

# Former Soldiers Struggle to Move On

Juba, [Sudan](#) - On a quiet afternoon less than three months before a referendum on independence for south Sudan, Morris Nyaiji Ruben sits under a tree outside a school for ex-combatants in Juba, radiating the peace that has been a long time coming.

During the 21-year civil war between north and south Sudan, Ruben ran education programmes in southern-controlled areas. These days, he's teaching former soldiers, most of them between 40 and 65 years old, how to read, write and do simple arithmetic.

For many of the people here, this is their first chance at an education.

"They really have that desire, as if they could go and learn to write within one day," said Ruben. "While they are alive, they want to know something in education."

The school in the south's fast-growing capital city is part of a programme called Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). It is run by the German development organization GTZ.

DDR is a common component of cease-fire agreements and was included in the 2005 peace deal between north and south Sudan. Both sides agreed to reduce their armies by 90,000 soldiers.

The struggles of the south's ex-soldiers are emblematic of southern Sudan's transition from a guerrilla war zone to potentially the world's youngest nation, struggling to modernize at breakneck speed.

A January 2011 referendum will decide whether south Sudan becomes independent, a result expected by most observers.

The older ex-combatants who gather at places like the reintegration centre are considered heroic freedom fighters. But their new lives, now that the struggle may finally be over, appear less heroic.

In today's south Sudan, the greatest demand is for an educated work force.

"When you pass over 20 years in the field, you are for sure a very good guerrilla soldier, but with very little clue about what life is supposed to be," said Jean-Christophe Goussaud, who runs the [training](#) centre in Juba.

According to Goussaud, of the more than 1,000 ex-soldiers receiving training, only 70 knew how to read or write when they arrived. It is a number that mirrors the illiteracy rate in southern Sudan.

In 2006, the UN found that the region's illiteracy rate was 90 per cent. The government of autonomous south Sudan, just four years removed from holding its meetings under trees, is also in need of modernization.

It is ill-equipped to run massive programmes like DDR, and it is difficult to figure out exactly who is in charge of DDR.

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