



Case Study: Re-Integration of Ex-Combatants

Organisation d'Appui à l'Auto Promotion (OAP)

Country: Burundi

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I. Summary of the case

They stood facing each other a long time in Burundi: 400 ex-fighters from two rival parties. These young people do not feel included in society, often have no work and live in extreme poverty. Therefore, politicians can easily persuade them to join their armed militias again. In a project of our partner OAP they learned to live together and build peace in their communities. In addition, the project engaged the former combatants in self-development and taught them how to work together on income-generating activities.

II. Full description of the case

Since May 2010, the eve of general elections, especially in the province of Bujumbura Rural insecurity increased and political opponents were harassed. Violence and intimidation were also observed between young members of the ruling party (CNDD-FDD) and those of the FNL-PALIPEHUTU.



The ex-combatants were unhappy with the way their demobilisation was effected: they felt they were not well integrated into the communities because of their prior membership to armed movements. For these reasons, awareness sessions on the risk of violent escalation became urgent, in order to prevent these ex-combatants from being manipulated by disgruntled politicians.

This project contributed to the national Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme of the government of Burundi. Despite this programme, the ex-combatants live in extreme poverty without jobs or support for economic integration. Most of them expressed

their dissatisfaction due to the lack of opportunities to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their communities. The project targeted 400 ex-combatants from both sides in the communes of Kabezi and Mutimbuzi.

Aim

The main objective of the project was to contribute to preventing cycles of violence, by learning ex-combatants to build peace in their communities and to unite to earn a living.

Context

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world. A main reason for this is the long-lasting civil war (1993-2005), that had disastrous effects on the population and the social fabric. With the end of the war, after long and difficult negotiations and the Arusha Accords on reconstruction and development being signed, Burundi went through a transition to multi-party democracy. The former rebel movement CNDD-FDD won the election, their leader was chosen as president. A difficult period followed, but during 2009 the peace process made considerable progress. The last remaining rebel movement renounced the use of arms and was registered as a political party (and changed its name to FNL, "Front National de Libération"). Their fighters and political leaders were integrated into the security forces and government. However, the elections conducted into 2010 were contested by opposition leaders who were then forced to the exile in neighbouring or European countries.

Main actors

OAP (Organisation d'Appui à l'Autopromotion) aims to support rural communities in a socio-economic way, with an approach based on the values of auto-development. The organisation has worked in Bujumbura Rural since twenty years. Almost 80 per cent of the people in this province live below the poverty line. Most of the health and education infrastructure was devastated during the war. In spite of the difficult situation, OAP remained in this province without interruption during the war period.

An analysis of the post-war situation revealed significant tensions between host communities and marginalised groups such as former refugees, internally displaced and ex-combatants. OAP began the process of peace building by reducing the tensions within the communities and launched the reintegration of marginalised groups with a program funded by IRC.

Why did Oxfam Novib get involved?

The partnership between OAP and Oxfam Novib started in 2003. The OAP project helped people to re-integrate in society and to live in peace and dignity, one of Oxfam Novib's main goals.

Methodology

During preliminary sessions, ex-combatants were able to identify the constraints that hinder their self-promotion. These included the lack of adequate training for self development, the lack of associations and lack of support for their income generating activities. Awareness sessions on the armed conflict and peaceful conflict resolution started from the analysis of the state of cohabitation between ex-combatants of different movements in the former project area. From there, participants were able to identify the root causes of violence — one of them being that some political leaders carry the ideals of violence and use the youth to achieve this goal. The 400 former combatants also attended trainings on how to set up and manage an association for self-improvement. After this, 20 associations were set up by 112 ex-combatants.

The project also contributed to the protection of the population against the negative effects of floods. Ex-combatants received training in tree planting and the construction of drainage systems.

Results

The project helped the beneficiaries to realise the disadvantages of the armed conflict. In addition they have recovered a feeling of dignity and self-confidence. They understood that they have the potential to contribute to national reconstruction and lead a healthy life like everyone else.

The communities are happy with the involvement of ex-combatants in the protection of the environment. Indeed, this work has allowed landowners to recover their crops and homes threatened by heavy rains and erosion.

A total of 22 mediation committees are now operational in the project area. They operate on a daily basis, working with the local administration and locally elected officials. The aggressiveness of some ex-combatants to local authorities due to political affiliation has since disappeared. Habits of theft and crime are increasingly disappearing.

In Rubirizi zone, the administrator recognises that the ex-combatants have changed their behaviour after participating in awareness-raising sessions on the conflict. In that zone, there had been segregated neighbourhoods: there were areas reserved exclusively for former FNL combatants and other for former combatants from CNDD-FDD, and it was dangerous to go 'on the other side'. This state of affairs has changed and everybody now moves freely.

III. Lessons learned

According to testimonies collected in the two municipalities, the training provided to ex-combatants by the OAP has put an end to the phenomenon of Balkanisation and insecurity that characterised these areas.

The project should be extended so that beneficiaries can fully integrate socially and economically, by financing their income generating initiatives. The time allocated to the project was too short to see more significant impact. Associations created require close support and regular monitoring.

IV. Read on..

<http://oapburundi.bi/spip.php?article12>

http://oapburundi.bi/IMG/pdf/Rapport_Anee_2011_Version_definitif.pdf

V. Colophon

Partner: L'Organisation d'Appui à l'Auto Promotion (O.A.P.), SAP CP number: 501277, ON partner since 2003

Project: SAP project number: A-1383, name: "Early warning project" or "Projet alerte précoce", aim: support the socio-economic reintegration of former combatants in Kabezi and Mutimbuzi communes, project period: 01.12.2010 – 31.12.2011, financial contribution Oxfam Novib: € 73,636

Country and further context: Oxfam Novib has worked in Burundi since the mid-1980s. ON, together with Butterfly Works, is working on four programmes in the country. Programme 4 (right to life and security) focuses on marginalised groups living in rural areas (especially small scale farmers), who are being affected by conflicts, often related to competition over land. On conflict prevention ON is supporting organisations that use media to raise awareness on peaceful conflict resolution. Partners working under programme 1 (right to a sustainable livelihood) will be stimulated to mainstream conflict transformation in their programmes. (Source MFS II)

Bureau/field office dealing with the project: Burundi field office

Author: Raphaël Bindariye, HCB Project Officer, Oxfam Novib office in Bujumbura (Burundi)

Edited by: Metha Spaans (Programme Resource Desk)

Source: Monitoring and/or annual reports: narrative progress report

Aim of the Case:

Selling (advocating for project continuation)

Telling and learning (for sharing information and learning from experience)

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