

STUDY + HARD WORK= SUCCESS

by Katerina Nezhelskaya

The topic of today's class on the blackboard reads: "Subtraction" and the students diligently scribble down numbers and symbols in their exercise books. Most are much older than you would expect a class of pupils learning simple mathematical equations to be. But they are not exactly



regular students – they are ex-combatants who have voluntarily handed in their weapons.

For their transition from soldier to civilian, participants of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program are provided with training that can help them to earn a living outside the military. DDR in Southern Sudan is led by the

Southern Sudan of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC) with UNDP providing technical assistance on Reintegration projects and international donors contributing funding. In Central Equatoria State and Lakes, the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), is providing vocational training and start up materials, such as equipment and tools, for ex-combatants and Women Associated with Armed Forces (WAAF) who plan to either go into paid employment or start their own business. For those ex-combatants who choose to become farmers or run agriculture businesses, FAO are providing agricultural and livestock training and start up kits.

In addition to their training for a new career the ex-combatants at GTZ are also given educational assistance in the form of help with either numeracy and literacy, others may obtain computer training or taught the English language. For some of the ex-combatants it is for the first time in their lives that they found themselves on the school bench.

Paul Pita Moga, one of the ex-combatants, never learnt how to read or write when he was a child. "I come from a place where we keep cows; I didn't know anything except fighting".

Paul is doing well with his mathematics course, but admits that he is probably too old to pick up a new language completely, especially as it is

so different from his native one, but he is still giving the English course a try. Paul finds he is not the only one struggling.

"I memorise what I've been taught until I actually get a grasp of the subject. Once I got 20 points for my homework in the English language, but I kept studying at home over and over again and finally I got 100 points, but so many people did not make it. As for me, I enjoy school" says Paul.

He registered with GTZ in June this year and has regularly attended training ever since. As his final Reintegration option in Central Equatoria he has chosen the small business training. Paul's small fruit and vegetable stall is already doing well. Within one month he earned an 300 SDG just through selling fruits and vegetables. The success of his humble endeavour encouraged him to seek further opportunities to expand his business and he approached the local authorities in Juba who eventually allocated him space at the Juba market.

As a part of an encouragement campaign for each classroom, Paul, who had previously been elected the leader of his training course, shared his story with his fellow classmates; this meant more than ten ex-combatants in his class are now following his example.

Paul pinpoints one of the challenges of the DDR programme, namely distance. Some of the ex-combatants are from Mangala and Terakeka have for different reasons have chosen to receive their reintegration package in Juba which means travelling to the training centre daily or looking for a place to stay in Juba. Paul, being a resident of Mangala, decided to settle in Juba because there are more business opportunities than in Mangala. He managed to find himself a small hut to stay in around the Gabat area, which is close to the training centre.

Paul had to learn everything from scratch, other ex combatants, with the help of the DDR Reintegration programme, found their core skills are being used by the training centre.

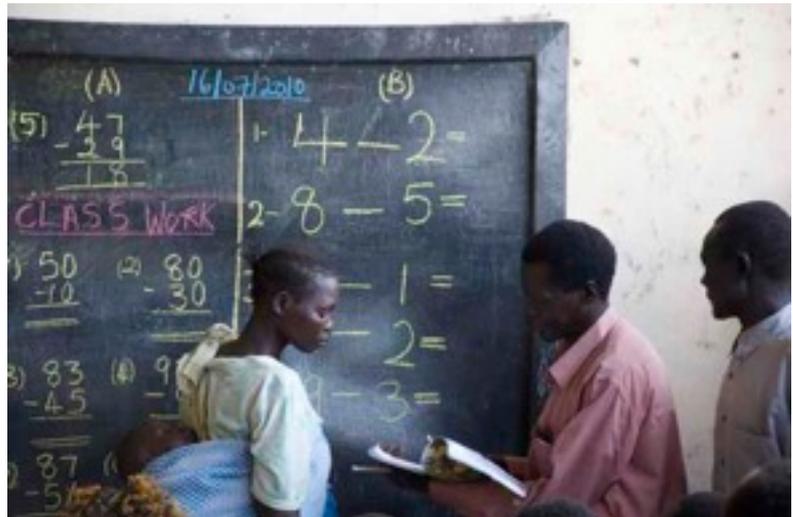
During the registration with GTZ, Morris Nyerji Ruben, also an ex-combatant, did the obligatory tests and it turned out that he has excellent numeric and literacy skills. And that was somewhat explainable as before becoming an SPLA fighter Morris was a school teacher.

Morris completed his A-levels in Sudan at the local secondary school in April 1978. He remained at his school as a teacher and carried on with his teaching career for the next five years. After obtaining his teaching certificate he was promoted to the position of a headmaster. But in 1987 the reality of the country collapsing into war his life changed course with

Morris joining as a fighter. He was an active combatant for three years until his commanders realised that Morris was a teacher and employed him to run their educational programme. Still as a teacher he travelled to Uganda in 1996 and ended up working for Oxfam. Morris returned to Sudan in 2003 to continue his career in education. In 2005 the demobilisation started and Morris was screened for DDR programme.

"I came here as a member of the ex-combatants' community".

After seeing his enrolment test results and discovering that he was a certified teacher, Morris was employed by GTZ to teach the adult numeracy and literacy classes in Juba. This allows him to have his own income and also allows GTZ to use Morris' skills in peer-to-peer teaching, providing other ex-combatants with trainers from their own communities. Aside from teaching numeracy and literacy, he is also benefiting from the computer training for himself.



Morris Nyerji Ruben teaches subtraction to fellow DDR ex-combatants

"I would like to address all other ex-combatants who have not become part of DDR programme; I want to ask them to kindly request to join this programme".

"If they stay at home without knowing about the DDR programme or don't want to follow any Reintegration courses, then there is a chance that in the future they may be forgotten by the government without being given any support. Then he or she maybe not feel at ease at home in his home community – seeing their former colleagues earning money and they themselves being prevented from having the same opportunity".

The transition from times of war in the military back to the reality of a civilian life can be confusing and anxious times for the thousands of DDR participants like Paul and Morris, with serious challenges still to come. But by empowering these ex-combatants with a new set of civilian skills the transition will be easier and less frustrating for their future careers.

Reintegration is underway in Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria, Lakes, Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Western Bahr El Ghazal and Warrup States. In each state, the Reintegration consists of training, start up materials and follow up services. Training lasts three months and includes literacy and numeracy skills, and civilian life skills such as how to prevent HIV/AIDs, Child nutrition and Civic Education. Mothers with their children are welcome and every effort is made to facilitate for them.

Demobilization will commence in Western Bahr El Ghazal and Eastern Equatoria over the next two months. IOM and GTZ are UNDP reintegration partners there and will be providing training and start up kits of the same value as those in elsewhere. In Jonglei, Stromme Foundation and FAO will be providing the same services soon.