



**Comoros: What to do with ex-militia youth?**

The *Reintegration of Anjouanese Ex-Militia Program* was financed by a Post-Conflict Fund (PCF) grant for a total cost of US\$788,000 and implemented by CARE France between July 2001 and June 2003. It was conceived as a response to the volatile security situation in Anjouan after years of attempted separation of the island from the Comorian state and as a contribution to the fledgling national reconciliation process initiated in 2001.



The program identified young Anjouanese ex-militia as a significant destabilization factor and hence aimed at providing them with an alternative to violence. Youth surrendering their arms and agreeing to a basic 'contract' would benefit from six months of in-residence targeted professional/vocational training coupled with an introduction to human rights and the culture of peace, and fourteen months follow-up and support during the reintegration phase. The specific objective of the program was to reintegrate 650 young ex-militiamen professionally and socially over two years.

What worked:

*In-Center Training.* While in-center formulas are usually considered with caution, this choice actually proved judicious. It translated into increased attendance, reduced drop-out, and allowed to shorten training periods by means of intensification. It also gave training staff the opportunity to get to know the trainees better and provide a tailored package. More importantly, the risk of negative group solidarities was avoided and even reversed. The in-residence formula deliberately mixed the trainees' populations thus breaking traditional allegiances. Also, new positive group identifications occurred whereby the trainees identified no longer as militia but as ex-militia having 'turned the page'.

*Learning-by-doing.* The pedagogical approach was based on the ideas of appropriation and responsibility. Values of democracy and consensus governed the trainees' life at the center (literally

through elections) and guided their transition into civilian life. The use of sketches and role play provided a tangible expression to otherwise abstract principles. Giving responsibility to the youth played an important role in (re-)building a positive self image.

*Targeting the right activities.* To support economic self-sufficiency after the training, small income generating activities were identified after consultations with representatives of various professions (to ensure sufficient economic demand) and with village councils (to ensure sufficient community demand). Each youth was guided by individual meetings, talks, and field visits with professional monitoring teams to formulate his or her own professional project. By focusing on activities that could be carried out on a very small scale, the project also sought to reinforce the community fabric, bringing the youth back to the villages and fostering local development.

*Women Participation.* While women did participate directly and indirectly in militia activities, their inclusion in the program, which involved in-center accommodation alongside male trainees, was a challenge. In a traditional Muslim context such as that of Anjouan this was achieved through close collaboration with women's associations during awareness campaigns in the villages.

#### What did not work:

*Identifying the beneficiaries.* As part of an emergency program linked to the National Reconciliation process the project was to target initially only proven ex-militiamen. The criterion was made as simple and straightforward as possible: youth who agreed to give up a weapon would be considered an ex-militia and hence entitled to training. In practice the process of surrendering weapons and of tracking those having surrendered the weapons proved extremely tricky. Arms were often sold or exported without being recorded. The project had to switch to a more ad-hoc approach relying on communities to identify ex-militia. Entitlement was extended to include a broader category of "youth at risk". With this shift, the project gradually changed nature with a basic tradeoff: by opening up to a more diverse group (which was positive) the project lost focus and gradually shifted toward a more classical vocational training operation. It became difficult to justify inclusion or exclusion of a growing number of candidates to the program. Moreover, by switching from a punctual operation (DDR) to one that was permanently in demand (given the high rates of youth unemployment), the project subjected itself to increased pressures for renewal of funding, making exit difficult.

*Meeting conflicting expectations.* The project had been initially structured in two phases: In the first phase, trainees received in-center professional training for a period of six months. The second phase, a period of three months, focused on training "community development agents" who would spread the culture of peace and to take over the task of conflict *prevention* in the communities. This second phase proved to be impracticable and extremely unpopular with the new candidates to training. While initiation to Human Rights was extremely successful *in association* with professional training, the project was unable to recruit more than few youth for the community development agents program and had to revert to a professional training curriculum. The change both in content and duration created a strong sense of unequal treatment between the first trainees and their subsequent cohorts. This experience highlights two important lessons: First, the sensitivity of this public to unequal treatment, and second, the centrality of professional training for ex-militia youth.

*Ensuring proper reintegration.* The main shortcoming of the project was its failure to ensure that the youth, once trained, were able to be integrated professionally. The project team had counted on linkages with micro-credit institutions that would provide trainees with modest start-up capital. However, ex-militiamen without collateral were not considered credit-worthy and some 75% remained unemployed with a sense that their skills were being wasted, and that their trust had been betrayed.

To avoid such situations, DDR projects with elements of professional reintegration should either directly provide the necessary toolkits upon completion of training, or include a 'guarantee fund' to be used as collateral for micro-credit.

### Conclusion

Some salient features this project are specific to the Anjouanese context and type of conflict. Anjouan is a small, island community and this means that (i) community participation was fairly easy to muster; (ii) no regions or villages were left out; and (iii) no outside destabilizing forces were at play. In addition, the relative bloodlessness of the Anjouanese conflict meant that the trainees had not been exposed to and participated in extreme violence. Intense psychological care was not needed and normal conflict inside the 'camp' never escalated into actual violence.

In this context, the project managed to successfully provide youth at risk, both ex-militia and others, with professional skills training as well as to create a culture of participation and responsibility among these youth. Yet the project was constrained by high sensitivity to perceived unequal treatment and eventually by low access to credit.

### ***The PCF Occasional Notes***

*This PCF Occasional Note was written by Aurelien Kruse (AFTP1). This occasional note series is intended to disseminate good practices, lessons learned and useful information about PCF grants. The series is edited by the PCF Secretariat within the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction (CPR) Unit in the Social Development Department of the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network of the World Bank. The views expressed in these notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank Group, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent. PCF Occasional Notes are distributed widely to the World Bank staff and outside the World Bank and are also available on the CPR/PCF website (<http://www.worldbank.org/pcf>).*