

CHAPTER 2

REINTEGRATION AND RETURN

Demobilisation was not done properly. There is not enough trauma counselling, and only five days in the camps. Post 1996, there were problems when Taylor was elected. DDR wasn't done properly and then they became part of continued conflict. In the recent conflict and rioting, people were caught with AKs. Monrovia is overpopulated. The best way to secure yourself is to keep some arms with you. The security sector cannot defend you. National security has no capacity. Mob violence is there; in seconds, conflict can erupt. Guns are dangerous when ex-combatants are being reintegrated without proper demobilisation.

-Interview with CEDE programme officer in Monrovia, 12 November 2004.

Liberia

The failures of reintegration in Liberia represent one of the biggest threats to peace in the sub-region. The UNDP and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) warned the international donor community in the early months of 2005 that the successful disarmament and demobilisation of former combatants in Liberia's 14-year civil war was facing "serious risks of reversal."⁴³ With a budget shortfall of USD39.5 million, the most important implication of the lack of funds for the Reintegration and Rehabilitation part of the DDRR process is that 42,000 ex-combatants have no access to programmes, with elections rapidly approaching. In April, Sweden increased its contribution to the UNDP DDRR Trust Fund with an additional 25 million Swedish Kroner. This still leaves a monumental gap.

The demobilisation phase at the 11 cantonment sites in Liberia lasted for only five days. Training was intended to help ex-combatants gain the skills and insights to transform from fighters (or, as in the case of many women and children who participated in the DDR process, the equivalent of indentured servants) to civilians ready to assume the duties of life in peacetime. Participants

joined trainers for pre-discharge orientation activities in the areas of Personal Development and Career Counselling, Trauma Healing, Civic Education, and Conflict Resolution and Peace Building. Women were also supposed to be provided with reproductive health and sexually based gender violence (SBGV) counselling.

One of the trainers for FIND (the Foundation for International Dignity) worked with ex-combatants at Tubmanberg for six months and then at Voinjama as a supervisor for another three months. He described a four-day process, since the first day was dedicated to logistics.⁴⁴ On day one, participants learn “to understand conflict and how to resolve and cope with it;” on day two, they move on “to start a process of redefining one’s life through the development of a healthy self-image and self perception,” on day three they strive “to understand our basic responsibilities to our nation and fellow citizens,” and finally, on day four, they get to talk about trauma and healing, “to understand the effects of trauma, how it is able to destabilise a normal person and ways to cope with it.”⁴⁵

FIND is contracted by the Liberia Community Infrastructure Programme (which is, in turn, funded by USAID) to do conflict resolution and reconciliation. Two trainers there admitted that “four days is a drop in the bucket.” In almost a year of working with ex-combatants, they believe strongly that the lack of adequate counselling could be directly responsible for prolonged or renewed conflict, or at least fail to stop its momentum:

We need to get the ex-combatants back to their communities before another outbreak of violence like the one in Monrovia on 28 October.⁴⁶ We want them to extend similar messages to their communities like the ones they receive in our training. There is a lot of work to be done, especially among youth. The energy fuelling this war is not the guns; it is the people who physically engage in armed conflict. We need to rebuild the education system, tear down and rebuild their values. We say to these guys at the camp: “If a Big Man gives you a gun and says, kill this person, will you do it? If it is a woman or child? Will that Big Man ever ask you to kill his son or himself? No. He will always be using you to kill people just like you.” When they start to think about it, some of them cry. We send them away like that sometimes, having opened another wound of what they have done but with no time to close it properly.⁴⁷

A counsellor at a different organisation offered more evidence for the absurdity

of trying to rehabilitate ex-combatants in only a few days, with very little continuing NGO support. "Many of these people come to accept or believe that they are murderers," she said. "They have killed family members, friends, and even small children during the war. Psychologically, they are in need of a lot of support. We are worried that the few people working on this are not enough."⁴⁸ An interview with two trainers who worked with ex-combatants at the camps revealed the challenges.

Interview: Demobilisation trainers, Monrovia, 15 November 2004

I ask them, those who gave you arms to kill, what if you turned around and said, instead of killing the people you want me to kill, I will kill you. I say to them, the people you kill, they are vital. They could be your friends. Because they did not offend you personally. Someone somewhere, feels offended by them, but the person has not done you any harm. So the essence is, we need to identify our brothers and sisters, redirect them, that's the way out. The big bosses, those who fuel the war, the warlords, will never stop hunting people down, but they don't have to use these innocents, these virgins, who know nothing about crisis or about war. But they continue to use them, marginalise them, to abuse them, to get their aims accomplished. So the second question I ask is, "How many times have your warlords asked you, 'how are you doing?' They gave you arms. How many times have you seen them? Do they care about you? No, they have abandoned you. And tomorrow, if you accept again to be used, they will forget you again". So either way, the conclusion is that working constructively with the ex-combatants is the way out. Because if you can educate them, or give them the tools to resist being used, then there is no fuel for the people at the top. The people at the top might still want to fight, but they will not have any place to go. They are in the vehicle but they can't drive anywhere because there is no fuel. Those people will have learned to resist them. The population, predominantly the youth, constitute the energy base.

That's part of what we have been fighting. One of our processes which is important is personal development and career counselling; the level of ignorance is alarming in our country. Every time we lecture, every day we lecture, we see in their faces, the interests to go get an education, to be able to handle themselves, to respond to challenges, and so in our personal development course, we try to build the self-

esteem, which is the core. A lack of self-esteem, if a man feels he is nobody, he cannot rise to heights where others are, so he goes for anything. But if his self-esteem is good, in the way that he believes in himself, if he believes he can make a life, there are many, many things that he can turn his back on. So we try to get them to understand that what others can do, if they work hard, if they get something or skills, they will be able to challenge and stand up for themselves.

Q: What do you say to a young person who has gone so far as to get skills training and there are no jobs?

Such training should inculcate peace education. Training in carpentry will afford you the opportunity to maximise your skills in terms of economic reward. But you also need to build peace. What that will mean is, people need to move in environments that enable them to let live. People will migrate to communities where they can make a living. But I think that is much better than resorting to war or violence. For where we are, this nation is degenerating so bad, that no amount of economic promise will be able to assure all the people who have skills training, but at least they have some sense that they can resort to. Having a skill, even if you can't make money with it, it's part of peacebuilding. It's something they have other than a gun. If you can create a vision that you can pursue, rather than the gun, you can wait for an opportunity then sit back and have big dreams.

Q: Do you think that educating the youth is the most important thing to sustaining the peace?

The need for education is the most important thing. They have realised that they have been used because they are not educated. Man who has a master's, or who has gone as high as a PhD, he can do something not to resort to hostility. If you realise that I have a 50-50 chance to survive, they can choose to die, if I choose to die, if I choose to go for education, it means that education is the way out. Because once our youths are educated, they will know what is good for them. But if they are not educated, they become the prey of those who want to achieve bad aims. And there are plenty of people still around who are interested in their own agendas. Look at the government, in the peace process. See where we are. There is a need for us to have awareness for transformation. When you look at the present activities

of the “stakeholders” in our government, there is a lot of dissatisfaction still looming around. People are still not satisfied. And so, they will be looking over their shoulders. If they do not work with the youth, they could be using them. Because these stakeholders are respected by their constituencies. If we want to build a peace, we must begin with awareness; build it among the youth, especially the youth.

Q: Will people move to Guinea or Ivory Coast if there is a conflict?

Yes, I think it is so. People are so similar. It is so difficult to distinguish a Liberian from an Ivorian, or from a Guinean. But when you work positively with youth, and they are really rehabilitated, that too will spread. Just as the bad things spread, so the good things will spread. It will affect others who they associate with. If we do a good job, instead of bad things spreading, the good things will spread. That is our belief.

The process of peace building is correcting what went wrong before. Liberia served as a land of asylum for many Africans. But then the nation started to degenerate, especially in the 1980s and so Liberia became a ground for hate. We must correct that. This nation needs urgent support of the international community so that our borders are protected. This nation is a loving nation. There is peace in Liberia, it can affect Ivory Coast, and other places. This is the only place you come and people don't harass you. But nobody cares about you, unlike neighbouring countries and if you are prospering it's an offence to someone. The international community needs to get through and we will become a haven, we can accommodate and provide solutions. So Liberia again must be given the needed attention beginning with DDDR and reconstruction process.

Some of the optimistic views expressed by these two trainers highlight their passion for their work. However, without funding to provide the needed counselling and education, “personal transformation” seems a long way off for the 42,000 ex-combatants currently left out of the reintegration phase. There are other ongoing projects to address the need for general “demobilisation” not just of ex-combatants but also within communities that must prepare to re-absorb former fighters into their homes, villages, businesses, churches, and mosques. Civil society is not optimistic about the reintegration and rehabilitation (“RR”) phase of DDDR, and although at least one UNDP official responsible for civil society funding has openly acknowledged that she is “stingy” because

of a lack of technical capacity in the sector, it may fall to these underfunded groups to pick up the slack of the underfunded UNDP.

There are problems with civil society taking on the burden of filling this gap, beyond just the lack of technical capacity and funding. Where religion may enter into rehabilitation issues, there are almost no Muslim peacebuilding organisations in Liberia (this is true in Africa in general; most funding from Muslim donor countries and individuals goes directly to humanitarian work and schools, rather than peace or conflict resolution programmes). Most Christian groups include a proselytising element to their counselling and other work; there is a risk of alienating those with different belief systems or those who need help but are not ready or willing to profess faith in a particular religion. One NGO worker said:

Ninety-nine percent of the peace practitioners are Christians. If there was religious violence here today, we would have a difficult time navigating as peace builders. This is probably a large structural problem or issue, at the donor level. Christian groups are interested in funding peace work specifically, and maybe Muslim groups internationally are afraid to get involved.⁴⁹

Finally, how equipped are NGOs to provide job training and alternatives to violence? The equation can be reduced, at its core, to the economics of employment and trade. Civil society, driven by donor concerns about peacebuilding themes and education, may not have the follow-through or staying power with young people to offer them real alternatives. In mid-2004, while disarmament was ongoing, UNMIL noted that it had received reports from people living near the frontier in Liberia that guns used in Liberia's civil war were being traded in neighbouring countries for consumer goods such as bicycles and motorbikes.⁵⁰ This piece of information, though it only garnered three lines in the middle of a larger media story, was corroborated by several respondents during fieldwork in Monrovia and Daru (on the Sierra Leone-Liberia border). Many of the young men trading AK variants for motorbikes, in particular, hoped to use the bikes to start small businesses and earn money transporting people and goods locally near their homes. When asked whether this kind of entrepreneurial spirit could be part of peacebuilding, several NGO workers responded that they wouldn't know where that kind of activity fit into their agendas, and that they would have no advice for these particular ex-combatants.

Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, reintegration is still very much an issue, particularly in the context of unemployed youth. Although the DDRR process was widely hailed as a success, problems like drug addiction and a lack of psychological support have left some communities burdened with crime and potential instability. Youth populations are unemployed and instil fear even in political leaders, who cite them as the biggest risk to the sustainability of peace. Civil society is under-equipped and financed to deal with this burden and the Ministry of Youth and Sport in the post-war context is relegated to onlooker status when it comes to questions of security. A government official in Kono stated that the biggest security threat facing one of the richest diamond mining areas in the world was, quite simply, unemployed youth.⁵¹ This view was corroborated by other government representatives and people living in Koidu town. In Koidu particularly, libraries and resource centres were considered to be necessary for keeping the peace, since there was no other way to “occupy the youth” other than violence.

Because of the way both warfare and demographics have changed during the 20th and early 21st centuries, children and youth are increasingly becoming both perpetrators and victims of instability, whether manifested as crime or civil war, or some combination of the two. The major “threat” cited so often in Sierra Leone and Liberia is less focused on youth as soldiers and more on the possibility of a growing criminal element such as Kono’s prostitutes and Freetown’s drug pushers. Small arms proliferation and conflict in West Africa, particularly the Mano River Union countries, relies on an economy that excludes the majority of youth from legitimate employment. However, it has been repeatedly shown that given the option to pursue non-violent livelihoods, young people will do so. Argenti argues:

Given the chance, young people do not vent their frustration in the form of anarchic violence. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that young people only become involved in warfare or other forms of violence as a rational choice in a zero option political and economic climate.⁵²

With UNAMSIL pulling out, Sierra Leone has yet to face the challenge of maintaining peace without international reinforcement. Creating a climate of political inclusion through reintegration and an active civil society and local government structures can diffuse the threat of a rekindled conflict. Providing education and job opportunities for youth is likely to anchor them within their communities, helping to remove the pull of mercenary work or

easy recruitment into armed groups both within their own country and in neighbouring ones. Sierra Leone's slow devolution of power from Freetown to local governments, where a quota of the representatives must be youth, is an excellent first step in this direction.