

## Demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation

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### 1. Political and Military Framework

The Abidjan Accord of November 30th 1996 made provision for a nationwide DDR process that included the possible deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to oversee the programme. The proposal failed due to RUF scepticism over the neutrality of such a force. However, it now seems likely that any future DDR process in Sierra Leone will require at least some kind of observer group, possibly similar to UNOMIL in Liberia. In Liberia, UNOMIL's mandate was the verification of disarmament, whilst the wider process of demobilization was handled by UN-HACO. A similar state of affairs may well be considered for Sierra Leone. However, the role of UNOMIL and UN-HACO in Liberia was supported by the authority of ECOMOG, who were in place and enforced the amnesty deadline. Clearly, this will not be an option for Sierra Leone. The impartiality and direct involvement of ECOMOG, and in particular its Nigerian contingent in the present conflict, will almost certainly preclude the organization from involvement in its current form in a future Sierra Leonean DDR programme. There are few alternatives. A UN peacekeeping force is a possibility, but the cost and political will to participate of non-African states of such an operation may prove to be prohibitive. The OAU is unlikely to want to play a direct role in the DDR process, and has traditionally avoided operations that are concerned with internal conflict. A more likely scenario would be some kind of regional force comprised of small units from various West African states. The group will probably hold some kind of mandate from the UN Security Council, but it is unlikely that they will be UN troops per se. A combination of Ghanaian and Ivorian soldiers might be well suited to the task – both bringing some degree of efficiency, impartiality and sub-regional balance.

Apart from the obvious military considerations, there will need to be adequate civilian monitoring of the process as well. Civilian organizations such as religious bodies and local NGOs would be well placed to perform this kind of work, and add a greater dimension of accountability to the process. The media would also have a responsibility to record the process as it unfolds and to inform and encourage sceptical combatants and participants.

### 2. Lessons from the Recent Past

To ensure success in any future DDR programme, lessons must be learnt not only from the failure of the original Abidjan Accord process, but also from

successful processes elsewhere in Africa. There were many reasons why the original Sierra Leonean process failed. Primarily there was a lack of political will on behalf of all the parties to encourage and implement the DDR programme. Fighting continued after the signing of the peace agreement; the joint demobilization and resettlement committee foreseen under the terms of the peace agreement was never formed; there was no progress in the restructuring of the armed forces; armament and mobilisation increased, and the MNRRR suffered from organizational inertia. The demobilization process itself was not linked to a wider political and socio-economic context, and the Kamajoisia and other civil defence forces were not included in the programme.

There were bureaucratic and financial problems as well. The programme's trust fund was managed in New York, which made the funding and procurement process unnecessarily slow. The channeling of ODA funding through the UNDP system made the system cumbersome and weakened ODA influence and control. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the procurement process itself became corrupted at an early stage. The DDR technical package was insufficiently flexible to respond to the inflow of small numbers of combatants, and created chaos among the DDR unit, local government and NGOs. DDR being constituted as a government department headed by an army officer, created a major image problem and intrinsically linked DDR with the state, thus compromising neutrality.

In the Liberian process there were similar problems, but many of the warlords could see that further conflict would prove to be futile, and that territory and resources could be controlled through more cost-effective political means. However, observers noted that little was done to disarm factional leaders, many of whom maintained large, secret caches of arms for use in the eventuality of a resumption of hostilities. Another danger has been sudden increases in donor inputs to relief and development projects in response to a perceived 'successful' DDR process. This can often lead to a significant increase in the level of destabilisation in some areas. Finally, private wealth and trade networks that allow factions to rearm themselves often remain largely unmonitored both nationally and internationally.

### 3. The Situation on the Ground

Sierra Leone's current geopolitical landscape is highly complex. A proportion of the defunct Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF) formed the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) on May 25th, the date of the coup d'État. The AFRC by no means constitutes the entire RSLMF, and as the political position of the junta, led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma becomes weaker, many soldiers are beginning to express their loyalty to the constitutionally elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabba.

The AFRC was joined in its indecisive bid for power by the Revolutionary United Front. It was an unlikely alliance -- the two had officially been at war

with each other since the initial rebel incursion in 1991. Together they formed a combined force which was dubbed the 'People's Army'. It is this group that controls the Freetown Peninsula, Bo, Kenema, Makeni, the majority of smaller market towns in the interior and sometimes Zimmi. They are poorly disciplined, unpaid, under fed and unpredictable.

In opposition to the AFRC/RUF alliance are the predominantly Mende Kamajoisia (supporters of the SLPP-influenced Kabbah government), and the Nigerian contingent of ECOMOG. Other civil defence forces exist in the country, but their alliances remain unclear. The Kapras (from the Temne constituency), made it clear that they had no grudge to bare with the armed forces -- they too were concerned about the perceived rise in Mende political hegemony. The Tamaboros, predominantly Koranko in ethnicity, also adopted a reserved approach to the situation. The RSLMF was traditionally an employer of young Korankos from the Kabala area. Much of the Kono mining area is controlled by the Kongotom Dosas, loyal only to the Koidu-Sefadu diamond chiefs -- historically masters of borderland diplomacy and the control of valuable bush resources. There are also elements of ULIMO at large in southern and eastern Sierra Leone. This is a total of eight constituent groups, each of which will require bespoke DDR treatment to ensure the success of the entire programme. Furthermore, since the coup it has become difficult to estimate possible figures for the membership of these groups. The reality of the situation is one of such flux that accurate assessment may only be possible at the time of demobilization.

The separate processes of demobilization, disarmament and resettlement will each create numerous sets of problems for the implementation of a complete project of this nature. In the field of successful demobilization, the Kamajoisia will present the greatest difficulties for the dispersal of a standing army. The Kamajoisia are recruited locally along the lines of age-set patrilineage. This makes the centrality of the unit particularly difficult to dissipate. In Liberia it was found that 'Disarmed fighters....returned immediately to their factional command structures'. Admittedly, the experiences of NPFL fighters and Kamajoisia will be extremely different. However, whether social or psychological, a voluntary desire to continue participation in pseudo-military organizational structures could be a troublesome hurdle for complete and successful war-peace transition.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration form a continuum. Demobilization is only possible on the basis of effective voluntary disarmament. Similarly, the success of demobilization efforts is contingent upon perception of effective rehabilitation follow-up. For Sierra Leone, it is most probable that any successful demobilization effort will require a complete cessation of hostilities through a cease-fire agreement that is an explicit part of a political settlement involving the AFRC, the RUF, the ousted Kabbah government and the Kamajoisia. This would be dependent on a credible central authority with the power to provide security guarantees for disarmed individuals. The primary objective of a DDR programme for Sierra

Leone would be to substantially reduce the number of combatants and weapons that currently exist in the country. After demobilization and disarmament, combatants would be resettled and presented with viable alternatives to conflict.

#### **a) Problems of disarmament**

For many men living in the bush in Sierra Leone, the ownership of arms is culturally accepted. Hunting societies, of which the Kamajoisia is one, often expect firearm ownership of their members. The Kamajors may well argue that a shotgun is a means to a livelihood in the provision of bush-meat and is, therefore, exempt from any decommissioning scheme. The RUF will almost certainly have substantial caches of arms hidden in the bush. There is a danger that these weapons would not be declared, and could be traded across the border to either Liberia or Guinea. Transparency with regard to arms collection would be vital. Containment for collected weapons should be well separated from the assembly points of the former combatants and the weapons if not immediately destroyed should be guarded by an external military presence. To be completely successful the disarmament process must go beyond disarming individual soldiers and units, to include national disarmament and appropriate ways of dealing with 'surplus weapons'.

#### **b) Demobilization**

Demobilization requires a certain degree of momentum to be successful. Financial support for a programme of this nature is vital, so that it may be carried through to its conclusion. The necessary resources should be assured in advanced of the demobilization exercise. If possible, it may be advisable to bring all the combatants together into a unified national force, prior to demobilization. Subsequently, on the basis of the agreed criteria, some of them could be demobilised, leaving a sufficient number to form a national army. Alternatively, a programme of complete demobilization of all former combatants could be undertaken. In this instance, members of conflicting constituencies would be offered training to prepare them for a role in a positive war-peace transition. In either case the creation of well-organised central assembly points will be necessary for the collection of weapons and to establish documentation, reorientation and counseling. Important in this regard is that the security of assembly areas should be assured and that physical amenities must be in place. Finally, while an essential prerequisite of successful demobilization and disarmament is that the international community is committed to supporting it, any international involvement should be dictated by the government or the parties to the peace agreement, within the political, economic, social and cultural climate of Sierra Leone.

#### **c) Resettlement**

Resettlement of ex-combatants presents particular problems in the case of Sierra Leone. The facilitation of this aspect of the process may well be more straightforward when it comes to handling the Kamajoisia and other

chiefdom-based militias. Members of the RUF and the AFRC may run the risk of being victimised in the event of their resettlement, causing renewed tension and possible sources of conflict. Politically, resettlement will create fundamental problems. The locally organised structures of the Kamajoisia will essentially remain intact after any DDR process but those of the AFRC, and the RUF in particular, will be dissipated. This will almost certainly be a stumbling block in negotiations, but could be overcome by the creation of an integrated national army prior to demobilization.

#### **d) Sensitization**

Key aspects of the entire DDR process would have to be communicated clearly and simply to all factions involved in the current conflict and also to the civilian population, in large part through the radio and the press. During the original, failed process, the GoSL community sensitization and reconciliation package was late, inadequate and lacked substance.

#### **4. Specific Problems**

It now seems that the possibility of a decisive military solution to the current crisis is remote. The most likely scenario would be a negotiated settlement between all parties. Once this has taken place there will be a need for immediate security arrangements to be made in Freetown and up-country. The most pressing issues to be addressed will be the needs of combatants and the security of civilians. Guarantors for this process will have to be found extremely quickly to prevent a return to conflict and an increase in the level of rural banditry and urban crime.

Most importantly there will need to be firm political will to see the process through. Ideally, the process should be administered by civilians and the primary goal be the unanimously agreed, lasting and monitored cessation of hostilities. The agreement to disarm must be universal and the process supervised by a neutral body that is acceptable to all parties. Combatants must be encouraged to take part in the scheme by the use of incentives. These incentives include a basic survival package designed to meet immediate needs. However, any kind of package of this nature must be balanced so as to be attractive to the target group, but not to create resentment among the civilian population. Ideally, paths to concrete longer-term opportunities for employment, vocational training and formal education should be an integral part of the demobilization process. There will need to be adequate funding to ensure that a simple but effective system of management for the process will create transparency and accountability, guaranteeing fair and equal treatment for all combatants.

There are various bodies which would be in a position to assist with managing the implementation of a programme. Organizations and agencies who have been involved in previous demobilization plans include: GoSL; UNDP; WFP; WHO; UNICEF; international NGOs including ICRC, Africare, MERLIN, Tear Fund, MSF and ARD.

## 5. Conclusion

For a DDR programme to be a success in Sierra Leone, it is vital that a comprehensive strategy for its implementation is in place before the signing of any tripartite agreement between the RUF, the AFRC, and the Kabbah government-in-exile. The reasons for the failure of the original programme are noted above, but by far the over-riding factor that contributed to the present crisis was the disastrously slow pace of implementation. Had the process benefited from some degree of transparency, good-faith and momentum, catastrophe may well have been averted.