

## **Social Safety Nets in Conflict-Affected Countries**

*P. Wam, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, December 10, 2002*

Conflict-affected countries are usually faced with a situation of increased vulnerability (larger number of people affected, more severe vulnerability, new groups of vulnerable) and decreased formal capacity for support (breakdown of welfare systems, reduced budgets). Feasible approaches in such situations would include a strong emphasis on community level social and attitudinal capacity for support. Support that can help overcome schisms between population groups should be emphasized. I will look at a few examples of approaches in which the local communities have been playing key roles, including one dealing with the reintegration of ex-combatants. I will also discuss two aspects that are often missed in support programs in conflict-affected countries: attention to ethical and political norms (i.e., international humanitarian law) and the need to assist in ways that are sensitive to potential consequences on the conflict situation of the interventions.

### **Vulnerability and conflict**

Every society has groups that are vulnerable because of their age, health, education, family situation, social status or economic position. Violent conflicts tend to worsen this type of vulnerability and also create new groups of vulnerable - especially refugees and internally displaced people. Groups that are already vulnerable prior to a violent conflict would find themselves in an even more precarious situation, and some groups of vulnerable would increase in size, e.g. female-headed households or the unemployed. And while the need for support would increase in a situation of violent conflict, domestic capacity to provide welfare of vulnerable groups would typically decrease.

Vulnerability is often defined as the likelihood of being harmed by unforeseen events. Although the occurrence of violent conflict as such can be predicted, the detailed unfolding of events within the conflict can not be foreseen. How can we help people become better able to recover from negative events brought about by a violent conflict situation? The answer would clearly be that it depends on the situation – and that the assistance would have different elements, including material support. But what should the other elements of the support be?

Consider a situation such as the following (from a recent report on Sri Lanka):

1. The human suffering from the many years of armed conflict is well documented, and includes lost lives, disappearances, repeated displacement, dependencies on relief handouts, insecurity, fear, harassment, hatred, distrust, fragmented families, and disrupted education. Networks of social relationships have been weakened or destroyed. Psychosocial reactions to the war have come to be accepted as a normal part of life in some regions, such as in Jaffna. Collective trauma affects all social institutions, structures and organizations, according to consultation findings. Security arrangements, which include controls over the movement of people and goods, often

intimidate the civilians they are meant to protect, and further fuel hatred and conflict. Restrictions on farmers and fishermen inhibit them from accessing their fields and fishing sites, and from the tools and means necessary for their livelihoods. The economic impact at the household and community level has been devastating.

2. The conflict situation has had, and continues to have, a profoundly negative effect on the Sri Lankan society. Armed conflict between state security forces and the LTTE has polarized various schisms within Sri Lankan society, gaps that transgress Tamil-Sinhalese boundaries. The animosity and distrust between, and within, the ethnic groups are found in every part of the country, and create divides between neighbors, colleagues and family members. Society is increasingly militarized. Security concerns often take priority in decision-making within the civil administration. Every war has 'winners' who benefit financially from predatory exploitation.<sup>1</sup> In Sri Lanka they include members of militant groups extorting from individuals to larger businesses who have managed to secure monopoly of trade to Jaffna. Continuation of the war is in the interest of an entrenched "winning" minority, while the predatory activities continue to fuel resentment and conflict. Even with a peace-agreement between the warring parties, the building of reconciliation among people is bound to be a long-term endeavor.

It would clearly not be very helpful to counter vulnerability in a situation like this with assistance designed to improve people's material situation only.

It may be useful to differentiate between three different types of capacity: (i) material capacity - the things people would need to survive and eventually return to a normal a situation if possible: productive assets, food, money, shelter, etc.; (ii) social capacity – the degree of cohesion in the communities, the degree of association within and across communities, the level of organization among people capable of protecting and promoting their interests, and (iii) attitudinal or motivational capacity – people in northern Sri Lanka described the situation there as one of "collective trauma", people's belief that it's possible to change things for the better, the degree of dependency on outsiders for survival or change (such dependency syndrome is often found among people in refugee camps).

Relief, rehabilitation and development assistance have traditionally focused on material capacity and often neglected the social and attitudinal aspects. The experience is that if effects of the assistance are to last, if improvements are to be sustained, we have to give at least equal attention to the last two aspects.

### **Social capacity for reconciliation**

A particular concern in a situation like the one in Sri Lanka would be to strengthen communication, links and association between population groups that for different reasons (often instigated by political interests) have been on different sides of a conflict. The assumption is that such links may contribute to a more peaceful relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Collier, "Doing Well out of War", The World Bank, April 1999, pp. 9.

affected population groups, and eventually help the development of reconciliation. It should be recognized that reconciliation would entail a complex and long-term process of multiple activities, including trust-building, and building of acceptance for *differences* (ethnic, religious, geographic) while striving for enhanced *equity* (economic, social). Rehabilitation and development projects may represent a small but useful cog in such a process through provision of opportunities for increased engagement between groups.

Over the last few years several projects have attempted to provide opportunities for such links between groups that were previously in conflict with one another. One example is the SEILA program in Cambodia which was led and implemented by the government, supported technically by UNDP, and financed by several bilateral donors and the World Bank.

The SEILA Reconciliation Program contributed to the establishment of a secure environment conducive to reconciliation between government and communities, through decentralized governance. The program, which focused on the north-western and northern parts of the country, had three categories of outputs: (i) dialogue and coordination between groups previously in conflict; (ii) address immediate rehabilitation needs; and (iii) establish a decentralized rural development structure in the reconciliation areas. The inter-relationship between the three components was a crucial part of the strategy.

Reconciliation covered the relationships between political leaders (members of the Khmer Rouge and the Hun Sen government) and, most importantly, between the communities who had been on different sides of the conflict for several decades. The program helped to establish participatory management committees at village, commune and district levels, and introduce the local planning, financing and implementation systems developed under SEILA. Through integration of this approach across the provinces, the distinction between reconciliation areas and non-reconciliation areas gradually diminished. By taking part and being trained in the decentralized planning system, the communities acquired tools for solving every-day problems through participation and through cooperation with neighboring communities. To facilitate integration of former enemies into the Cambodian government, the program provided training of the new civil servants in national policies, administration, sector strategies, and good governance.

Assessments identified the following as the most important of the lessons learned in the project:

- The establishment of development committees at the village, commune and district levels at the earliest stages of intervention in reconciliation areas provided an appropriate local governance structure into which former rebel/opposition leaders could be integrated.
- A structured decentralized and participatory approach to rehabilitation and reintegration boosted the reconciliation process as well as rapid establishment

and consolidation of democracy in areas that had been controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

- The project's reconciliation approach, with decentralized and participatory rural development structures, successfully integrated humanitarian emergency responses and longer-term development assistance.
- The project's reconciliation approach demonstrates the importance of non-discrimination among different categories of beneficiaries, and advocates the need for a holistic approach to rehabilitation in which reconciliation is a key element.

### **Demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants**

Support for demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DD&R) is seen as crucial in most post-war rehabilitation. Reintegration is an ongoing process by which ex-combatants<sup>2</sup> find a new productive role in civilian life. The importance of this process is increasingly being recognized. The 1998 report of UN Secretary-General (SG) on "The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa" lists "the reintegration of ex-combatants and others into productive society" as one of the priorities of post-conflict peace-building.

Demobilisation itself is only the first part of the transition process which is followed by *reintegration* in which ex-combatants find a new and productive role in civilian life. Reintegration is a complex process which involves the family and community of the demobilised. Social reintegration deals with the issue of reintegrating groups with different backgrounds, experiences, norms, expectations and capacities. The objectives of reintegration activities are to facilitate the smooth reintegration of demobilized soldiers into their communities, and contribute to continued social cohesion in the communities and in the society at large. The process also has psychological aspects as most ex-combatants go through a process of adjusting attitudes and expectations, and many are still dealing with traumatic experiences related to the war.

Opportunities for ex-combatants to establish new livelihoods have a crucial bearing on the success of reintegration. And formal sector jobs are often scarce after a period of war. Post-war reconstruction processes usually involve policies to stabilize and readjust the economy. Tight macroeconomic policies may lead to fewer government jobs and increased urban unemployment during the adjustment period.

In most of the post-war demobilisation programs, a large share of the combatants had been recruited from rural areas and wanted to return there. Access to arable land is therefore a key condition for establishing a sustainable livelihood for many ex-combatants. Other factors that can facilitate finding employment or starting a small business are adequate skills and start-up capital. Experience shows that successful

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<sup>2</sup> The term "combatant" is used here to refer to both government soldiers and members of an armed opposition group.

reintegration depends to a considerable extent on the support that ex-combatants receive from their families and communities. Increasing the 'absorptive capacity' of receiving communities is therefore an important way of supporting reintegration.

In post-war countries, the reintegration of ex-combatants needs to be paralleled by processes of reconciliation at various levels. The leadership of former fighting parties need to learn to live and deal with each other. At the community level, processes of reconciliation are required in order to find a basis for true acceptance and reintegration. Skills in non-violent conflict resolution could be useful in this respect. Many ex-combatants in rural Mozambique underwent cleansing rituals in order to be accepted back into their communities. These acceptance rituals had a positive impact not only on the community, but also on the state of mind of ex-combatants themselves.

It has been argued that it is unfair that ex-combatants receive special support through externally funded programs. These combatants often created havoc and made development and life impossible for others. Many other groups of people have suffered more than the combatants and should be supported in restoring their livelihoods. When peace returns, ex-combatants are usually not the only group that has to reintegrate. Returning refugees and internally displaced people usually significantly outnumber ex-combatants. However, the justification for supporting ex-combatants is usually based on one or more of the following arguments:

1. Demobilized soldiers and fighters require support from a humanitarian point of view. Upon demobilization, they are out of a job and often far from their homes. Therefore, they require at least the initial provision of basic needs and physical resettlement.
2. In some cases demobilized combatants have sacrificed several years of their life to improve the development perspectives for their compatriots. In other cases, some of the demobilized have been recruited into the armed forces under pressure.
3. A third argument for supporting ex-combatants relates to their potential to contribute to general development. Their skills and capabilities – be they technical or organizational – might bring new economic activities and employment opportunities.
4. In some cases the most important reason is that lack of reintegration support could jeopardize peace-building and human development in the entire country or region. Without support, demobilized soldiers and guerrilla fighters might have great difficulty re-establishing themselves in civilian life. Frustrated ex-combatants may threaten the peace and development process by getting involved in criminal activities, joining or creating violent political opposition or selling themselves as mercenaries.

## Reintegration of ex-combatants in Eritrea

The design of the social and economic reintegration support in a recent Bank-assisted demobilization and reintegration program in Eritrea is based on the following principles:

- (i) Reintegration activities are seen as *opportunities* that the demobilized soldiers may choose to access. Based on experiences in other demobilization and reintegration programs, it is expected that a significant proportion of the demobilized soldiers will choose to access reintegration projects.
- (ii) The program is designed to be an integral part of the broader post-war economic recovery process. Therefore, it is considered that IDPs, returnees, deportees and other war-affected persons will be *included* in local level projects under the program in order to promote community cohesion and economic recovery. The program will coordinate closely with projects supporting the return and reintegration of other target groups, so that the assistance is compatible with and supportive of, the entire reconstruction and economic recovery effort.

While most of the demobilized soldiers in Eritrea were not considered especially vulnerable, the program is paying special attention to the following three sub-groups of demobilized soldiers: (i) female soldiers; (ii) soldiers who have been disabled as a result of the war; and (iii) HIV positive soldiers. They are encouraged and supported to pursue existing opportunities and programs, and will have access to: (i) specialized counseling (strengthened through the program); (ii) assistance to establish peer-support groups; (iii) programs and facilities for medical treatment and rehabilitation; and (iv) support for special programs in response to their unique needs.

The reintegration component includes the following:

- (i) *Economic Reintegration.* The activities are designed to develop the financial self-sufficiency of a demobilized soldier's household, through business initiatives, or productive employment. The program provides economic reintegration assistance and access to employment through: (i) employment referral services, micro-projects, apprenticeship, training and education opportunities; (ii) access to micro credit and micro business development services; (iii) support of small-scale rural development activities, such as small-holder livestock initiatives, 'cash for work', small-scale fisheries activities, rural trade promotion, and training in agricultural production, processing and marketing; and (iv) employment promotion and training in the construction trades.
- (ii) *Social Reintegration.* Activities to be carried out under this component include: (i) information and sensitization of the demobilized soldiers and society-at-large; (ii) social and economic information and referral services; (iii) first-line counseling upon arrival in the region; (iv) specialized counseling on psycho-social issues and family life, HIV/AIDS and the needs of the disabled and women; and (v) strengthening of social capital, including community associations and

networks of demobilized soldiers. I will discuss the two main social reintegration activities in some more detail:

*First-line counseling.* This represents the first opportunity for ex-soldiers to get counseling and support outside their circle of family and friends. The first-line counseling is provided in each sub-district by volunteers from the National Union of Eritrean Women, the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, the Eritrean War Disabled Fighters' Association and the Ministry of Health, who have received courses in counseling and community development work. The counselors are coordinated and supervised by the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare's (MLHW) social counseling staff. The MLHW organizes arrival counseling shortly after the demobilized soldiers have arrived in their respective sub-district. In addition to social reintegration of ex-soldiers, the counselors also assist reintegration of other war-affected groups, especially the internally displaced. The minimum first-line counseling includes:

- Basic counseling and advice: listen to ex-soldiers experiences and provide reintegration advice; meet with community leaders/members regarding reintegration problems and opportunities;
- Information and referral: provide information and advice on availability and access to specialized counseling and services; recognize needs for specialized counseling, including signals of serious psychosocial problems;
- Assist peer group and community activities: advise on group formation and peer and community group activities in support of reintegration; help mediate in local conflicts, e.g. on land issues.

*Outreach and community support.* Reintegration of demobilized soldiers and their families is further facilitated by follow-up counseling of demobilized soldiers in their communities. To enhance community reintegration, this activity includes advice to and support of peer groups and associations of demobilized soldiers, as well as community organizations and NGOs. The program has a budget for strengthening and expanding existing outreach and community support programs, and is able to fund new activities that can strengthen community social capital, e.g. adult education, sports and cultural activities, through community outreach activities.

### **International Humanitarian Law**

Three years ago, the Bank started work with the Government of Sri Lanka and a large number of multilateral, bilateral and nongovernmental agencies to develop a country framework for assistance to the war-affected people in the country. One important aspect of this framework dealt with issues that were beyond simply providing assistance – i.e., an agreement among the parties to the conflict and the providers of assistance of certain key ethical principles to ensure effective support to all war-affected. The central issues included: humanitarian access to all population groups in need; opportunities for movement of goods and people; and a secure environment where civilians reside or work.

An agreed code of operation was necessitated by a situation where one had a large number of displaced civilians, many of them without adequate protection; space for civil society had shrunk due to security rules and regulations; assistance had been dramatically reduced and controlled because of security rules; and the need for relief and rehabilitation had increased as the impact of these efforts have decreased. The adoption and application of a set code of operation was seen as a means to help reverse this trend.

The application and implementation of an agreed code of operation is sensitive to real or perceived insecurity, and thus may become jeopardized during times of war. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides the applicable standards for the protection of victims of war and the conduct of hostilities, balancing military necessity and humanitarian requirements. Under IHL, all parties to a conflict must respect the fundamental rights of those affected by conflict, this entails access to potable water, sanitation, shelter, food, etc. and the space for humanitarian actors to deliver these necessities to those in need. Within the scope of IHL, in addition to issues of access, are issues related to the movement of people and goods, secure environments, and military-civilian relations. One major benefit of IHL, if applied properly, is that it prevents extensive destruction and bitterness during hostilities, and thus facilitates the establishment of a lasting peace once the war ends.

The National Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation<sup>3</sup> was based on an extensive consultation process, completed by the Sri Lankan Government in cooperation with the main civil society organizations earlier this year, and adopted by all the key actors – provides the following recommendations on international humanitarian law:

- Elicit from the conflicting parties a reaffirmation of their commitment to IHL;
- Enact the Geneva Conventions into the national legislation and consider accession to all IHL instruments;
- Familiarize, through dissemination and training, civil servants, military personnel, staff of other competent authorities and humanitarian workers with IHL and its application in Sri Lanka;
- Review of the national legislation and legal framework to identify any gaps and inconsistencies with IHL;
- Undertake a comprehensive analysis of any violations of IHL and recommend mechanisms and measures to rectify them;
- Ensure that humanitarian agencies have access to all areas affected by the conflict, in particular ICRC which has a specific mandate under the Geneva Convention.

### **Conflict Sensitivity**

‘Post-conflict’ is a difficult concept – there is rarely a clean end to violent conflict: even if violence ends, if the issues that brought about violence are not addressed there is

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<sup>3</sup> The documents can be found on the Sri Lanka Government website:  
<http://www.erd.gov.lk/ERDDOCS.html>

substantial chance that it may re-erupt (50% chance during the first five years after a peace settlement according to research findings).

In any program, it is necessary to pay close attention to the sources of conflict and the roles played by different stakeholder groups: mistakes can re-ignite violence. So also with social safety net programs. Why? Because they are dealing with people – people who belong to, and identify with, groups formed on the basis of factors such as ethnicity, religion, social and economic interests, production, property, geographic location, etc. The population groups we are dealing with may have been on different sides in a war, they may have lost or they may have won, in either case the experiences and sentiments may still be raw.

The Bank wants to make sure that its assistance may help reduce tension rather than exacerbate conflict. It is therefore trying to promote conflict sensitivity by seeing all aspects of the project through a “conflict lens”. This need is based on the fact that any project or intervention set in a conflict-ridden/prone region inevitably impacts the conflict environment there - positively or negatively, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally. The issue is how such impact best can be managed as part of the project.

To manage potential effects of project interventions on the conflict, I would suggest conducting a specific conflict impact assessment in the project area. This should aim at identifying key factors that affect the conflict situation there directly or indirectly, positively or negatively. It’s important not to forget positive factors, i.e., those which have the ability to reduce tension. The focus of the assessment should be the groups who will be affected by the project, and it would be important to also consider divisions within the groups.

The identified factors should be assessed on dimensions that may help us understand how different project interventions may induce change, i.e., either escalate or de-escalate the conflict, including: how the factor is likely to develop with and without project interventions; how the factor is perceived among different stakeholder groups; how the factor is politicized; how the factor is affecting organizations; how the factor is affecting the key stakeholder groups in the project.

The results of the conflict impact assessment would be used for all operational decisions that affect, or may be seen to affect, either of the stakeholder groups under a project/program:

- (i) *Implementation plans.* Based on the assessment, a set of criteria would be developed to help determine what activities to assist under the project and how they best should be designed. All proposed activities, including the ones developed through participatory processes, should be assessed for potential conflict impact. Success on this level would help ensure that potential escalation of conflict by the project is prevented.

- (ii) *Operational systems.* The assessment would be used to ensure that project operational systems are equitable (and are seen to be so) – including: control of project resources; access to project benefits; project-decision making such as hiring and firing; stakeholder influence on the project.
- (iii) *Monitor effects on conflict situation.* Based on the conflict impact assessment, formulate a set of indicators to monitor the consequences of the project on different aspects of the conflict environment. Continuous monitoring of the consequences is critical because the conflict situation would keep on changing. The factors (variables) that were identified and analyzed in the assessment (above) would be rephrased as indicators.
- (iv) *Mitigation of escalating conflict.* Monitoring of the interrelationship between the project and conflict will most certainly reveal problem areas that need to be mitigated. However well the project is designed in terms of preventing project-induced escalation, there are likely to be issues in need of mitigation. Mitigation requires tailored responses – there is no one mechanism that can deal with all types of issues.