobilization thus becomes the first important test of the peace process. There are two significant implications from this. First, donors may not want to get involved unless they are confident that the peace process will go forward, but they need to be involved early on in the planning phase to determine what they can contribute to make the demobilization and reintegration process succeed. In Angola, the United Nations and donors began developing plans for demobilization while the accords were still being negotiated; this will likely strengthen both the process and the program re-

response. Second, if the peace accords include a calendar for the demobilization process, not meeting deadlines can become a political ploy to extract more compromises from the other side or from the international community. In Mozambique, demobilization occurred a full year later than originally planned. Where calendars are or become unrealistic, there should be a way to renegotiate them.

Bureaucracy can impede demobilization programs, whether within USAID or the United Nations. Within USAID, the DFA project design cycle can last from six months to two years, and in many cases donors, especially in a post-conflict demobilization, do not have two years to design a program. Contracting procedures within USAID can be cumbersome, particularly with 'Buy America' provisions. In Ethiopia, USAID wanted to purchase jeeps, and found that those produced by Toyota were the most suitable for the country and the easiest to service. Pressure from Congress forced the procurement of jeeps from Chrysler, which does not provide service in Ethiopia. These and other capital items for the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) Demobilization Commission did not arrive until June 1993, more than two years after demobilization had begun.<sup>3</sup>

Funding arrangements and contracting procedures are even more cumbersome within the United Nations. In Mozambique, USAID found that:

the handling of other donor money under trust fund arrangements was a disaster in most cases, partly because of unwieldy (and opaque) procurement procedures, and partly because squabbles developed in New York over which office would manage which programs and therefore handle the funds.<sup>4</sup>

USAID/Maputo has further recommended that the United Nations "must find a way to cut through red tape so that critical administrative decisions can ... [be] made on the ground."<sup>5</sup>

Within the United Nations, coordination and cooperation between UN agencies is another significant obstacle. In Mozambique, the Secretary General's Special Representative (SGSR) Aldo Ajello performed remarkably well under significant constraints, but his office did not supervise all U.N. activities in Mozambique. The United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs Coordination (UNOHAC), which was responsible for reintegration programs, reported directly back to the Department for Humanitarian Affairs in New York and

was under no obligation to "coordinate or cooperate with broader UNOMOZ objectives."<sup>6</sup> Simply put, there was no effective chain of command to oversee the different U.N. organizations, something that is required in time- and politically-sensitive environments.

Experiences from many countries indicate that donor coordination is critical to successful demobilization and reintegration efforts. The programs themselves are usually expensive, and no one donor funds an entire program, either because it has limited financial resources or because it does not want to commit all of its resources in a given country to just one program. Since donors need to decide which portions of the programs they will fund, it is important for them to coordinate their assistance to ensure that all aspects are funded and to eliminate duplication of efforts. No clear institutional mechanisms exist for donor coordination, thus coordination of demobilization and reintegration has depended heavily on the capacity and interests of the institutions on the ground.

Multiple donor involvement appears to have played a positive role in both Uganda and Mozambique. In Mozambique, donors were forced to coordinate, after many delays, because of the United Nations' failure to act in a timely manner on many issues.<sup>7</sup> The Ugandan government announced its plan in the middle of the fiscal year, when USAID had few funds available for new programs. Providing roofing materials was something it could undertake by modifying an existing program. All demobilized soldiers received roofing materials, and all of the roofing materials came from the United States, but this was only one aspect of the benefits package they received. In Ethiopia, donor coordination was haphazard, and instances of miscommunication caused serious problems in implementing demobilization.<sup>8</sup>

Who takes the lead in coordinating efforts is an unresolved question. In cases of a post-conflict demobilization, it has been necessary to have an outside organization oversee the process because the parties to the conflict have little confidence in the national government's neutrality. The United Nations has frequently played this role, but has not always been able to effectively implement its mission. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), an international organization, has been effective in supporting the demobilization process in Mozambique, and is now working in Haiti. In Nicaragua, the United States provided \$43.3 million to support the voluntary demobilization, repatriation, and resettlement of the Nicaraguan Re-

sistance. In its appropriation, Congress specified that assistance go through a joint commission of the United Nations and the Organization of American States.<sup>9</sup> Donors may want to avoid working through the United Nations, but experience has shown that the alternatives are limited.

In cases of a peacetime demobilization, finding a neutral coordinator is less problematic. In Uganda, the World Bank had been encouraging the government to reduce public expenditures, including military spending, and drafted a plan for downsizing the military. The government opted to implement the Bank plan in March 1992, subsequently requesting donor assistance. In that case, it was natural for the Bank to serve as coordinator, but this has been the only instance of their active involvement.

Experience has shown that flexible sources of funding are critical to USAID's involvement in demobilization. For USAID's Africa Bureau to use funds from the Development Fund for Africa (DFA), its principle means for working in Africa, a proposed program must show that it will contribute to long-term sustainable development. If demobilization is necessary to formally end a war, and USAID has identified war as a significant obstacle to development, then does support for demobilization constitute a linkage to long-term sustainable development? In Mozambique, support for demobilization had to be funded from the Africa Disaster Assistance (ADA) account—an anomaly of Fiscal Year 1993—because support to demobilization was not considered supporting long-term sustainable development. Programs in Eritrea and Uganda rely, in part, on the Economic Support Fund (ESF). Using the ESF requires justification solely on political grounds and carries fewer design requirements. The added flexibility of ADA and ESF funds helped USAID to respond quickly in supporting demobilization.

### Operational Issues

Many different organizations may be involved in implementing demobilization and reintegration programs. They include international organizations, U.S. private voluntary organizations (PVOs), and indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Each brings unique capabilities to a particular program, in the form of resources, technical expertise, management and oversight, and on-the-ground knowledge. For example, PVOs already active in Mozambique, particularly in RENAMO-controlled areas, successfully provided food

and medical assistance in the assembly areas. Their familiarity with the territory and the trust they had built up with RENAMO played a big role in their success. Similarly in El Salvador, NGOs helping war-affected populations were best positioned to resettle ex-combatants and their families during the post-war transition.<sup>10</sup> These advantages notwithstanding, one of the problems that USAID faces is a lack of organizations with real expertise in the processes of demobilization.

In post-conflict demobilization, the question of assembling troops emerged early on as an important issue. The principal purpose of the assembly area is to provide temporary housing to soldiers in the transition period. The assembly areas should meet minimal living standards because, without food and medicine, the soldiers have no incentive to remain there. They should not, however, be so comfortable that they become alternative living arrangements. International observers must also be present to ensure that soldiers do not have access to their weapons, as happened in Angola where soldiers resorted to banditry to obtain food.<sup>11</sup>

The registration of soldiers is an important task undertaken in the assembly areas because it serves as the final tally of who will receive reintegration assistance, for those leaving the military entirely. It is at this point that host governments and donors alike are able to determine a final headcount. Personnel typically photograph and fingerprint the soldiers, and issue identification documentation for receipt of benefits.

The World Bank has suggested that literacy training, basic education, and health education in assembly areas may increase soldiers' ability to reintegrate.<sup>12</sup> In Mozambique, "devising ways to educate the soldiers in the assembly areas is less important than figuring out ways to get them, into, through, and processed out of the camps as quickly as possible.<sup>13</sup> Boredom and frustration were the main problems, and it is better to process them in and out before they get bored than to come up with a solution for their boredom. Literacy training and health education may be better incorporated into reintegration programs.

Demobilization typically involves some sort of cash payment to soldiers as or after they demobilize, whether in the form of one lump-sum payment at the time of demobilization or two-three payments after demobilization. The payments serve two purposes. First, the cash payment facilitates the soldiers' ability to reestablish a life out-

side the military by enabling him or her to purchase needed commodities or undertake entrepreneurial endeavors, both of which may require a sizable amount of capital. Second, the payments are important tools, demonstrating to soldiers that their years of service, often while risking their lives, are appreciated. Without such payments, soldiers have little incentive to demobilize.

Options or supplements to cash payments include materials to help ex-soldiers start a civilian life and build a livelihood. USAID provided agricultural starter kits in both Nicaragua and El Salvador, and the experience from Nicaragua, applied in El Salvador, showed that the kits must contain identical items to prevent accusations of bias or favoritism from either party to the conflict. In Uganda, USAID provided iron roofing sheets for ex-soldiers to use to build new homes, thus encouraging them to settle on the land. U.S. assistance in Mozambique included funding the transportation of demobilized soldiers to their destination of choice, a very successful part of the demobilization program because it served to disperse the ex-soldiers back to their communities and avoid a significant concentration in urban areas.<sup>14</sup>

An additional option is to provide cash subsidies on a regular basis over an extended period of time. In Mozambique, donors agreed to the idea because no reintegration programs awaited ex-soldiers in their communities, and donors were concerned about the potential destabilizing effect. Evidence from the first months after demobilization, albeit anecdotal, suggested that veterans were not necessarily putting the payments to productive use nor were they planning for the future. Once the payments concluded, the threat to stability could return, suggesting that extended cash subsidies are an inappropriate tool for reintegration. Anecdotal evidence many months later suggests that the payments provided donors time to get reintegration programs operational, and ex-soldiers time to think realistically about their possibilities for earning a living in a civilian economy. Cash subsidies are a poor substitute for reintegration programs, but in Mozambique they served as an adequate stop-gap measure.

Donors need to design reintegration programs early in the process in order to ensure that they are ready to respond to ex-soldiers' needs as soon as possible after demobilization. Conducting a thorough assessment of ex-soldiers' skills and abilities, broken down by rank, informs program design because it provides a picture of the total number of ex-soldiers and the needs of specific sub-

groups. The easiest place to collect this information is in the assembly areas, but by then it is too late to design an appropriate program. The problem is difficult to circumvent, since parties sitting across the negotiating table do not want to share information about force size. Donors and program implementors may get around this obstacle by gathering information from sources knowledgeable of the soldiers' backgrounds, as happened in El Salvador.<sup>15</sup> If and when soldiers gather in assembly areas, this information can then be confirmed and the reintegration programs refined.

It is important for ex-soldiers to identify themselves quickly as civilians. Programs designed solely for ex-soldiers may create hostility in the larger civilian population and perpetuate the self-identification of these individuals with the military and the military way of life. In war-torn countries, civilians may resent special treatment for combatants whom they see as responsible for war-time destruction. There are exceptions, as in Eritrea, where the larger population agrees that the combatants deserve benefits after their years of sacrifice. It is important to note that the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) won a war of liberation, therefore it is not surprising that Eritreans are more supportive of special benefits.

USAID has developed a variety of approaches to reintegrating ex-soldiers. Helping ex-soldiers to reintegrate facilitates, along with other programs, the goal of achieving long-term sustainable development. Many of the same programs that are targeted to other groups may be modified to incorporate the needs of ex-soldiers, a social group with a specific set of needs and constraints. In some cases, as in El Salvador, USAID was able to build on programs designed for depressed areas. These included training and education, credit initiatives, jobs programs, and land distribution.<sup>16</sup>

USAID/San Salvador funded a counselling and referral center to link veterans with those programs and then added funds for services provided to veterans, rather than creating entirely new programs specifically for veterans. USAID also adopted this approach in Mozambique, where the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has established an Information and Referral Service (IRS). The IRS has served in a counseling and short-term problem-solving capacity while waiting for reintegration program to become operational.

The types of programs mentioned above are not new to USAID, and in many cases, USAID has a wealth of experience in designing

and implementing them. On the other hand, it has relatively little experience in implementing those programs to meet the needs of ex-soldiers. Consequently, it should apply the lessons learned from those experiences to the design of reintegration programs. Indeed, the best programs serving ex-soldiers will also incorporate the needs of their families and their communities.<sup>17</sup> This strategy effectively reduces the distance between a reintegration program and a community development program.

Training veterans with useful job skills is one way that donors can facilitate the transition. Experience shows that the training must be demand-driven, rising from the needs of the local economy. Training is not a solution to unemployment; rather, it is a vehicle for the unemployed to obtain skills needed in the market. Training programs work best when designed and implemented by local organizations that are most aware of the needs in the local economy and therefore less likely to train people for jobs that do not exist.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, education for veterans should match their abilities and the needs of the local economy.

Credit programs are another tool for empowering veterans to launch their own entrepreneurial activities rather than seek formal employment, such as programs in Ethiopia and Uganda to assist ex-soldiers establish self-help income generating groups.<sup>19</sup> Programs run by local NGOs are the most likely to succeed because they are rooted in the needs of the community. Programs optimally should combine access to credit with some form of technical assistance and on-the-job training to help the entrepreneurs learn how to launch a business, manage its finances, and market its services.

After a long war, a country will likely need to rebuild its infrastructure. With the influx of donor funds, governments may launch projects to rebuild roads, bridges, and even buildings destroyed during the war. This rebuilding results in an availability of jobs for the population as a whole, though the jobs themselves are of relatively short duration. Placing veterans in these jobs provides them with productive activity and new skills to make the short-term transition. The number of available jobs will depend upon the amount of funding dedicated to infrastructure, whether from external donors or the national government.

## Conclusions

USAID has learned much from its involvement in the demobilization and reintegration of soldiers. It has grappled with the legal restriction of assisting foreign militaries, and, drawing on flexible funding sources, has managed to design programs to respond to demobilization needs. In the policy area, USAID is still working out several issues. Significant political hurdles to donor involvement exist because of the uncertainties of the peace process, yet there is no simple answer to overcoming these risks. Bureaucratic obstacles are a hindrance, and the evidence suggests that some programs have failed because of them. Donor coordination is important, yet there are no institutional mechanisms to coordinate demobilization and reintegration.

On the operational side, USAID knows much more about the successes and failures of demobilization than about reintegration. The lessons from demobilization processes and programs are quickly evident. USAID has learned that assembly areas require a minimal amount of assistance to ensure adequate living standards, that soldiers should be processed in and out as quickly as possible, and that military observers must collect and secure weapons to prevent unauthorized access. Donors also know that providing assistance to soldiers as they demobilize gives them an incentive to leave the military.

Preliminary evidence suggests that reintegration programs are particularly needed when soldiers have spent many years in the military and have no other job skills. Life in combat has taught them acquisition by force, thus the alternative to not facilitating their reintegration is to see them resort to banditry. Options that USAID has pursued include vocational and agricultural training, education and scholarships, and credit programs. Information and referral centers have served to bridge the demobilization and reintegration process, often linking ex-soldiers with training and employment opportunities. USAID's involvement in reintegration programs is still difficult to assess, since it takes at least a couple of years to determine impact, whether in terms of the perceived level of reintegration or ex-soldiers' levels of economic self-sufficiency. High levels of poverty in countries such as Mozambique make it difficult to determine how much reintegration programs can, or will, contribute to long-term sustainable development—the overarching goal of the Agency.

## Notes

1. See Nat J. Coletta and Nicole Ball, "War to Peace: Transition in Uganda," **Finance and Development** (June 1993), pp. 36-39.
2. In other words, if 70 percent of the soldiers were expected to demobilize, then USAID could provide no more than 70 percent of the total assistance in all the camps.
3. Wendy Fenton, "Demobilization in Ethiopia: Lessons Learned," (Addis Ababa: USAID/Addis, mimeo, July 1994).
4. "Demobilization, Reintegration and Mine Clearance: Summary of the United Nations' Performance," USAID Cable, Maputo 4033, (Mozambique) (15 July 1994).
5. Roger Carlson, "Comments by Roger D. Carlson, Director, USAID/Mozambique on Humanitarian Assistance—Lessons Learned," Speech before the UNOMOZ Workshop, (New York) (27 March 1995). [UNOMOZ is the acronym for the United Nations Operation in Mozambique.]
6. Maputo 4033, *op. cit.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Fenton, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.
9. U. S. General Accounting Office, **Nicaraguan Resistance: Programs for Repatriation and Resettlement** (Washington, DC: GAO, July 1991).
10. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., **Final Evaluation of Emergency Program: Health and Jobs for Displaced Families** (Submitted to USAID/San Salvador, August 1993).
11. "Old Angolan Foes Struggle to Unite," **New York Times** (New York) (16 December 1991), p. 9A.
12. World Bank, **Demobilization and Reintegration of Military Personnel in Africa: The Evidence from Seven Country Case Studies, Report no. IDP-130** (Washington, DC: World Bank, October 1993).
13. Carlson, *op. cit.*
14. "Demobilization in Mozambique: Lessons Learned," USAID Cable, Maputo 5206, (Mozambique) (15 September 1994).
15. Creative Associates International, Inc., **Program Options for Reintegrating Ex-Combatants Into Civilian Life: Final Report** (Submitted to USAID/San Salvador, 26 April 1991).
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-39; World Bank, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
18. Creative Associates, *op. cit.*, and World Bank, *op. cit.*
19. See Coletta and Ball, *op. cit.*; "Reaping the Peace Dividend: Demobbed Soldiers Return to Civilian Life," **The Courier** no. 145, (May-June 1994); and Oswald Iten, "Ethiopia and Uganda: Swords Into Ploughshares," **Swiss Review of World Affairs**, no. 3 (March 1994), pp. 26-27.