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Planning for ex-combatants reintegration in a post-conflict society: lessons learnt from African experiences for Kivu in the Democratique Republic of Congo

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to critically assess an alternative approach to reintegrating ex-combatants into the Local Economic Development (LED) process, using the experiences of other African countries. It also offers practitioners guidance on how planners might successfully address the challenges of reintegration within the context of a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. The study unpacks the role of Public Works Projects in a post-war torn society for this purpose. The strength of Public Works Projects in a post-conflict society lies on the fact that these projects aim to provide rapid and visible relief for the reintegration of ex-combatants and/or other socially marginalised people into civil society. Public Works Projects build the capacity of communities for development, keeping the marginalised members productive and self-reliant in the new society in which they find themselves.

Using the case study of Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this study is premised on the assumption that the planning of the reintegration of Kivu's ex-combatants needs to focus on the an overall systems framework, whereby all the segments play a crucial and equal role and where all the issues of LED through Public Works Projects are regarded as dynamic and treated as interconnected. Experience from Sub-Saharan African countries show that the reintegration of ex-combatants is a means towards sustainable peace and LED enhancement in a post-conflict society since it allows external and national partners to invest, through Public Works Projects, in rebuilding developmental infrastructure in a post-conflict society. Planning for the reintegration of ex-combatants in a society, therefore, assumed a multifaceted approach. Within the context of this research, this new form of planning for the economic reintegration of ex-combatants has the potential of lasting longer and requiring more funding than the ex-combatants' reintegration programme as it exists currently in Kivu. It urgently needs more dedicated resources in the form of Public Works Projects to prevent a relapse of conflict. The reintegration of ex-combatants in Kivu (DRC) confirms the fragile and complex nature of the DDR programme and speaks of the need to reassess the role of Public Works Projects in post-conflict reconstruction.

Field visits, extensive readings on Kivu and interviews with conflict analysts and residents of the DRC's conflict-tensed regions have revealed that Kivu will not improve without a holistic approach to LED planning through Public Works Projects and systemic thinking. Planning for the reintegration of ex-combatants in Kivu's post-war torn society will, therefore, have some priorities, that is: a reintegration program drawn from the experiences of other post-conflict countries as well as a good understanding of local and international policies and the involvement of Public Works Projects. These priorities will re-orientate the existing theoretical and methodological processes of planning for the reintegration of ex-combatants in a post-conflict-society. Based on the analysis of Kivu's recent reintegration programme, and following the readings of the shortcomings of United Nations Organization in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), soon to be United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) as of 1st July 2010, and the National Commission for Disarmament and Reintegration (CONADER), in this study a good understanding of local and international policies and the involvement of Public Works Projects will serve as recommendations for prospective African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations.

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