

Rebuilding Society After Conflict

How do you rebuild a society once war and conflict end?

The key is to return ex-combatants to civilian life, give them means to contribute to society (for example, a job and a house) and a reason to want to be part of that society.

The Great Lakes Region in Central Africa had been mired by violence and conflicts for more than a decade.

The international community is working to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate some 450,000 former combatants in 7 countries: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

This international effort is called the [Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program \(MDRP\)](#). It isn't a peace keeping mission, but a socio-economic development initiative.

For an ex-combatant to become civilian again, he or she must:

- **Disarm:** Turn over any weapons
- **Demobilize:** Be discharged from the armed forces
- **Reinsert:** Be reintroduced to civilian life and settled into a community
- **Reintegrate:** Complete transition to civilian life, such as get a job and become part of a social community

In some cases, ex-combatants must also be:

- **Repatriated:** Returned to the country of origin, if they were on foreign soil
- **Resettled:** Transferred to a third country, if they were on foreign soil and can't be returned home

Becoming a Civilian Again

Once ex-combatants decide to enter this process, they come to a point where they are met by officials from the government and demobilized.

The ex-combatants first get clothes, shelter, basic medical care, HIV/

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IT'S A FACT

The **MDRP** is financed by the World Bank and eleven donors— Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Commission, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom—that have pledged some US\$350 million to the trust fund, and involves some 30 [partner organizations](#).



AIDS counseling and civic education.

They are then given some money for transport and resettlement, basic household goods or farming tools.

Upon return to their communities, they receive training or basic education and opportunities to establish a livelihood or to find short-term employment.

It is estimated to cost about US\$1,200 to turn an ex-combatant into a civilian, with a job and a role in his or her community.



The Democratic Republic of Congo military registering for the demobilization process.



Ex combatants catching a ride to a demobilization center.

Examples of Success

Here are some examples of how ex-combatants have been helped.

In Angola, more than 30,000 ex-UNITA soldiers, who had spent on average 14 years fighting, are receiving reintegration assistance. For example, 50 ex-combatants in Huila province repaired an irrigation canal to make the land more productive, which the community gave them to use. The irrigation also helps improve the land for an additional 200 families from the same community.

In Rwanda, ex-combatants have become farmers, civil servants and even small scale entrepreneurs such as shop keepers of downtown Kigali.

In the Republic of Congo, former combatants have used the support they received to build poultry farms, manage fishponds or run barbershops.

Inching Toward Success

While these are some examples of success, helping these ex-combatants become civilians again is complicated for a number of reasons:

- Political and security conditions in these countries are still shaky.
- These countries are economically depressed and often lack infrastructure (roads, etc.) so it's difficult to help ex-combatants find jobs.
- Ex-combatants often need to get some basic training or schooling because many are illiterate—illiteracy is widespread in the region.

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