

# IOM celebrates DDR Day in Western Bahr el Ghazal State

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IOM celebrates DDR Day in Western Bahr el Ghazal State; IOM begins construction of a training centre for ex-combatants in Mapel, in the State.

On 15 June 2012, ex-combatants attended an event to celebrate the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Program for South Sudan in Mapel Village, a specifically designated demobilization site in Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

The festive event was organized to mark the drawing to a close of the first phase of the DDR program, and to allow ex-combatants the opportunity to reflect on the process and to ask questions regarding how to improve their profit margins, expand their businesses, and work against established competition in local markets.

The celebrations were attended by ex-combatants, their families and members of the Mapel community. Representatives from the South Sudan DDR Commission (SSDDRC), State Ministry of Education, Payam Administration, traditional authorities, the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Mission for South Sudan, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were also present.

The SSDDRC in partnership with UNDP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have provided reintegration training support to over 2,264 ex-combatants since the program was implemented in Western Bahr el Ghazal in November 2012.

The beneficiaries, that are part of the reintegration program, were targeted for participation from Special Needs Groups (SNGs) which include people with disabilities, who are considered unable to work; those above the retirement age of 60; female combatants; and women associated with the armed forces (WAAFAs).

In the third stage of the reintegration process, ex-combatants are provided with support for developing an alternative livelihood. The livelihood training is focused on four main categories: agriculture/livestock and animal husbandry; small business development; vocational training; and alternative education. Within this group the majority of beneficiaries selected small business or agriculture as their livelihood options. Communities in Mapel generally have had limited access to education and so literacy rates remain low. Alternative employment opportunities are limited in rural areas across South Sudan, mainly because of poor infrastructure and a lack of investment.

“Regardless of where you were born or where you have come from, if you live with us then you belong to the Mapel Community. And as members of this community we all have an obligation to development in our own areas of expertise, to use the skills and knowledge that we have been given and to work and give back to the community who did not have the opportunity that you have had through this program,” said Dominic Uchalla, a traditional Chief from Mapel.

Many of the beneficiaries involved in the program expected to receive free schooling for their children and a pension for their army services. While grateful for the assistance provided through the DDR process, many ex-combatants are nonetheless disappointed that they will not receive additional benefits in response to the years they spent fighting during the civil war. IOM works closely with traditional chiefs and religious leaders in Mapel in order to manage expectations in the context of extremely limited resources at the local level.

In his address to the crowd, beneficiary Lino Madut Chol, who had chosen livelihood training for agriculture, spoke at length about the need for mechanization in agriculture and the community-wide benefits of owning a tractor. He called on the international community to provide mechanized equipment for farming. Lino mentioned that part of his reintegration kit included a sack of groundnuts and that since the distribution he has collected over 50 sacks in a single year's harvest despite the drought in 2011.

Drought is an unexpected impact which can threaten the success of income generating activities, regardless of the work put in by the ex-combatant. If ex-combatants do not succeed then they are forced to rely on the support of their extended families and the community.

Udar Buor Kuak, a young ex-combatant in his twenties, told the gathering that through establishing his shop he has achieved a sense of focus and direction which has led him to stop harmful practices such as drinking excessively. Udar mentioned that while ex-combatants had been provided with reintegration kits and skills to run small businesses, they had not been allocated land upon which to set up their shops and this had led to conflict with established traders in the community. Udar urged the UN and the SSDDRC officials to address this issue more carefully for beneficiaries of the next phase.

The final testimony was given by Rebecca Athor Akon who has established herself as a vegetable grower/seller. "It is difficult to compare my life to what it was before, now I have food, I have an income, and I can provide for my family. If I can extend my pipes to a water source then there is no stopping me – from my first harvest I saved enough to buy 12 goats, next I will build a multi-storey house, and then finally I will buy some cows," she said.

During Phase 1, 12,525 ex-combatants were demobilized, 2,830 of these came from Western Bahr el Ghazal. In the second phase, 150,000 combatants will be targeted for demobilization, 80,000 from the SPLA, and 70,000 from branches of the armed forces. A pilot project to test the success of transitional camps before reintegration into the community is being piloted in three areas, including Mapel. The camp is under construction in Mapel, once it is complete it will house ex-combatants for 3 months before they are encouraged to return to the community.

On Saturday, 15 June 2012, IOM teams began the construction of a multi-purpose training centre for ex-combatants which will be attached to the transitional facility in Mapel. IOM will employ skilled ex-combatants from the community to assist with the construction which is expected to last 3 months. The multi-purpose training center is being financed by the Government of the Netherlands.

IOM is in the process of distributing the remaining 50 reintegration kits to beneficiaries in Western Bahr el Ghazal, the project is set to conclude on 30 June 2012. IOM is committed to remaining engaged in the DDR process in South Sudan which is an important and necessary part of the peace consolidation process.

The first phase of the DDR program identified 12,525 candidates, IOM provided reintegration to just under half of these combatants in Warrap (35), Western Bahr el Ghazal (2,264), Northern

Bahr el Ghazal (2,274), and Eastern Equatoria (500).

IOM offers support to ex-combatants in skills development and provides assets to secure livelihoods and to enhance the development of economic opportunities and adequate income to facilitate their transition back to civil society.

The second phase of the DDR Programme will be launched in the coming months; 150,000 combatants from the armed services will be targeted for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the most ambitious DDR program globally.

As the situation on the border between Sudan and South Sudan remains unpredictable, including active military engagement in some areas, it remains critical that efforts are placed on the provision of reintegration support to demobilized soldiers, so as to offer alternative livelihoods to a large segment of South Sudan's population that for decades has looked at a life in the army as one of the better ways to generate income and support themselves and their families.

About IOM's DDR Programs worldwide

IOM has been implementing DDR in Africa for 20 years in 12 countries: Angola, Congo Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. Currently, IOM is implementing DDR projects in DRC, Uganda and South Sudan and security sector reform projects in Somalia DRC and Sierra Leone.

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