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**LOCAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION
AND THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS:
STREET CHILDREN, REFUGEES, DISPLACED PEOPLE
AND
DEMOBILISED SOLDIERS**



**DEMOBILISATION OF THE NATIONAL RESISTANCE ARMY
OF UGANDA - A PEACE DIVIDEND**

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DEMOBILISATION OF THE NATIONAL RESISTANCE ARMY OF UGANDA - A PEACE DIVIDEND FOR DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The end of the Cold War era has brought an end to many of the conflicts (Ethiopia, Namibia) that disrupted the African continent and brought suffering to both the warring armies and civilian population during the past decade. It has also facilitated political liberalisation (Zambia, Mali, Gambia, Benin and Namibia).

As peaceful and stable situations now seem to settle in many African countries previously experiencing conflicts, many Governments are now undertaking significant economic and political changes to transform their societies. One such change that offers opportunity for governments to reallocate resources for the transformation process is demobilisation of soldiers. As conflicts erupted in many African countries, armies were increased rapidly and their maintenance claimed significant budgetary resources at the expenses of other sectors of the economy such as health, education etc. In other words, maintenance of security became a priority.

A review of the Uganda demobilisation programme and its progress therefore demonstrates that while the war to peace transition offers opportunity to recapture substantial resources for development, the process presents the same transitory social and economic development problems of any transformation and adjustment process. The short experience of Uganda with demobilisation offers unique guidance for other governments that are intending to demobilise their armies to reallocate resources to set their countries towards the path of peaceful economic and political modernisation.

Background and Rationale for Demobilisation

Uganda's National Resistance Movement (NRM), came to power in 1986 after a protracted guerrilla struggle. The past two decades of civil strife had left Uganda with a war-torn and ravaged social economy.

From 1986, the National Resistance Army, estimated then at less than 15,000, was rapidly expanded to contain the political and military situation that obtained in the country. The expansion became necessary for the following reasons:

- (i) The need to integrate the military wings of the various political organisations which had participated in the war under different command structures as a way of ensuring stability and order in the country.
- (ii) The outbreak of a large scale rebellion in the North and North Eastern parts of the country in 1986/87. This necessitated a rapid military build up in order to appropriately deal with the situation, and
- (iii) The need for the army to participate in the maintenance of law and order after the breakdown of relevant law maintenance organs such as the police force.

Overtime and by 1992, NRA had successfully overcome the rebellion and the Government had been able to re-establish a state of increasing security, and began to move the country towards a path of peaceful economic reconstruction and development.

Under these stabilising conditions, it no longer became necessary to maintain a large army. Accordingly, Government found it appropriate to reduce the size of the army so that its focus would be shifted from the internal security problems to that of defending the national borders. Reduction of the army also meant that available resources for defence would now be used to improve army welfare and its quality in equipment and skills.

The demobilisation of soldiers, especially after resolution of the then obtaining military and political conflicts, provided government opportunity to shift the burden of its public expenditure away from the earlier necessary stress on defence and security to promoting social and economic development. This shift in investment from non-productive (destructive) to productive assets entail the demobilisation (net reduction) and subsequent reintegration into productive civilian life of about 50,000 soldiers over three years. To date and after about nine months of programme implementation, about 23,000 soldiers have been demobilised.

The demobilisation of soldiers meant releasing large numbers of potentially vulnerable persons and their families into a relatively hostile labour market. Many of the soldiers had no homes beyond NRA, little experience of civilian life, no savings, little education with no marketable skills. If they were simply discharged from the military, experience from other parts of Africa, and within Uganda itself suggests that they could resort to banditry and other forms of unlawful behaviour to provide for themselves and their families. Such a situation would further burden a weak recovering economy and undermine the country's hard-won peace and stability without which all development efforts would be futile.

Recognising that the demobilised soldiers would constitute a "specially disadvantaged group", the Government decided to establish a Veterans Assistance Programme (VAP) to facilitate their demobilisation and subsequent reintegration into civilian economy.

Veterans Assistance Programme (VAP)

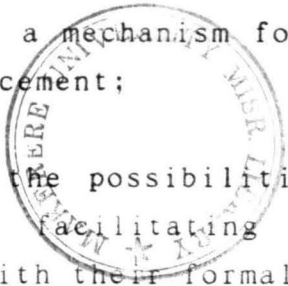
The primary objective of demobilisation programme was to create a "peace dividend" that could be applied to priority economic sectors, so new soldiers will not be recruited to replace those demobilised. The veterans will not be eligible for employment in either commercial activities run by the military or the civil service.

VAP has three stages; assembly and discharge, demobilisation and reintegration. The first phase, handled by the army, occurs over a minimum of two to three days in central assembly points in various regions of the country. The second phase of demobilisation provides transport and settling-in benefits.

The final phase, now at a very advanced preparatory stage, reintegration, incorporates the long-term social adjustment, training, and employment programmes. The final phase is considered critical in sustaining the achievements made in the demobilisation process.

The overall objective of the long term package is to ensure the smooth re-integration of veterans into productive civilian life with the following specific objectives:

- (i) to provide the modalities for counselling on job opportunities, health, education and on economic activities;

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- (ii) to provide a mechanism for assisting the veterans in job placement;
 - (iii) to assess the possibilities and suggest ways and means for facilitating interested veterans to continue with their formal education and to assist productive activities through provision of credit.

With the demobilisation of 23,000 soldiers now complete, it is anticipated that the thrust of the programme, (in addition to further demobilisation) will be re-integration. The success of the reintegration process does not only consolidate the transition from war to peace but guarantees that those citizens directly involved in the resolution of conflicts are settled as productive members of communities.

As a first step in creating the programme, extensive preparatory work was undertaken to determine personal characteristics and post demobilisation aspirations of the military personnel, the administrative structure required and the structure and cost of short and longer-term reintegration programmes. Guidelines to be used in selecting the personnel to be demobilised were drawn and agreed on by the Army council and these included voluntary resignation, age, service no longer required and health.

Settling in Kit:

Provision of entitlements to veterans was carefully considered. the objective of the settling-in-kit was to ensure the quick resettlement of the veterans as civilians by providing them with the means to meet their immediate needs during the first six months of his/her resettlement. The programme covered the veteran and his immediate family who were considered a "vulnerable social unit", thus increasing

beneficiaries to over 70,000. It was anticipated that payment of settling in kit that takes into account the veteran and his immediate family would smooth out the transition to civilian life and community reintegration. Entitlements (clothing, food, shelter, medicare and school fees for two children) were provided to veterans and spread over time (six months) and location (discharge point and district), thereby spreading the social costs of reintegration among as many communities as possible.

It was also intended to encourage veterans to find employment in their areas of settlement, rather than congregating in Kampala or other urban centres and reducing the risk of large groups of former soldiers disrupting law and order. Payment of benefits was also spread over time and location to ensure that they will be available when required and used as intended, as well as encourage veterans to settle in rural areas.

Institutional Arrangement

An extensive programme of this nature requires an appropriate institutional framework to expedite its implementation. Accordingly, Government legally constituted the Uganda Veteran Assistance Board to implement the Programme. A Board of Directors is responsible for policy decisions and general supervision of the programme. At operational level, the Board was managed by Secretariat and each district had a staff of three persons to handle all matters pertaining to demobilised soldiers. At the District level a District Veterans' Committee oversees the implementation process by the field officers.

In addition, the programme was supported through provision of technical assistance and several consultancies which provided technical expertise for the programme implementation.

Experiences and Lessons from the Programme.

Like all other adjustment programmes, demobilisation of soldiers presents same transitory social and economic development problems. With no parallels in Africa, demobilising large numbers of soldiers requires a strong and bold political commitment. It also means that oversized armies, which some governments in Africa used to cling to power and suppress opposition, are no longer necessary as conflicts cease. Instead, we should evolve peaceful political processes to resolve our conflicts. The demobilisation experiment in Uganda clearly demonstrates the political commitment of Government towards demobilisation, and a desire to evolve peaceful political processes for change. I wish also to observe that the armies which are due to undergo a reduction-in-force also need careful sensitisation and cooperation in the demobilisation exercise.

Given budgetary constraints often experienced during adjustment programmes, the role of the donor community is particularly crucial in demobilisation exercise. In the context of Uganda, the cost of undertaking significant demobilisation to realise sizable "peace dividend" implied availability of resources to effect payment of benefits to demobilised soldiers to facilitate their transition from military to civilian life. The strong political commitment on the part of Government to the exercise received positive response from the donor community which generously provided significant financial resources for the implementation of the programme. These costs of the programme will, in course of time, pay off through savings, which can then be reallocated to other priority areas such as health and education which suffered at a time when defence expenditures of necessity claimed significant budgetary resources.

Equally important in demobilisation is the need to have an in depth knowledge of socio-economic characteristics of demobilised soldiers as these influence transition and subsequent integration processes. These characteristics also provide sound basis for the design of appropriate programmes for reintegration. In the context of Uganda, the majority of veterans were young in age bracket of 20 - 30 implying the need for a medium to long-term programme of assistance to harness this important section of the country's workforce. Moreover, most of these youths had little or no education and lack marketable skills. This came about as a result of these gallant sons and daughters of Uganda opting to fight for real freedom to continuing with their education. This exacerbated the vulnerability of the veterans.

Some veterans discharged on medical grounds were "causality cases" and these constitute a particularly vulnerable group which is likely to complicate the process of reintegration. Some veterans, in the casualty group were receiving treatment while in the army, found themselves unable to meet medical bills after demobilisation. Accordingly, the needs of this subset and others emerge more significantly than the rest of demobilised soldiers during implementation of the programme. Fortunately, the majority of these cases are now placed in a special category for whom a special discharge and re-integration programme is being worked out. Thanks to the far sightedness of the army leadership.

The level and effectiveness of organisation of implementors is critical towards successful demobilisation. At the various districts where soldiers settled, personnel to specifically and expeditiously attend to the issues related to demobilisation were in place. Moreover, the programmes utilised expertise of Consultants to undertake in depth monitoring, evaluation and beneficiary assessment of various aspects of

the programme. Lessons and experiences learnt from programme monitoring and evaluation were directly feedback towards improving the implementation process as well as providing basis of designing subsequent phases of demobilisation.

While the first phase of demobilisation of soldiers in Uganda has offered opportunity for Government to reduce defence expenditure and subsequently to be used in other priority sectors and programmes including decentralisation, its sustenance and acceptance will depend on the reintegration programmes to further assist the demobilised soldiers settle into civilian life by enhancing their productive capacity.

Initial fears of disruption of peace and stability appear to hold many Governments back from taking decisions towards demobilisation. This inertia may be removed through effective counselling process of would be veterans, effective handling of all unlawful acts of those demobilised as well as putting in place programme for their further integration into civilian communities. It also entails evolution of political processes that encourage and support peaceful resolution of conflicts in society without military resource that seems to support maintenance of oversized armies. For demobilisation experiments of this nature to hold the promise of providing additional resources for development, the issues arising from it must be firmly dealt with like in all adjustment programmes.

It should also be understood that, the prolonged military conflicts in Africa all seem to have tired out military personnel to the extent of many desiring to settle civilian life . With proper guidance and appropriate political changes, reduction of armies in Africa indeed offer opportunity for all to reap peace dividends and encourage the citizen towards determination of their destinies with minimal use of military recourse.

Our humble observation demobilisation demonstrates that reduction of armies through demobilisation will have the greatest impact, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the bulk of military expenditure is not on weapons but on personnel.

The Ugandan experience suggests that with careful planning, it is possible for African Governments to demobilise oversized armies without social disruptions and without undermining security. Savings from reduced military expenditure can contribute significantly to social expenditures of general benefit. Reduction in force also demonstrates our resolve to opt for peaceful self governance. Finally, it offers opportunity to transform the vulnerable army personnel involved in these conflicts into productive section of society contributing to overall development process.

Finally, I would like to underline the fact that we in Uganda associated with the on-going demobilisation exercise do not claim so much experience and expertise. We have made our own mistakes and are learning from it. We would like to exchange views and experience with our counter parts especially in Africa to enhance our knowledge and deepen our insight into a programme which offers strategic gains for our Governments and peoples.