

**STRENGTHENING THE
ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS
OF PEACEBUILDING**

**ENHANCING SOCIO-ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES FOR EX-COMBATANTS
IN POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS**

About International Alert

International Alert is a 26-year-old independent peacebuilding organisation. We work with people who are directly affected by violent conflict to improve their prospects of peace. And we seek to influence the policies and ways of working of governments, international organisations like the UN and multinational companies, to reduce conflict risk and increase the prospects of peace.

We work in Africa, several parts of Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Latin America, and have recently started work in the UK. Our policy work focuses on several key themes that influence prospects for peace and security – the economy, climate change, gender, the role of international institutions, the impact of development aid, and the effect of good and bad governance.

We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding NGOs with more than 159 staff based in London and 14 field offices. To learn more about how and where we work, visit www.international-alert.org.

About this series

This is part of a series of case studies which explore the socio-economic aspects of reintegration programmes for ex-combatants in a number of conflict-affected countries where International Alert works: Nepal, Liberia and Uganda. The aim is to stimulate discussions at the local, national and international level about the role that private sector actors can play in the effective reintegration of ex-combatants, and to strengthen practice by developing recommendations for future socio-economic reintegration programmes.

Acknowledgements

The research and publication of these case studies has been made possible with the generous financial support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

© International Alert 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without full attribution.

Layout by D. R. ink, www.d-r-ink.com

About the project

This series of three case studies explores the socio-economic aspects of reintegration programmes for ex-combatants in a number of conflict-affected countries where International Alert works. The aim is to stimulate discussions at the local, national and international level about the role that private sector actors can play in the reintegration of ex-combatants, and to strengthen practice by developing recommendations for future socio-economic reintegration programmes.

Objectives

The case studies form part of a broader project which seeks to enhance the capacities of economic actors and institutions to adopt conflict-sensitive policies, approaches and methods, and integrate them in their operations in conflict-prone and conflict-affected countries. The objectives of the project pertaining to socio-economic interventions with a focus on ex-combatants are as follows:

- **Collect and analyse lessons learned** to promote improved policies and practice in the area of socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants;
- **Build the capacity of in-country actors** with an active role in reintegration processes to incorporate good practice on socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants in their work;
- **Conduct practice- and change-oriented advocacy with key policymakers** to inform their strategies and programmes on socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants.

The field research behind the case studies was conducted over a three-year period (2010-2012) and focused on different groups of ex-combatants in each country:

- **Nepal:** Ex-combatants who were minors at the time of their registration as part of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme or recruited after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006.
- **Uganda:** Youth who had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army.
- **Liberia:** Ex-combatants who partook in the disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programme between 2003 and 2009.

Background

The project is comprised within Alert's wider work on improving the peacebuilding potential of economic interventions in conflict-prone and conflict-affected countries. One of the major elements of strategic peacebuilding is a strong and equitable socio-economic foundation. Since 1999, we have been working on a range of initiatives that address economic issues and their links with conflict and peace. This has included work with: multinational and local private sector actors to ensure that their activities do not fuel violence but contribute to stable political climates instead; international institutions to strengthen knowledge and post-conflict economic recovery practices; and governments to promote policies and approaches that support sustainable development and lasting peace. Our methods include research, awareness raising, advocacy, accompaniment and capacity-building.

For more information, please visit

www.international-alert.org/ourwork/themes/peaceandeconomy

Overview of the case studies

Nepal

The case study discusses rehabilitation efforts in Nepal following the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006 and geared towards those ex-combatants who were either verified minors or late recruits (VMLRs). It examines the outcomes of the process and highlights the role that private sector actors can play in the socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants. The study critically explores the challenges that VMLRs encountered when enrolling in the rehabilitation programme, the vocational training options they were presented with, as well as the inhibiting factors which impacted on their ability to find gainful employment and attain sustainable livelihoods upon graduation. It highlights the tensions between ex-combatants' immediate versus long-term interests, the need to align training modules with local market realities, and the barriers that misinformation and suspicion within the business community can pose to reintegration processes.

Uganda

The case of northern Uganda illustrates the difficulties of socio-economic reintegration faced not only by ex-combatants, but also by internally displaced persons and war-affected youth in the post-conflict environment. It discusses the marginalisation of former abductees in particular, with a focus on the specific challenges that the reintegration process posed for girls and women. The study underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach, and of extending support to receiving communities so as to facilitate the return of former combatants and war-affected youth more generally. It furthermore highlights the potential of private sector actors to contribute to the design of socio-economic reintegration processes which are linked to realistic livelihood opportunities, and the need for donor interventions to provide long-term, sustainable support to beneficiaries.

Liberia

Oversubscription, financial constraints, unrealistic timelines and a format transposed from other countries with insufficient consideration for the local context were some of the pitfalls of the disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration process in Liberia. The case study critically explores the effectiveness of the component geared towards providing ex-combatants with long-term livelihood opportunities and psycho-social support. It illustrates the drawbacks associated with limited involvement of the local business community and women's groups in the design and implementation of the reintegration programme. The study also discusses the importance of community-based initiatives and life-skills coaching, with a view to empowering ex-combatants to not only secure sustainable livelihoods but also contribute to the rebuilding of societies whose social and economic fabric has been disrupted by violent conflict.

Key recommendations for socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants

1. **Clear, sustained and honest communication helps promote uptake among ex-combatants and mobilise private sector support.** Managing ex-combatants' expectations through effective communication is also key for enhancing their capacity to enter the labour market and attain sustainable livelihoods.
▶ See [Nepal and Liberia case studies](#).
2. **Early engagement with businesses and close coordination among stakeholders is essential for the positive reception of ex-combatants into the labour market.** Involvement by the private sector in the design phase can help align vocational training with local market needs and also lessen suspicion between formerly opposing parties to a conflict.
▶ See [Nepal and Uganda case studies](#).
3. **Donors and training providers need to be sensitive to the risk of inadvertently entrenching gender stereotypes.** Limiting women's vocational training options to more traditional "female" professions can lead to an oversaturation in the labour market and impede the realisation of sustainable livelihoods.
▶ See [Uganda case study](#).
4. **In addition to providing them with specific vocational training, ex-combatants should be empowered to harness broader economic opportunities.** Programmes which enable ex-combatants to identify and take advantage of such opportunities are likely to increase their chances of securing long-term livelihoods.
▶ See [Uganda case study](#).
5. **Supporting ex-combatants to work collectively can add value.** Joining together has the benefit of peer-support, allows for the utilisation of complementary vocational skills and can enhance business viability in some cases.
▶ See [Liberia case study](#).
6. **The psycho-social component of vocational skills programmes and soft skills coaching are crucially important to the ability of ex-combatants to successfully reintegrate into society.** They enable ex-combatants to deal with trauma, learn to socialise with previous enemies, communicate effectively as well as share workloads and responsibilities.
▶ See [Liberia and Nepal case studies](#).
7. **Training providers and vocational skills centres should be located close to potential beneficiaries.** Proximity helps facilitate attendance, especially on the part of female ex-combatants, and allows programme staff to engage in follow-up activities.
▶ See [Liberia case study](#).
8. **Involving receiving communities in reintegration programming has the dual benefit of reducing resentment against returning ex-combatants and repairing severed community bonds.** Community involvement tends to generate greater ownership over the process and thereby enhances the chances of success.
▶ See [Uganda case study](#).
9. **Support from government is essential to facilitating private sector involvement and sustainable socio-economic rehabilitation.** Government leadership is vital in creating the political environment for successful rehabilitation, including encouraging private sector involvement and helping to ensure that ex-combatants are not excluded from access to loans.
▶ See [Nepal case study](#).

International Alert.

346 Clapham Road, London SW9 9AP, United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0)20 7627 6800, Fax +44 (0)20 7627 6900

general@international-alert.org

www.international-alert.org

ISBN: 978-1-906677-33-6