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# paper 23

**Veteran combatants do  
not fade away: a comparative  
study on two demobilization  
and reintegration exercises  
in Eritrea**

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The study draws on detailed research on “Reintegration of ex-refugees and ex-fighters in post-conflict Eritrea” that I recently completed for my Ph.D. thesis at Leeds University. Most of the additional data collection, analysis and writing were conducted during my fellowship at BICC. The research on which the study is based was consolidated and updated in March 2001 after I participated in a multi-donor assessment mission to assist in the design of a new demobilization and reintegration program in Eritrea, conducted from 15 January to 8 February 2001. In addition, the paper incorporates my reflections on my experiences of more than 15 years in the armed struggle for liberation and of the demobilization and reintegration program for ex-fighters which I headed from 1992 to 1996 in Eritrea.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all staff members of BICC for their friendly approach and constructive criticisms. Special thanks to my project leader, Kees Kingma, for creating a good working environment and for his thoughtful comments. I thank Eva-Maria Bruchhaus for her continuous support, and for my conversion from liberation fighter to scholar.

Finally, it must be said that I alone am responsible for the opinions expressed in the report. All shortcomings, omissions, generalizations and prejudices in it are mine.



## **Acronyms**

ACORD	Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development
BICC	Bonn International Center for Conversion
CB	Commercial Bank
CERA	Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs
DRP	Demobilization and Reintegration Program
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
ERA	Eritrean Relief Agency
ERRA	Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
ERREC	Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission
ER-DRP	Eritrean Demobilization and Reintegration Program
EWDFFA	Eritrean War Disabled Fighters Association
FNDC	First National Development Corporation
GOE	Government of Eritrea
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Co-operation
GNP	Gross National Product
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
MLG	Ministry of Local Government
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOE	Ministry of Education
MLHW	Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare
NCO	National Co-ordination Office
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NUEY	National Union of Eritrean Youth
NUEW	National Union of Eritrean Women
OBS	Otto-Benecke-Stiftung
PGA	Provisional Government of Eritrea
PROFERI	Program for the Repatriation and Reintegration of Eritrean Refugees
RLF	Revolving Loan Fund
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDHA	United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNMEE	United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZO	Zoba Office

## **Abstract**

After 30 years of armed struggle for independence, Eritrea enjoyed only seven years of peace before war with neighboring Ethiopia broke out again and still is under way. In the short peaceful interval, tremendous efforts were deployed not only to rebuild the country's material infrastructure, which was to a great extent destroyed, but also to rehabilitate the social tissue which had suffered severe wounds. The cessation of hostilities does not mean a return to "normalcy". In the aftermath of conflict, depending on the nature of devastation, people's livelihoods, the country's infrastructure and facilities, its social, economic and political institutions have all to be restored—a process that can take several years, and even decades.

One of the most significant efforts consisted in reintegrating those parts of the population which had fled abroad, most of them to neighboring Sudan, but also to destinations as different as Europe, the Middle East, the United States and Australia. Included were those who had been displaced within Eritrea. Another urgent task was to demobilize those of the EPLF freedom fighters who were not integrated into the new national army, and to assist their return to a civilian society. Taking into account the manifold constraints it had to face, the overall reintegration process in Eritrea can be considered as rather successful.

Unfortunately, with the return to an outright war situation, these achievements have been to a large extent annihilated. The demobilization and reintegration of demobilized combatants has suffered in particular: most of them have been re-mobilized, and currently more than 300 000 soldiers are under arms.

At the end of the present armed conflict, the country and its government will be back to square one: the majority of the Eritrean armed forces will have, once more, to be demobilized and reintegrated into civilian society. Therefore it seems useful to thoroughly study the past experience, to compare it to other experiences in Africa and elsewhere, and to draw necessary lessons from this exercise.

The present situation in Eritrea offers the rare opportunity to examine two demobilization and reintegration exercises occurring with only one decade, in the same country and in very different circumstances. The main aim of this study is to compare the two Eritrean exercises, to present them in their specific contexts, and to give policy recommendations.

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Rationale and objectives of the study*

The present situation in Eritrea offers the rare opportunity to examine two demobilization and reintegration exercises occurring within one decade, in the same country, and under different circumstances. The main aim of this study is to compare—as far as possible—the two Eritrean demobilization exercises and present

them in their specific contexts. In 1993, after one of the longest liberation struggles in Africa, 60 percent—that is 54,000 out of 95,000 fighters—of a victorious guerrilla army were demobilized and reintegrated into civilian life, a life they had missed for more than 10 years. In 2001 the situation is quite different. Currently the country has more than 300,000 soldiers in a regular army, among whom nearly one-third are veteran fighters from the war of independence. In the case of both conflicts, the country is simultaneously confronted with the challenge of reconstructing a large portion of its infrastructure, and the return and relocation of a huge number of refugees and IDPs.

As the present Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DRP) is still in a preparatory stage, it will not be possible to compare the management, implementation and impact of both programs. But at this stage it is already possible to analyze the concept of the forthcoming demobilization program and examine the first reintegration exercise to draw lessons that will contribute to sharpening future policy formulation and improving its design. Even at this stage, it is already possible to assess the difference in scale and conceptualization of both programs. As part of the study, past examples of demobilization and reintegration processes carried out in various countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, will be reflected upon to draw lessons for the new Eritrean demobilization and reintegration program.

Spending money on armaments is the least productive way of investing scarce funds. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict has estimated that the cost to the international community of the seven major wars in the 1990s, not including Kosovo, was US\$200 billion—four times the amount of total global development aid in any single year (UNDP, 2000). Therefore, disarmament and demobilization should be considered as appropriate measures for shifting badly needed resources from unproductive and destructive sectors to productive development with the aim of promoting human welfare. Worldwide public spending for the improvement of health care, education, living and working conditions is inadequate. In 1999 in Sub-Saharan Africa alone, 19 countries out of 43 showed a negative Gross National Product (GNP) per capita growth rate, and 20 others reached a growth rate of only between 0 and 3 percent (UNDP, 2000). Nigeria spends US\$ 5 per person per year on basic health care: that is 42 percent of the minimum package required. Ethiopia spends even less: US\$ 3 per person per year, which is only 25 percent of the minimum package required.

The end of the Cold War and persistent economic deterioration in many Sub-Saharan countries has created a climate in which a growing number of governments, whether emerging from internal conflict or at peace, are exploring ways to reduce their military expenditure to redress persistent poverty and growing inequality. Worldwide, the demobilization of former combatants over the past decade has been impressive. The total number of armed forces personnel has declined considerably and continuously since 1989. Following the 1987 Cold War peak of 28.8 million military personnel, the number dropped to 22 million by 1998 (BICC, 2000).

Especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, the 1990s could be called the decade of demobilization.

By 1995, fourteen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with a total population of over 175 million people, were facing the challenge of post-war reconstruction after devastating and prolonged conflicts that shattered economies and disintegrated states (Green, 1995).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as of mid-1998, 20 of the 34 poorest countries globally either were in, or had just emerged from a state of civil war (*Financial Times*, 30 June 1998, p.9). In SSA, armed conflict is now one of the main factors responsible for the estimated more than 250 million people (almost half of the total population) living in poverty (Colletta, *et al.* 1997).

In this changing environment, DRPs for military downsizing and economic revitalization constitute a vital part of the continent's transition to sustainable peace. They are part of a conversion process shifting resources which were used for military activities to civilian tasks. If managed well, the effort will lead to increased employment, social justice and decreasing social tension (Kingma, 2000). The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants have not only economic and social dimensions, but have also to be seen as important prerequisites for a return of peace, security and stability.

The cessation of hostilities, or at least the ebbing of widespread armed conflict, provides an opportunity for war-torn peoples and countries to rebuild their societies, economies, and polities, and to start reforms and restructuring. This applies also to Eritrea. At least three main reasons can be given why the reintegration of ex-soldiers—in 2001 as much as in 1993—is an important factor for stability and progress in Eritrea. In the first place, in many cases the social ties of the veteran with his or her family or origin have been dislodged and their diverse experiences have made it difficult for them to settle into the sort of 'normal' life which they might otherwise have had. Secondly, since they form sizeable groups, Eritrea's political stability and development depends to a large extent on the successful reintegration of these veterans. Thirdly, their experiences during the struggle have often given them skills, abilities and insights which, if properly harnessed, can be useful in assisting the process of development. Thus, on the positive side, they might be assets to the young nation if their experience is properly used. On the negative side, however, they could become a destabilizing factor if a large number of them fail to reintegrate into civilian life.

## *1.2 Historical background*

In order to understand the dimension of the challenges Eritrea is facing in its two rehabilitation exercises in less than 10 years, it is useful to briefly present the historical background of the Eritrean struggle for independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Western Sahara, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia/Somaliland, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi.

Eritrea, presently an independent state, has been under different colonial overlords for the last four centuries. From 1572, for roughly three centuries, Turkey controlled parts of the area which was later named Eritrea. The next colonizer, Egypt, stayed for 29 years (1846-1875). Italy, which ruled until 1941, named the territory Eritrea and put the current boundaries in place. From 1941 up to 1952, Great Britain administered the area which is now known as the State of Eritrea on behalf of the United Nations Organization.

Following the victory of the Allied Powers in World War II, the question of the future status of the former Italian colonies—Eritrea, Libya and Somalia—was first discussed by the four big powers (France, Britain, the USA and the USSR) in the late summer of 1945. The impossibility of arriving at an agreement on the different proposals of the four powers brought the issue onto the agenda of the fourth session of the UN General Assembly, which decided to send an inquiry commission. The allied powers were not, however, able to reach an agreement on the future fate of Eritrea. They were willing to take the point of view of the Eritrean people, but their position was dictated by their own interests. Thus, unlike other Italian colonies, Eritrea was sacrificed for the strategic benefit of the winners of the Second World War—particularly the US, which wanted to secure a bridgehead in the strategically important region of the Red Sea. Against the repeatedly and openly expressed opposition of the Eritrean people, the country was federated with its neighbor, Ethiopia, in 1952 through UN Resolution 390A/V. The then US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, stated clearly and without remorse that:

From the point of view of justice, the right of self-determination of the Eritrean people must receive consideration, but for the strategic interests of the United States and stability in the region, Eritrea has to be federated with Ethiopia (ERRA: 1994).

In 1962 the federation was abolished and the Ethiopian Empire openly annexed Eritrea. By 1961, peaceful opposition had already turned to armed resistance and the protracted liberation war against Ethiopian rule had started. It only ended after 30 years of guerrilla warfare with a military victory in May 1991. After de facto independence, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) leadership formed a Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) for an interim period of two years, after which the Eritrean people participated in an internationally supervised referendum from 23 to 25 April 1993, with a turnout of 98.5 percent of 1 173 706 eligible adult voters. Participation in the referendum was based on a relatively broad and inclusive civic conception of citizenship, which applied to anyone born in Eritrea, irrespective of descent. The referendum and its results confirmed what was never a doubt: an overwhelming majority (99.8 percent) voted in favor of independence.

### *1.3 The situation at the end of the liberation war*

During the three decades of more or less intensive fighting, numerous atrocities were committed against the civilian population by the Ethiopian regime. Hundreds of thousands fled from their villages or hometowns, either temporarily or

permanently. Many people became internally displaced when they were forced to move to more secure areas liberated by the EPLF. Thousands more crossed the borders to Sudan and Ethiopia, to countries in the Middle East and to Europe and North America, seeking security and protection. Others, however, remained in their villages despite the atrocities and permanent threats they faced.

Although the violence and threats directly associated with the war had ended, the dire living condition of Eritreans during the war did not end with the EPLF's victory. While other countries had been able to move ahead economically, in 1991 Eritrea was emerging as one of the poorest countries in the world. The country's GDP per capita income was about US\$ 130-150 in 1991, less than half of the average per capita income in Sub-Saharan Africa. The problems caused by the ongoing destruction of the economic infrastructure were compounded by the effects of social disruption engendered by 30 years of warfare. The death toll at the end of the war in 1991 is estimated at more than 200,000 among them 65,000 fighters (Ministry of Defense, 1993). In addition, 70,000 civilians and fighters were injured and continue to suffer from various disabilities, and about 90,000 children lost either one or both parents (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1994). About 800,000 Eritreans had fled the country: 500,000 to the Sudan, and 300,000 to different destinations in industrial countries and the Middle East. In 1991, there were 100,000 displaced people inside the country needing immediate attention.

At the end of the war it was expected that many of those living in exile would return, either spontaneously or in an organized way. They would have to be helped to reintegrate into their home communities or into a new environment, together with the fighters to be demobilized who needed support for their reintegration into civilian life. This, together with the ongoing reconstruction of infrastructure is a tremendous task for the young nation.

#### *1.4 The situation during the Eritreo-Ethiopian War, 1998 -2001*

Eritrea enjoyed only seven years of peace before war with neighboring Ethiopia resumed in May 1998. In this short peaceful interval, tremendous efforts were made, not only to establish and develop the basic institutions of the new state of Eritrea and rebuild the material infrastructure which had been largely destroyed, but also to rehabilitate the social tissue which had suffered severe wounds. In post-liberation Eritrea, the peace dividend was obvious (Bruchhaus and Mehreteab, 2000). Unfortunately it did not last. In December 2000, when the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia finally signed a Peace Accord, the situation was similar to the one the country had experienced at the beginning of the 1990s: of a total estimated population of 3 088 454, about 31% (961 404 persons) had been internally displaced or directly affected by the war. Seventy thousand IDPs are still living in camps. In addition, 734 450 drought-affected persons required food assistance. In total, 57% of the Eritrean population in 2001 received either full or partial food assistance (Government of Eritrea, 2001).

As odd as it may seem, despite all the destruction and disruption, the war itself had one positive effect: it helped to forge a strong sense of unity and national identity among the various ethnic and religious groups by mixing them together more strongly than ever before.

### *1.5 Structure of the paper*

This paper will be structured as follows: section one covers the background, rationale and objective of the paper. Section two describes and analyses the demobilization and reintegration exercise carried out in Eritrea between 1993 and 1997. Section three presents relevant lessons learnt from other demobilization and reintegration exercises, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Section four outlines the concept and plans that have been worked out by a group of nineteen consultants participating in a workshop on behalf of the “Eritrea DRP Multi-donor Assessment Mission” from 15 January to 8 February 2001. Section five draws some conclusions, highlighting especially important new dimensions, as well as the lessons which have or have not been learnt. It also presents some recommendations for—and beyond—the implementation of the second demobilization and reintegration support program.

## **2. Demobilization and reintegration, 1993-97**

When a country emerges from a liberation struggle, everything seems to be a priority. Among the many priorities the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) highlighted and listed in 1991 were the following: the repatriation of refugees, the demobilization of ex-fighters, and the reintegration of the two groups into productive civilian life.

### *2.1 Context*

National unity based on equality was only one of the basic values that were instilled into the EPLF fighters during the struggle, starting from their registration for military training. Members of the liberation forces were recruited from all ethnic and social strata. This, together with the egalitarian distribution system of social services and the democratic administrative structures that encouraged popular participation in the struggle, had far reaching effects in breaking down the barriers that had always divided the society. The following characteristics were taken into consideration in attempts to achieve a balance within different ethnic groups both before military training started and after assignment to their units: age; sex; background; level of education; ethnic affiliation and religion. Similarly, at the end of each training period, care was taken to balance the composition of each unit based on ethnic, linguistic, religious and educational background, so that nearly every unit represented the whole front in a microcosm. Therefore it is only logical that in post-war Eritrea, reintegration is meant to be addressed within the process of building a

new nation, bringing together liberation fighters, returnees from Sudan and other countries, and the people who lived under the Ethiopian regime. But this also means that—as part of the reintegration process—the formerly egalitarian EPLF society would splinter into different groups, each facing a different future as new soldiers, fighters working as civil servants and demobilized combatants.

Thus demobilization and reintegration of ex-fighters represented—and now represents again—a great challenge for Eritrea. It constitutes an integral part of the overall transformation from a ‘war-torn’ to a reconstructed country, as it has to address a number of key problems that are shared by many Eritreans, but are especially severe for the vast majority of soldiers. Thus it happens that support for returning soldiers may turn out to be a further burden for the other members of their community. Currently all strata of the Eritrean society have been confronted with the heritage of a devastated economy and a fragmented society resulting from centrally planned policies, the military conflict, the recurrence of droughts and famines, and the lack of foreign exchange to import essential goods and services.

Nevertheless, Eritrea also offers some distinct advantages over other newly liberated countries. First of all the country was, and still is despite the recent war, an island of relative stability in a region full of political and military conflicts. Secondly, although it had little capital, there was hardly any corruption and little crime to speak of. Finally, the country had few debts and no political obligations, since there had been no political support for the Eritrean independence movement from outside, besides for that repatriated by Eritreans in the Diaspora.

The transformation process from a war-torn to a reconstructed country has political, economic and social dimensions, which all have to be addressed at the same time. Politically, the Eritrean government has set up an administration on national, provincial and local levels and has declared that it is aiming for the development of a democratic system based on political pluralism. Economically, the government has initiated a range of reforms including market liberalization, privatization and export-orientation. Together with the comprehensive recovery and rehabilitation program that has been adopted, the first positive results of this approach were widely acknowledged. Socially, a number of programs were being implemented with a view to facilitating improvements in the social sector. Culturally and economically, the Eritrean government and society vigorously seek to integrate returnees from the Sudan and industrialized countries alike, as well as returning internally displaced persons and ex-fighters into their multi-ethnic society, thus stimulating the process of integration and nation building.

### 2.1.1 General policies of the Eritrean government

The basic principles guiding the policies of the Eritrean government are the same as those applied by the EPLF during the struggle. One of them is self-reliance based on the mobilization of Eritrea’s own resources, be they human or material. This includes the conviction that the government should be free to define its own

policies as a sovereign state, asserting its ownership and leadership role in economic reconstruction, general development and all other aspects of life. Another basic principle is the conviction that the Eritrean State will have to be based on the union of all ethnic groups living together in harmony, all citizens sharing equal rights and having equal access to material resources and services. In this concept, self-reliance is a goal as well as a guiding principle in social and economic transformation programs. It is strongly believed that this principle should apply to all levels of society: national, communal, and personal. As far as possible, groups and individuals are encouraged to mobilize their efforts to improve their situation, drawing on their own resources and abilities. The reintegration policies and programs are no exception to this rule. Intervention is designed to relieve groups from dependency either on the Government or on external bodies.

### 2.1.2 International co-operation policy

In accordance with the EPLF's guiding principles, ideally there should be no need for foreign assistance, but given the devastated state of the economy inherited at independence, external aid clearly had, and still has, a role to play—at least initially. Such an approach means that the recipient country is fully responsible for identifying its needs and for developing and owning its programs according to its objectives and strategies for development (Doronboos and Tesfai, 1999). The long-term objective must, however, be to prevent the country and its people from falling into chronic dependency. It is on this ground that the Government has developed its policy for the national execution of programs, with the international community being asked to provide technical assistance and financial resources that are needed, rather than substituting local capacities.

Development co-operation was quite a new phenomenon for Eritrea. Until formal independence was achieved, Eritrea received very little external official development support, and most of this came through NGOs. Even in emergency situations, the Front implemented programs with minimum interference from outside. In the early 1980s, the EPLF was not only managing relief activities but was also engaged in development activities, using food aid as emergency relief, and promoting food for work and cash for work initiatives. Seeds, tools, oxen for ploughing, and rural credit were also distributed. Thus the Front was able to rehabilitate schools, health posts and wells, and set up an administrative and social infrastructure. All these activities were conducted as investments in social capital and helped to transform social relations. Many of these activities can be considered as 'developmental', as they contributed to the rehabilitation of the country's infrastructure. Some of the economic activities also served to diversify income opportunities at household and community level. Last but not least, the provision of social services and skills training can be considered as an investment in human resources development.

The small amount of humanitarian assistance the EPLF had received during the struggle was used to support relief activities as well as development programs. After independence, Eritrea has sought external assistance based on national ownership and partnership. Co-operating partners were asked to assist in areas where expertise is lacking in clearly identified fields, and to monitor whether resources are used in accordance with stated purposes. In this regard, the Government of Eritrea issued a statement which included the following points:

- *Partnership relations:* The country being assisted ...plays a focal role in articulating and prioritizing the problems and in designing and implementing their solution....This requires a fundamental reassessment and relationship between the parties to reflect this new character.
- *Technical assistance:* the government has reservations on the indiscriminate assignment of expatriate experts who are likely to make only a small contribution to institution building. Besides, they are very expensive and use up a lot of aid money. Ideally, funds earmarked for technical assistance should thus be directly transferred to the concerned country as budgetary support for it to decide how to spend it to build its capacity.
- *Delivery of external assistance:* External assistance is usually delivered in tied forms. This leads to restriction on where and how the assistance can be used. Funds should be transferred directly to the government concerned.
- *Delays:* With regard to the time dimension as a precious resource, the Eritrean government calls attention to delays of development co-operation....We wonder if some of the procedures could not be streamlined, and if the establishment of a local office would not help to solve some bottlenecks.
- *Co-ordination:* Because co-ordination is important on various levels of development co-operation, the Eritrean government has institutionalized this task under the Office of the President. A minister for International Co-operation, Macro-Policy and Economic Co-operation co-ordinates, negotiates, and signs international economic co-operation agreements (Government of Eritrea 1994a; World Bank, 1994).

## 2.2 *Rehabilitation and reintegration approach*

The demobilization and reintegration of ex-fighters in Eritrea are seen by the government of Eritrea as a significant part of the overall recovery process. They fit into a national concept of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration. Before examining the Eritrean approach of Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-fighters in more detail, I shall therefore look at the government's conceptualization of how the processes of rehabilitation and reintegration should take place.

In 1993 the GOE established a national execution plan for post-war recovery addressing reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration. Its implementation was to involve the line ministries rather than international organizations like the

UNHCR or other INGOs. The emphasis was to capitalize on the experiences gained during the long armed struggle in identifying issues and carrying out development programs. Unfortunately the wishes of the Eritrean Government were in direct conflict with the practices of international development agencies. The donor community was not used to governments who came with their own ideas and ready-made project proposals with pre-determined budget lines, and who asked to retain ownership of projects, especially in precarious post-conflict situations.

In the case of Eritrea, the international donor community met a government that was used to carrying out its own programs. The government was convinced that it would be able to handle development programs as it had tackled far more difficult tasks during the thirty years of struggle. It wanted the funds to be incorporated into the general budget. Thus the Eritrean government took on a more active role in development co-operation than is normally encountered by donors. It had clearly stated goals and identified programs; it questioned the role of expatriate personnel and it asked repeatedly for contributions to general budget lines. This insistence has caused considerable irritation among several donors and has led to hesitance in the development of assistance policies on the side of development co-operation partners. For example, the donor community was reluctant to fund the demobilization program designed by the Government of Eritrea, compelling the latter to borrow 430 million *Birr* to pay the severance money.<sup>2</sup>

### *2.3 Demobilization and reintegration of EPLF-fighters*

The long-term objective of demobilization is usually to enhance economic and human development and foster and sustain political stability, security and peace. This certainly applies to the Eritrean case, and has required immediate action as the long periods of conflict have showed signs of ceasing. Conscious of the fact that demobilization can only be sustainable if it leads to the successful reintegration of ex-fighters and other vulnerable groups into civilian society, the government declared, in 1992, that the reintegration of demobilized EPLF-fighters and other groups was priority number one. Demobilization had, however, to wait until Eritrea was officially independent. Unlike in other liberation struggles, independence was not affirmed directly with a victory over an occupying army. Instead, it had to be confirmed by an internationally controlled referendum which was held after a period of consolidation.

After independence, the Eritrean government announced that the economy could neither sustain such a big army, nor that security needs required it. Democratic civil institutions, an effective police force, a strong judiciary system and a small but effective army would be sufficient to ensure security. In addition, constructive policies and diplomacy were considered to have positive effects, reducing defense needs and expenditure (GOE, 1993a). As early as December 1992

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<sup>2</sup> *Birr* is the Ethiopian currency which was in use in Eritrea until 1997.

the Government of Eritrea announced that Eritrea would demobilize about 60 percent of its armed forces.

### 2.3.1 Demobilization and reintegration policy

In this paper, I use the term integration or reintegration to mean a complex issue; that is, a process through which people who have developed different conceptions and attitudes in diverse circumstances are brought together to form an integrated society. They can act or react in ways that may help or hinder the action being taken to resolve the problems created by their differences. This is not necessarily a conflict resolution process. It might, instead, be a question of assisting particular groups to re-adjust, or to reassert their place in society. But this must be achieved through a process during which the whole community learns to live with differences, to understand and accommodate diversity. By meshing the diversified experiences gained while fending for survival, they can live, once again, a 'normal' life.

Deriving from this insight, the main considerations behind the formulation of Eritrea's demobilization policy were:

- After 30 years of war and destruction, Eritrea's resources should be channeled to reconstruction rather than defense and armaments
- While certain security concerns require contingency plans and an army, they do not justify the maintenance of the army at its present size. It is possible to plan for such events and troops can be mobilized if the situation demands
- The installment and nurturing of democratic civil institutions, the building of an effective police force and the strengthening of the judiciary system should be given priority over enhancing the defense capacities of the country
- For long-term purposes, only an effective and small army is compatible with the economic resources of the country and its security concerns
- Active and constructive policy and diplomacy vis-à-vis all neighbors in the region as a whole will have the necessary positive effect of reducing defense needs and expenditures
- Fighters from the army, once re-absorbed into civilian society, can, if engaged in productive activities, contribute significantly to the alleviation of the problems faced by their families and dependants, which currently constitute a big segment of the population. They will also be able to contribute to the growth of the national economy and thus
- Demobilization will have a positive impact on the long-term political development and the stability of the country.

Demobilization signaled the beginning of a difficult and expensive program which explicitly touched upon the welfare, pride and dignity of tens of thousands of men and women who had just won, at enormous personal cost, freedom and a place in the world for their country.

From the start the concept aimed at the dual objective of demobilization and integration. Demobilization—that is collecting personal arms, registration, and discharge—was entrusted to the Ministry of Defense (MOD), whereas *Mitias* had the responsibility of handing out certificates of service and getting the demobilization money paid. To develop a plan of action, a workshop was organized by the MOD in Asmara from 22 to 25 September 1992. The author was one of the participants. The workshop made the following recommendations:

- In order to ascertain the profile of the beneficiaries and assess their needs, a sample survey had to be conducted
- Demobilization and reintegration should be implemented as one package
- In order to minimize misunderstandings and promote trust between *Mitias* and the beneficiaries, qualified staff members should be recruited from among former fighters
- The new institution should be independent from the Ministry of Defense, the most likely structure to which it might be attached being ERRA
- It should be assisted by an advisory board formed from representatives of line ministries, which were to be the main actors in the implementation of the reintegration program and
- The demobilization and reintegration program would be implemented in phases, each of which should be evaluated in order to learn from past experiences and minimize future mistakes

In the discussion at the workshop preceding the establishment of *Mitias*, it became clear that reintegration should follow two paths:

- Non-assisted reintegration would be followed for those who found their way into the community by themselves, without any assistance; and
- Assisted reintegration would be limited to those who needed it for starting a new life.
- An autonomous Department for Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-fighters (*Mitias*) within the Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, ERRA, was created at the end of 1992 (*Mitias*, December 1994)

### 2.3.2 The Eritrean concept of reintegration

Thus the *Mitias* concept aimed at achieving twin objectives: the demobilization and the reintegration of former fighters.<sup>3</sup> It was obvious that the Government would not

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3 *Mitias* is a Tigrinya word meaning to give a helping hand for someone who is starting from fresh to make a living. It can describe a new couple, or returnees; and the help is given either by family members or the community when they start initially. After this, they are expected to be on their own. The choice of the name was significant in expressing the concept of a self-help support system. Thus a special autonomous department was created within the Eritrean relief and rehabilitation agency to carry out the practical activities of demobilization.

have the means to launch large-scale assisted reintegration programs. This would also have been in contradiction with the policy of self-reliance, which had governed the EPLF in wartime and which continued to be applied after independence. It was believed that fighters who had passed through numerous obstacles and had in the process acquired the stamina for a high degree of discipline and dedication could, if channeled in a positive direction, push forward the development of Eritrea. Thus, fighters were expected to play a role in the reconstruction and development of the country, and it was considered vital that they be given opportunities for full participation in civilian society (ERRA, 1993). Emphasis was therefore put on helping the ex-fighters to reintegrate themselves and encouraging them to take their lives into their own hands, assisted by their families and communities.

The demobilization money—or at least part of it—was meant to serve as an investment. Furthermore, the belief was that war-hardened ex-fighters, after having been able to cope with the tribulations and hardships of the struggle, could become the primary agents of development in society. The respect they had earned among the population by their commitment to the national cause, and the experience they had gained, if it could be properly utilized, was thought to be an asset in finding a job, setting up a business opportunity, or participating in training. The program for reintegrating former fighters did not consist of a uniform package. *Mitias* was an open-ended program, couched more in conceptual than in project terms. It aimed at giving a chance to individual ex-fighters, or groups of them, to identify the areas where they could best realize their own potential, and to assist them to make their selection accordingly. There were no restrictions confining assistance to a particular type of activity or locality.

### 2.3.3 The mandate of *Mitias*

According to this concept, *Mitias* was set up to offer the demobilized fighters a foundation which would help individuals to pass through several stages of adjustment, especially from dependence to independence, through burden-sharing during the transition period. *Mitias*' mandate reads as follows:

- To carry out studies and investigations concerning the situation of fighters with the aim of obtaining data to be used for support measures
- To raise funds for training programs, loan schemes and settlement projects
- To look for appropriate areas of training and settlement sites and
- To provide services to ex-fighters to facilitate reintegration into civil society

### 2.3.4 Implementation of demobilization

In order to fight the huge army of Ethiopia's military junta or "*Derg*", during the last half of the 30-year armed struggle, the EPLF built up a liberation army composed of volunteers. At the end of the liberation war, it had about 95,000 members (almost 3 percent of the total population). Convinced that there was no major threat to its

territorial integrity, its major aim was to secure political stability within the country, limiting its military expenditure and using the potential of former fighters for the development of the country.

*Table 1: Phases of demobilization and retrenchment*

	<b>First Phase</b>	<b>Second Phase</b>	<b>Retrenchment</b>
Demobilization period	June 1993	June 1994	After July 1995
Target Group	Fighters since 1990	Fighters to 1990	Fighters before 1990
<b>No. of Fighters</b>	<b>26,000</b>	<b>22,000</b>	<b>6,000</b>
Male	21,500	14,000	5,000
Female	4,500	8,000	1,000
Cash payment	1,000-5,000 Birr <sup>4</sup> (Total 100m. Birr)	10,000 Birr (Total 220m. Birr)	10,000 Birr (Total -60m. Birr)
In kind	Food for 6 months; health care	Food for 12 months; health care	Base salary of 450 Birr + service multiplied by 10 years

Source: ERREC 1998 (updated).

The design of a demobilization program depends to a large extent on the political and socio-economic context in which it will have to be carried out. Despite the absence of outside financial support, the process in Eritrea was implemented as planned and there was only one army to demobilize. In comparison with other Sub-Saharan African demobilization experiences, the disarmament of fighters in the Eritrean context was a straightforward activity.

Throughout the struggle, the light weapons of all fighters were registered, right from their entry into training camp. All records were kept up-to-date. The fighters who were to be demobilized were informed by their leaders and were told to leave their arms with their unit leaders in the barracks and camps. After fulfilling this task, they were asked to collect their demobilization money and a certificate of service. Their personal data were given to *Mitias*. Transport of the fighters to their destination was organized by ERRA. The whole process took only a couple of weeks (ERRA, 1996).<sup>5</sup>

Demobilization was conducted in phases. The total number demobilized in these phases was 54,000 out of which 13,500 were women fighters. Fighters during different periods of the struggle, be they members of Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) or EPLF gave their lives and their youth to rid the country of Ethiopian rule. That the country is now independent and sovereign is a result of their dire sacrifice. When they were given preferential treatment in 1993, the whole society was in favor of it because the government was rewarding Eritrea's liberators by helping them start civilian life from scratch. A lump sum of 1,000 to 10,000 *Birr* was given to each

4 Eritrea used the Ethiopian currency until 1997, and then it issued its own currency *Nakfa*, which has been in circulation since then. One US dollar was equal to 6.25 Ethiopian *Birr* in 1993.

5 For more details, see Bruchhaus and Mehreteab 2000.

soldier, according to the length of their stay in the army (the exchange rate at the time being 6.25 *Birr* to the dollar). The money given to former fighters was supposed to serve as a safety net in their transition from military to civilian life. The total amount spent—altogether 430 million *Birr* (70 million US\$)—had an important economic effect in the immediate post-war period, through activating the monetary system and economic life of the country.

### 2.3.5 Profile of the EPLF fighters

*Mitias* collected data as a means of acquiring better knowledge of the target group. Three surveys and one follow-up were carried out from 1993 to 1994. The representative sample survey of 1993 was administered to a sample of 1130 combatants, covering sex, age, geographical and social origin, marital and health status, educational and professional background and aspirations (ERRA, 1993).

Analysis of the data collected in 1993 by *Mitias* revealed that: 80.9 percent of the fighters were of rural origin, 6.1 percent from semi-urban and 13 percent from urban areas. When asked where they would prefer to be settled once demobilized, 41 percent declared a preference for urban areas, 9.7 percent for semi-urban and 13.7 percent for rural areas. A further 32.9 percent were prepared to live anywhere, provided they received what they needed to start up their new lives.

The study showed that 85.2 percent were under 32 years old, of whom 37.6 percent were between 18 and 22. 31 percent were between 23 and 27, and 17 percent between 28 to 32 years of age; 77.6 percent were men and 21.4 percent women. Most of the women (70.25 percent) were between 18 and 22 years old.

As for their educational background, 78.2 percent had attended only primary school, up to grade 5, while 6.6 percent had reached grades 6 to 8, with the remainder having finished senior school. The number of those who had gone to university was statistically insignificant. The marital status of the combatants was as follows: 48.8 percent were single, 44.9 percent were married and had families while the rest (6.3 percent) were separated, divorced or widowed. 71.5 percent cent said they had no children, while 24.2 percent had children ranging between 1 and 4 years of age. The ethnic origin correlated to a large degree with the size of the different groups that constitute the Eritrean population.

6.3 of the sample survey percent declared that they were normally healthy, while 22.7 percent had some kind of disability and the rest were suffering from various illnesses. Among those who had sustained war injuries, half were severe and half relatively minor. Taking the above points into consideration, the overall demobilization and reintegration program of former fighters was designed.

### 2.3.6 Support measures and activities

Despite the will of the government to include demobilization and reintegration into an overall recovery program, the demobilization and reintegration of EPLF fighters was handled as a separate exercise. One of the many probable reasons was the

unwillingness of the donor community to spend funds on severance payments, but this decision also reflects the fact that the reintegration of ex-fighters was seen as an emergency issue.

The support measures offered by *Mitias* did not consist of uniform packages distributed equally to all ex-fighters. Assistance to ex-fighters was provided along three lines:

- Credit for self-employment in rural or urban small-scale business, employment opportunities in the modern sector (public or private)
- Training and psychosocial counseling interventions for those who needed it
- Settlement in irrigated and rain-fed agricultural areas. Former fighters were not provided with inputs such as seeds and tools, as their demobilization money was intended as a start-up capital

### 2.3.7 Credit for self-employment

Loan scheme facilities were, and still are, guaranteed by using the ex-fighters' military service payment as collateral. Due to a lack of funds, the government was not able to disburse the service payment (US\$ 30 per month of service). Therefore it was decided that each demobilized fighter could get a loan from the Commercial Bank which was guaranteed by the government to the amount of the service payment owed. *Mitias* has facilitated access to Commercial Bank loans, coupled with technical and administrative assistance, with the aim of helping demobilized fighters carry out economically viable activities. Additionally to the loan scheme of the Commercial Bank, *Mitias* had its own Revolving Loans Fund (RLF) managed by the Credit Unit of *Mitias*. Altogether, 68 *Mitias* staff members—most of them not yet demobilized—managed and approved the loans. The following were nominated:

- 50 'barefoot bankers' at sub-zone level (each responsible for one sub-zone)<sup>6</sup>
- 16 credit officers (each responsible for three sub-zones) and
- 2 credit officers at headquarters' level

The credit scheme run by *Mitias* has progressed well and the repayment rate in 1995 was 85 percent (ERRA report, 1995). Most of the activities were in former Seraye Province. The main reason for this was the existence of a credit scheme run by the Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD) in this region. *Mitias* started its credit scheme in 1994 and chose this area to accumulate experience. In 1995, after developing their capacity for a year, it was replicated in other regions. In 1996 when the Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (ERRA) and Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs (CERA) were merged to form the Eritrean Rehabilitation and Relief Agency (ERREC), the full-fledged program of loan schemes started. In the process, more than 60 bare-foot bankers were trained

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<sup>6</sup> Barefoot bankers were former ex-fighters who were working as credit promoters for the *Mitias* credit schemes.

to promote credit. At the start of the scheme the available amount of money was 2 million *Birr*, and when it was stopped in 1998, the net capital in circulation was 32 million *Nakfa*.<sup>7</sup> In its initial stage the program had benefited from a German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) grant. The maximum loan per person was *Birr* 5 000 at a 12 percent interest rate.

Since 1995, the CB has also offered loans to ex-fighters according to their collateral. The interest rate ranges from 12-14 percent according to the investment sector, with the loan to be paid back after 1-5 years. The RLF appears to have performed much better in providing credit facilities than the Commercial Bank of Eritrea. The former had 1 176 clients within four months, whereas the CB was able to provide loans on a monthly average to fewer than 50 ex-fighters. This discrepancy occurred mainly because of the bureaucratic procedures and lack of interest of the CB staff in relatively small loans. At the same time it should be noted that some beneficiaries of RLF loans consider the maximum amount of 5,000 *Birr* per person to be too small.

The loan schemes, especially the RLF, can be considered as important instruments for facilitating economic reintegration even though the available funds are limited. According to the findings of the evaluation they would have to be considerably increased, especially if the target group is to include returnees. But there are problems in this area and doubts must be raised about both managerial capacity and government commitment.

### 2.3.8 Training

The prolonged war of independence had destroyed the basic economic infrastructure and institutions of the country and had a dramatic effect on the health and education of its labor force. The skilled Eritrean workforce was scattered, decimated and unable to take on the task of rebuilding the economy.

After the country was liberated, there was high demand for skilled labor in various sectors, particularly in construction. Nearly 3,000 Ethiopian nationals who were working in the education sector returned to their country, creating a shortage of teachers (ERRA, 1993). A lack of qualified staff was evident in all other sectors of the civil service too. There were only two vocational training centers in the whole country, and together they could accommodate only 500 students. However, the long struggle had endowed the EPLF with a rich experience of combining theory and practice in areas such as education. The *Wina* Technical School is one of the best examples of how this experience began to be used in a post-conflict situation. After independence, the Eritrean government developed several training programs

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<sup>7</sup> I tried to find out why the credit scheme stopped in 1998, but the answers I was given were conflicting. The official version is that it needed overhauling in order to meet the demands of the beneficiaries, but it seems that the scheme also suffered from poor structural and management policies.

providing the skills and competencies needed to fill the shortage of short-term labor in the country.

The donor community was asked to help fund projects that could contribute to capacity and institution building in the country. The Government of Eritrea wanted ex-fighters to be trained together with returnees, but this approach was rejected by some funders. Some donor agencies, such as *Otto-Benecke-Stiftung* (OBS), argued that they could not include ex-fighters in their on-the-job training program: I myself participated as *Mitias*'s representative in a meeting where this view was articulated.<sup>8</sup> For the Eritreans it made little sense to differentiate between ex-fighters and returning refugees because when fighters are demobilized they face the same problems of reintegration as refugees; and their needs should therefore be addressed together. As Dr. Nerayo Tecklemichael, former director of Eritrean Relief Rehabilitation Agency (ERRA) eloquently put it:

For us Eritreans there is no need to distinguish between refugees and community. Although there is a difference in the degree of destruction committed by the enemy one common factor is that it affected us all. The aim was to target the whole community, not to target the refugees as a separate group (Asmara, 15 December 1998).

The response of OBS and other donor agencies which hold similar views forced the Government to design different support programs for the two groups, even though their problems were similar. From October 1993 to April 1996, 5 500 ex-refugees, ex-fighters and internally displaced persons participated in the on-the-job training programs organized by ERREC in association with the OBS. Other institutions like the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Fishery also organized training courses. All in all 13 600 individuals benefited from these different schemes (ERREC, 1998). At the end of 1996, an independent consultant conducted an evaluation and concluded that beneficiaries had used the skills training effectively. The selection of trainees was taking into consideration those returnees who went back to rural Eritrea. In order to accommodate them, training centers were opened at different sites.

*Table 2: Mitias reintegration activities undertaken through 1998*

	<b>Barefoot bankers</b>	<b>Counseling/ guidance</b>	<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Credit</b>	<b>Training</b>
Male	38	9,000	4400	3976	4000
Female	17	6,500	950	1434	9500
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>14,500</b>	<b>5350</b>	<b>5410</b>	<b>13500</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

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8 Participating in a programme that includes former military personnel is interpreted as giving military help (meeting in February 1995, with representatives of Ministry of Education and ERRA).

The main shortcoming of the training programs was the lack of follow-up and of up-grading facilities. When training was conducted, the needs, wishes and commitment of the trainees was not taken into consideration. For example, in a discussion between the author and a group of trainees in 1999, it became clear that some had joined the program only because they were getting pocket money. There was no built-in mechanism for avoiding this pitfall. In addition, since training was given by different institutions, it was difficult to standardize the various courses. Training given to women in sewing and pottery proved to be a total failure for lack of markets for the products. The other shortcoming was that government institutions had a monopoly on implementing the training programs, irrespective of their capacity or efficiency.

Following training, most male trainees were able to find employment in construction, which had started to boom in Eritrea. Female ex-fighters who want to enter the mainstream job market still face many constraints, mainly due to their lack of mobility and to the reassertion of traditional norms according to which sectors such as construction are exclusively men's domain.

To counter and overcome this gender bias, *Mitias* and ACORD reached an agreement to build a child-care center in Keren. The aim was:

- to create temporary employment for a large number of women, for the premises were to be built only by women;
- to give women an opportunity to acquire skills that would enable them to enter the male-dominated construction sector; and
- to show the public that women are also able to build houses on their own, which would in the long run contribute to changing the general attitude towards women performing tasks considered to be within the male domain.

Training women only in traditional fields such as mat weaving, basket making, tailoring, embroidery or typing has proven to be insufficient for their income-generating opportunities; nor does it contribute towards shifting society's gender biases. According to an evaluation by *Mitias*, the training program in traditional female crafts was a complete failure and it was therefore phased out in 1995 (interview with the acting head of *Mitias*, Teckle Mengistu, Asmara 12 February 1999). However, training women exclusively in male-dominated skills has not proven to be a solution either, as it has not overcome the biased attitude of the employers.

### 2.3.9 Agricultural settlements

Agricultural settlement projects play a major role in Eritrea's reintegration strategies. They make it possible to relocate a large number of people and are expected to ensure their livelihoods and raise agricultural production. Agricultural settlements were initially expected to absorb a significant number of former fighters and ex-refugees, considering that most of them were of rural origin.

The preparation of settlement sites for both ex-fighters and ex-refugees was planned along the following lines:

- a major criterion for selecting resettlement sites was their suitability for agricultural activities. Returnees were to be brought to selected sites and provided with temporary shelter, food, and basic health and social services
- permanent social and economic infrastructure would be established when returnees had demonstrated their intention to stay on the site and
- a range of rehabilitation packages that would support different livelihood strategies

I have chosen three settlements, as they functioned in 1999, as a basis for assessing the impact of the reintegration program on returnees, namely:

- Mahmimet, Northern Red Sea Region
- Ali-Ghidir and Alebu in Gash Setit, Western Lowland and
- Ghinda and Gahtelai, in the Eastern Escarpments, Northern Red Sea Region

According to my findings in all three settlements, there was a clear absence of long-term economic activities which might have allowed the settlement community to become sustainable after termination of the support interventions. For example, the returnees got schools, clinics, dispensaries and boreholes, but all these facilities are in isolated areas, far from viable communities. The implementation of each settlement was more or less ad hoc without any co-ordination of the overall recovery program. This is due to mainly two factors: first, all the projects had a life span of only one to four years. This is too short a timeframe to develop a complicated process, which includes intricate social, economic and environmental factors.

It must also be noted that settlements were not designed in a way that would enable them to function as viable communities. For example, when the *Mitias* settlement program was devised in 1994, all the preconditions and components essential for establishing a settlement were identified; but when it came to implementation, most of the points were bypassed. The basic question that emerges is whether putting ex-fighters in settlements was even going to provide a good solution to solving their reintegration problems. So why did the Eritrean government choose the settlement approach? The main reason seems to be the same as that which lies behind the villagization policy implemented in 1993-94:

The intention is to relocate as many people as possible from dispersed communities in one central location—situated on a main road—in order to make them benefit from the facilities set up by the Government, e.g. schools, clinics, water supply, transport, etc. (Hansen, 1994; p. 34).

From an economic point of view, it might be argued that establishing a central point, or for our purpose a settlement, reduces the cost of service provisions. But building a new school cannot be as cheap as adding one or two classrooms to an existing village school. If ex-fighters are expected to play their role as models of

change, they can do it only if they are inside a community, not isolated in a community by themselves.

There seems to be another reason for the preference of settlements by partner agencies. NGOs and the Government need a ‘showcase’ to present their ‘important role’ in resettlement projects. If the projects—health posts, schools, boreholes—are implemented within an already existing community, their contribution is ‘invisible’ and there is no ‘showcase’ to be presented to the funding agency. My skepticism on this issue is not, however, the only reason for questioning the suitability of settlements for reintegration purposes. Among other disadvantages are the following:

- there is hardly any interaction with neighboring village communities and little opportunity to build up a relationship
- it is not easy to strike a balance between the interests of the settlers and those of the host community concerning such issues as land, grazing areas, water, etc
- compared with the host community, ex-fighters and returnees can be seen as privileged, which can create resentment in the host community and
- ex-fighters have been exposed to different ways of life and experiences and thus have developed different norms, values and attitudes from those of non-fighters. Confining them to settlements will not, therefore, help them reintegrate into mainstream society

Government projects, especially those related to settlement, have run into a series of different problems. Among others, the following deserve mention:

- conflicts over existing land rights (see Mehreteab, 2000; Hansen, 1994)
- the creation of high expectations: after receiving basic housing and other support for many years in some areas, namely Mahmimet, Alebu, Gahtelai, returnees complained about unfulfilled promises—e.g. the maintenance of shelter, availability of land, and provision of social services
- nearly one fifth of households in the settlements are women-headed, and with female ex-fighters, a shortage of labor has been a major problem and
- problems have been experienced that are typical for large-scale, mechanized agricultural development schemes, such as lack of, or a long delay in delivery of centrally controlled tractor services

It would take us far too long to examine the reasons for all the above-mentioned problems. In the end, the main problem seems to relate to a missing national framework in which different interventions could be interwoven to establish an operational plan for all measures. If these preconditions are missing, as they have been, the implementation of various projects tends to be ad hoc.

### 2.3.10 Counseling

Many war survivors have endured multiple traumas, including physical privation, injury, torture, mutilation, rape, and incarceration, witnessing torture or massacre, as well as the death of family members. In some cases, this has resulted in abnormal or anti-social behavior. On-going psychological counseling can assist in limiting the range of anti-social behaviors which adversely affect the social reintegration of ex-fighters. Thus an adequate number of people needs to be trained in counseling techniques and 'coping skills' to help ex-fighters reintegrate. To give *Mitias* credit, it must be mentioned that it tried to address the psychosocial problems faced by ex-fighters by training social counselors and assigning them to its branch offices in Asmara, Mendefera and Keren. The psychosocial Counseling Unit organized a training course in guidance and counseling (held from 27 December 1996 to 17 January 1997) which included the following subjects:

- Rural and community development
- Sociology and social work
- Case management
- Abnormal behavior and
- Clinical counseling

The training given was meant to enable *Mitias* to perform its duties and responsibilities effectively in all aspects and to enable counselors to meet the psychosocial needs of their potential clients. The clients mainly consisted of single mothers, elder veteran fighters, war disabled and ex-fighters with mental disturbances. All of them had special needs, which could be categorized as follows:

- Ex-fighters with little education and few skills face tremendous problems in finding a job. They feel helpless and abandoned, especially if they lack family support. Additionally they feel ashamed to be unable to support, or help support, their parents and other dependants who were forced to do without their help during their stay in the field. Counseling is mainly aiming at restoring their self-esteem and helping them find a job
- Female household heads, widows, or women divorced or separated from their husbands usually have financial problems. If the father of their children refuses (which is usually the case) to give financial support, the counselors will have to find a means to make them do so. If the woman cannot work because she has small children to look after, childcare needs to be provided; wounded, disabled, and traumatized ex-combatants will have to be helped to get appropriate medical care.

Discussions with the counselors in March 1999 showed how varied, conscious and concerted were their efforts to identify and reach the needs of their many clients, and provide appropriate solutions to them. Their main task was focused on establishing trust and facilitating contacts by organizing individual and group

discussions and encouraging them to set up self-help groups. Twenty-one such groups were formed, with a total number of 250-300 ex-fighters in Asmara, Keren, Decemhare, and Mendefera.

The training given to the counselors was not to diagnose and treat the affected people, but to enable them to identify symptoms of mental illness and take appropriate steps to ensure that clients are referred to the agencies that provide appropriate health services. Based on informal discussions with counselors, it was evident that they found the training useful and, by and large, relevant to their work. Some of them stated that the training they received had a positive practical outcome in providing an effective counseling service. This attempt to train counselors and establish service was a step in the right direction, however counseling and guidance needs also to examine beliefs and cultural attitudes as well as the social and personal perceptions and misconceptions of the receiving community and returnees. Since these points were not properly conceptualized and understood, and the training was much too short to address all these issues, the impact of the counseling and guidance activities was limited. In addition, with the continuance of the 'border war,' the organizational work involved in setting up counseling services was played down and most of its staff-members have been re-mobilized or assigned to other jobs, leaving behind only good intentions.

### 2.3.11 Support measures for women ex-fighters

From the beginning, the guiding principle was that women ex-fighters should be treated as equals to men. To accurately reflect their presence in the armed struggle, it was decided that at least one third of the trainees in each program should consist of women. Additionally, women were trained in traditional fields such as mat weaving, basket making, tailoring, embroidery or typing. Neither measures were as successful as expected: training in traditional female skills does not provide sufficient income generating opportunities (and therefore this support measure was phased out in 1995), and training them in male trades does not automatically make them employable using these skills.

It had to be recognized that women form a particularly vulnerable group among the ex-fighters, therefore special efforts had to be made to help them obtain a fair share in all demobilization measures. To address this issue, a special Gender Unit was established at *Mitias* headquarters, working closely with the provincial delegations and trying to find ways and means of enhancing the women's self-help potential. Pilot projects were initiated to give a kick-start to demobilized women fighters: for example, a small amount of seed money was given to those who wanted to form their own group and engage in income-generating activities.

The Gender Unit survived only for two years, after which it was marginalized under the pretext that the problem of demobilized ex-fighters would be taken care of by the 'National Union of Eritrean Women' (NUEW). In reality, the association

is over-burdened with different tasks and the current condition of most women ex-fighters is not favorable.

#### 2.3.12 Resources, capacities and constraints

Apart from the salaries of the people carrying out the demobilization, the government spent between 320 and 340 million *Birr* (approximately US \$53 million) on severance money for former EPLF fighters. Another 4 million *Birr* were paid to around 400 Ethiopian soldiers who had changed side and fought with the EPLF. The government of Eritrea also spent nearly 100 million *Birr* to rehabilitate the Ali Ghider cotton plantation in the western-lowlands and 2 million *Birr* was spent for the setting up of the small vegetable-growing pilot settlement in Gahtalai (eastern lowlands). 32 million *Nakfa* was dispersed through the loan schemes of *Mitias* and the Commercial Bank of Eritrea. Altogether an estimated US \$70 million was paid by the Eritrean government to ease the reintegration of ex-fighters, while the total amount donated by donors, including pledges, was less than US \$12 million.

In 1993-1996 *Mitias* had a head office in Asmara and branches in all of the then 10 provinces and in the Ali-Ghidir settlement scheme. The headquarters consisted of five main sections: manpower assessment, credit, planning (projects, monitoring, research, counseling and training), administration and finance. The total number of *Mitias* staff was 106, 95 percent of whom were fighters (but currently, this is one unit inside the department of rehabilitation within ERREC). The decision to employ ex-fighters in this role had both positive and negative repercussions. Since the staff members had been through the same experience as the demobilized fighters, they had developed a good relationship with their clients; but since they had spent the better part of their life in the armed struggle, they had shortcomings in relation to ongoing development and exposure. Beside this *Mitias* was entrusted with different roles, some of which were beyond its capacity. It initiated projects or implemented its own activities, such as counseling, human power assessment and research, and setting up and contributing to running the credit scheme. It further acted as a facilitator providing ex-fighters with letters of reference or giving assistance to projects such as the Ali-Ghidir Agricultural Development Project. On top of this, its role was to co-ordinate different institutions involved in projects or linking ex-fighters with project ideas to donor agencies. A fourth role was that of a lobbyist within the Government and the donor community, promoting the interests of ex-combatants. Although it is hard to find indicators to quantify the political will of the government to help reintegrate demobilized fighters into the mainstream of society, its devotion is clear—which is rare in the demobilization and reintegration experiences of other countries.

#### 2.4 *The Impact of demobilization and reintegration*

It ought to be said at the outset, that seven years is insufficient to provide a useful retrospective in which an adequate appraisal of such complex issues as integration

can be made. Usually, the transitional period remains fluid. Given this, my reflections will necessarily be tentative and my conclusions provisional. The study is meant to assess the impact of demobilization and reintegration while providing an examination of the dynamics of the process as it has unfolded over time. In examining the issues that arise, I shall try to be as objective as any observer participant could be.

Post-conflict rehabilitation processes in general, and reintegration in particular, need to be related to a variety of objectives at various levels—economic, social, political, and human. The various levels imply the need for short, medium, and long-term goals. The long-term objective of the reintegration process is to enhance economic, social and human development, thus fostering and sustaining political stability, security and a lasting peace that might pave the ground for overall reintegration to take place.

Global circumstances and Eritrea's post-war realities have dictated an overall development strategy which is market-based and outward oriented, with the government promoting private enterprise (EPLF's Charter, 1994). The Government has retained a role of overall coordinator, as well as of provider of basic services, together with a strong commitment to self-reliance. It is the service industries, and the financial service-sector especially, that are envisioned to be the leading sectors of the economy. On the macro-level, Eritrea's economic performance from 1992 until 1997 has been relatively good, achieving an average GDP growth of more than 5 percent per annum. However, this does not match the general expectation of the society and ex-fighters in particular.

The study I conducted from August 1998 to March 2000 touches on the progress of ex-soldiers and the pitfalls of integration before the current outbreak of hostilities, and draws on the experience gained in this period. So far, I have focused on ex-fighters' expectations, disappointments, and success in implementing programs, and touched on individual initiatives. As the surveys conducted by *Mitias* in 1993 and 1994 and the study I conducted in 1997 show, there was no valid reason for dividing the sample of ex-fighters into urban/ rural categories. A typical response of ex-fighters to the question of where they wanted to go after demobilization was:

It doesn't have any significance where I settle as long as there is a possibility of work in sight. As we more-or-less know the country, the people and its culture like the fingers of our hand, there is no way that we can be strangers in any corner of the country (interview with Robel Mokonnen, Asmara, 12 April 1997).

Taking the comment above as a starting point, I randomly selected ex-fighters from the list supplied by ERREC, whose head office has lists of the names of all ex-fighters.<sup>9</sup> ERREC offices within the regional administration also keep further details of the whereabouts of ex-fighters resident within each administrative region. A sample of 400 persons was selected from the main list, of which 372 were ultimately

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<sup>9</sup> The survey included people from all the fronts (Gash-setit front; Sorona front; Zalanbessa front; and part of *Asseb* front).

reached and interviewed. The remaining 26 were not located and two refused to be interviewed.

#### 2.4.1 Age and years of service of interviewees

As indicated in Table 3, the majority (79 percent) of the ex-fighters was young (20-39), which is consistent with the overall profile of ex-fighters. It was, therefore, relatively easy to provide them with different skills training that could be useful for their reintegration process.

*Table 3: Sample data of ex-fighters*

Age group	Ex-fighters	
	Frequency	Per cent
20-29	142	38
30-39	154	41
40-49	50	13
50-59	19	5
60-69	5	1
70+	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

Table 4 shows that nearly half (48 percent) of the surveyed ex-fighters stayed in the armed struggle for 6-15 years. More importantly,, it shows that 50 percent of the demobilized women fighters are veteran fighters. This number is very high compared to the average number of women who participated in the armed struggle. It shows that nearly all the veteran women fighters with children are demobilized. Given the general living conditions of single mothers in Eritrea and the shocking changes they went through after the experience of equality they had gained in the field, life is proving to be very difficult for veteran women fighters.

*Table 4: Service in the army in years and its breakdown by sex of respondent*

Sex	Army Service (in years)						Total
	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	>26	
Male	89 (78.1%)	52 (48.1%)	36 (50.7%)	35 (68.6%)	23 (92%)	3 (100%)	238 (64%)
Female	25 (21.9%)	56 (51.9%)	35 (49.3%)	16 (31.4%)	2 (8%)		134 (36%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>372</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

When the process of demobilization, and ultimately reintegration, starts there are usually difficulties experienced in adapting to a new way of life. To counter this, there is a need to accommodate and understand the lifestyle of ex-fighters by

identifying and choosing those ‘positive’ experiences that might help in their reintegration.

Exiting from any group or social setting that has had a central meaning in one’s life is often traumatic and painful. It involves tension between an individual’s past and present experiences, and future prospects. Past identification with social categories or roles lingers in one form or another throughout the lives of ex-fighters as they struggle to incorporate past identities into their present conception of self. Another characteristic that makes the ex-fighter’s status unique is the images the society holds of his or her previous roles. People in society are conscious of a person’s status in a social structure, not on the basis of their current role alone, but also on the basis of who the individual used to be. Life-cycle changes must, therefore, be taken into consideration when designing programs for ex-fighters and ex-refugees. Ex-fighters continually have to deal with society’s reaction to their previous role, an issue which can facilitate or hinder the overall process of integration. In order to grasp the complexity of the problem in Eritrea and to tackle it properly, this study places the integration process against the background in which the new nation found itself at the end of the war of liberation, and in terms of the developments which have been unfolding ever since.

#### 2.4.2 Preferred residential area

As mentioned earlier on, the outcome of the initial survey conducted in 1993 showed the preferred place of relocation of ex-fighters was in rural areas, although as we have seen, a significant number of interviewed people were prepared to live anywhere, as long as facilities were provided to ease the reintegration process (ERRA, 1993).

*Table 5: Initial residence place and origin of ex-fighters*

Present location	Place of origin			Total
	Urban	Semi-urban	Rural	
Urban	94 (91.3%)	13 (54.2%)	159 (64.9%)	266 (71.5%)
Semi urban	5 (4.9%)	7 (29.2%)	21 (8.6%)	33 (8.9%)
Rural	4 (3.9%)	4 (16.7%)	65 (26.5%)	73 (19.6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>372</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

However, a different picture is portrayed in Table 5, whose data reveal a clear trend toward urbanization immediately after demobilization. Currently seven out of ten of the ex-fighters are living in urban areas. Thus the influx of a large number of newcomers in urban centers is creating extra problems in the social service sector, placing additional burdens on institutions such as schools, health facilities and

housing, mainly in the Western Lowlands. In the coming years, urbanization will be one of the main problems in Eritrea—partly because ex-fighters in general, and women in particular, find it very difficult to accept the traditional social system prevailing in the rural areas.

### 2.4.3 Marital status and family

As can be seen in Table 6, the majority of ex-fighters was married. There is no significant difference between marriage rates among men and women. However, the figure shows that more women have lost their spouses through death or divorce. We have to remember that these marriages were usually contracted in an atmosphere of imminent dissolution by the death of one of the partners. Also, the couple did not usually live together, as they were assigned to different units in different places and often spent not more than a couple of days together during common leave. Furthermore, there were no material problems they had to attend to, as the EPLF took care of everything, even if what was provided was not much.

*Table 6: Marital status and sex of ex-fighters*

Sex	Marital status				Total
	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	
Male	22 (6%)	180 (48%)	1 (0%)	35 (9%)	238 (64%)
Female	1 (0%)	94 (25%)	4 (1%)	35 (9%)	134 (36%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b> <b>(6%)</b>	<b>274</b> <b>(74%)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>(1%)</b>	<b>70</b> <b>(19%)</b>	<b>372</b> <b>(100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

In my discussions with male ex-fighters about the reason why they divorced their fighter wives, I was often told: ‘women ex-fighters are not modest’ (they had to be submissive to be modest). Men usually claimed that female fighters had lost their femininity by participating in the armed struggle. This shows that the deeply entrenched belief that women should be soft and gentle has not disappeared, and the gender bias could easily be read between the lines in our conversations. My insights in this regard were confirmed by the fact that ex-fighters who were divorced from their ex-fighter wives usually remarried to a civilian, someone whom they considered a ‘soft doll’. Divorced female ex-fighters, on the other hand, experience difficulties in finding another spouse, firstly because their assertiveness is not appreciated, and secondly because divorced women are traditionally disrespected and not acceptable as a potential spouse.

### 2.4.4 Expectations and reality

During the long years of their struggle for freedom, the fighters built up strong expectations because of the political education they had undergone. They believed

that all problems would be solved once Eritrea attained its independence. After independence however, this was not the case, and the majority is now struggling to make a decent living. More than half of the interviewed ex-fighters (57 percent) responded that their expectations were not matched by reality. If we break this down by sex, we notice that women are more disappointed than men about not getting what they were expecting after independence. Table 7 shows this trend clearly: 55 percent of the women, as opposed to 45 percent of the men are disappointed because, more than anything else, of a lack of acceptance and recognition of the contribution they made.

*Table 7: Ex-fighters' expectations matching reality*

Expectation match with reality	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	143 (38%)	19 (5%)	162 (44%)
No	95 (26%)	115 (31%)	210 (56.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>238 (64%)</b>	<b>134 (36%)</b>	<b>372 (100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

#### 2.4.5 Reception of ex-fighters

Ex-fighters remember that when they first returned to civilian society they experienced a sort of 'honeymoon', as one informant put it. Everybody was euphoric, both those who came back and those who received them. All community members welcomed sons and daughters who had fought for the country's independence. Only a few did not receive a warm welcome. When interviewed, some recollected that the initial happy family atmosphere lasted up to six months after which some family members showed signs of rejecting the ex-fighters as they feared they now had to share housing, land, resources and property with the newcomers.

Another fact that must be taken into account is that returning fighters often feel guilty for having been absent for such a long time, and therefore unable to support their families morally as well as financially. In accordance with Eritrean custom, once back they are expected to look after their loved ones. Abraham, a key informant, expressed his feelings in the following way, which represents the dilemma the majority of former fighters found themselves in:

During all these long years of armed struggle I have survived with this feeling of guilt and responsibility for my family. When we were given money for the first time, I spent it to buy clothes for my father and mother and for the first time in my life I felt so good that somehow I was able to repay the love they gave me (Massawa, 19 December 1998).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Each individual fighter was given 500 *Birr* in 1991 to buy civilian clothes.

#### 2.4.6 Education and skill training

Ideally, education should be understood in its broader sense, meaning that life-long learning and work go together and education should not be restricted to the space of formal schooling. But in the studies conducted in the process of designing reintegration programs for combatants, it seems that education and training are implicitly understood as the formal transfer of vocational, technical and basic general skills (Klingebiel, 1995). The world of skills, however, is diverse. Human capabilities and competence relate to knowledge, abilities and skills, as well as to values, attitudes and norms that are the results of both the educational and the employment system, in which experiential learning usually has no place (Nubler, 2000).

Education was viewed by the Eritrean political leaders as integral to the national liberation struggle, and is currently valued by policymakers as a core element of the nation-building process. In the view of both the EPLF and the present Eritrean government, the broad educational arena relates to both formal and non-formal learning, to efforts at consciousness-raising, including those that occur outside of schools, and to all skill-building opportunities (Stefanos, 1997). The strategy for education is linked to a larger social vision that is egalitarian, responsive to the interests of peasants and workers, independent, oriented to self-reliance, and able to mobilize effectively all human and material resources. An examination of education during the colonial era shows that it was undervalued and constricted, and that Eritrean women in particular were greatly impeded in pursuing schooling and all forms of learning.

*Table 8: Sex-disaggregated break-down of time ex-fighters were exposed to education*

Sex	Origin of education			Total
	Before struggle	During struggle	After struggle	
Male	130 (35%)	99 (27%)	4 (1%)	233 (63%)
Female	34 (9%)	98 (27%)	2 (0%)	134 (37%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>164 (44%)</b>	<b>197 (54%)</b>	<b>6 (2%)</b>	<b>367 (100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

During the armed struggle, education and literacy efforts were not limited to introductory courses. EPLF fighters were involved in vocational and educational programs both in the base camps and in the liberated areas. Besides, the task of front line combat was to involve both female and male fighters in establishing small-scale workshops; schools, hospitals, and public services based on participatory management systems.

#### 2.4.7 Experiential Learning

Evan defines experiential learning as follows:

The knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study, which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification. It can include instruction-based learning, provided by any institution, which has not been examined in any way by the public examination systems. It can include those undervalued elements of formally provided education, which are not encompassed in current examinations (Evans, 1987; p. 138).

This definition mentions two strategic types of knowledge: on the one hand, the certified experiences and skills and, on the other, those informal resources which are disqualified or otherwise categorized as marginal. Experiential knowledge and skills are historical forms of practice referring to the way through which we construe the world and act upon one another. From this perspective the development of knowledge is a primary aspect of human socialization. It constitutes what has been termed cultural reproduction, the norms and values transmitted across generations.

However, cultural reproduction does not necessarily mean that people are socialized in an unproblematic way. It follows that the re-production of knowledge cannot be reduced to the development of individual mental attributes. On the contrary, the specific meaning ascribed to learning; thinking and knowledge are constantly shaped, struggled over and negotiated through social interaction between different groups in the society.

The skills and capabilities which the EPLF fighters were able to acquire in the field, by participating in educational programs—as beneficiaries as well as teachers and trainers—and while working in production and maintenance workshops, clinics or public administration, can well be seen as ‘experiential learning’. Thus former commanders or officers are now serving in official bodies and are employing their skills to lead and develop the country. The civil service has absorbed the best-qualified personnel. But most of the practical experience and skills acquired during the struggle, and yielding considerable potential for peace times, are not being properly utilized. The main reason for this is that the results of experiential as well as all other forms of informal learning are not recognized. Attesting to this, it is useful to note that a considerable number (72 percent) of interviewed ex-fighters have skills which are not certified. Again, the differences between male and female soldiers’ educational experiences is noticeable, particularly the fact that women were most easily able to acquire skills while in the EPLF.

*Table 9: Current skills of ex-fighters and its origin*

Sex	Time the skill was acquired				Total
	Before struggle	During struggle	After struggle	No skill	
Male	20 (8.4%)	111 (46.6%)	34 (14.3%)	73 (30.7%)	238 (100%)
Female	4 (3%)	90 (67.2%)	12 (9%)	28 (20.9%)	134(100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 (6.5%)</b>	<b>201 (54%)</b>	<b>46 (12.4%)</b>	<b>101 (27.2%)</b>	<b>372 (100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of surveyed ex-fighters acquired skills during the armed struggle, the significant area being “administration”, in which 201 of the skilled ex-fighter acquired competence adaptable for new roles.

*Table 10: Break down by skill acquired by ex-fighters*

Kind of skill	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Craftsmanship	5 (2%)	10 (4%)	15 (7%)
Barefoot doctor	19 (8%)	33 (15%)	52 (23%)
Radio operator	17 (8%)	12 (5%)	29 (13%)
Mechanic	29 (13%)	7 (3%)	36 (16%)
Petty-trade	1(0%)	2 (1%)	3 (1%)
Administration	48 (21%)	31 (14%)	79 (35%)
Construction	6 (3%)	3 (1%)	9 (4%)
More than one skill	2 (1%)		2 (1%)
Other		1 (0%)	1 (0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>127 (56%)</b>	<b>99 (44%)</b>	<b>226 (100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

Wastage of precious human resources can be seen in the Government’s retrenchment of civil servants in 1995, when the Ministry of Agriculture had to lay-off around 2,000 locally based mobile extension workers, among them more than 800 former fighters. Equally the Ministry of Health had to lay off 523 bare-foot doctors, mostly women. Some of them had worked for more than 12 years. The same happened in all other line Ministries. Thus the government has forfeited years of practical experience that no paper qualification can substitute for. It would have made sense to upgrade the skills gained during the armed struggle rather than simply dispose of them.

#### 2.4.8 Employment

Gainful employment is both crucial to social and economic stability, and a key ingredient of peace building. However, in the fragile Eritrean labor market, supply is much larger than the demand. Employment opportunities in the formal sector are rare. Ex-fighters have to compete with annual school leavers for the same limited number of jobs. In the course of reforming the civil service, which attempted to

streamline the inherited over-staffed and inefficient public administration and fit it to Government's revenues, an additional 3,500 ex-fighters were laid off.

In the EPLF access to "jobs" depended on motivation and accumulated knowledge gained from life experience and not academic or vocational qualifications. The post-war job market, on the contrary, bases its criterion on the use of formal qualifications and employment is hierarchically structured. As we see from Table 11, 30 percent of the sample survey was not employed, but if we factor sex into the employment numbers, we see that 79 percent of women are jobless. This clearly demonstrates the precarious situation of women ex-fighters, many of whom are living in abject poverty and experiencing difficulties with reintegrating into civilian society several years after they have been demobilized.

*Table 11: Sex-disaggregated break-down of current employment status of ex-fighters*

Current employment status	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Employed	111 (29%)	24 (6%)	135 (36.3%)
Self employed	91 (24%)	6 (2%)	97 (26%)
Running family enterprise	8 (2%)		8 (2%)
Working with a partner	4 (1%)	11 (3%)	15 (4%)
Unemployed	23 (6%)	87 (23%)	110 (30%)
Other	1 (0%)	6 (2%)	7 (2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>238 (64%)</b>	<b>134 (36%)</b>	<b>372 (100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

#### 2.4.9 The land problem

In rural Eritrea, arable land is allocated on the basis of membership of a particular community, while membership itself is based either on common descent or residence. Access to arable land in terms of ownership or usufruct is regarded as an inalienable right of every recognized member of the communities concerned. When I asked whether ex-fighters could get land in their village, usually the response was: "Yes, there is always space for our own people, those who joined the struggle or left the village for exile." But it was often added that there was no or little land available for returnees who were newcomers. As a result, land-related problems were among the most serious issues encountered by former fighters after demobilization with more than two third experiencing some difficulties. Other issues were raised as in the break-down below:

- Child-care: 1%
- House rent: 3%
- Lack of funds: 10%
- Lack of skills: 11%
- Land related problems: 69%

- Health related problem: 6%

#### 2.4.10 The social dimensions of reintegration

It can be argued that economic opportunities are pivotal in the early phases of adjustment, because they can facilitate the rate and the scope of integration. They are not, however, a sufficient condition for the overall integration to succeed, and thus, from the very beginning, social and psychological integration needs to be taken seriously. The social structures of the receiving society and the attitudes of its members towards ex-fighters are variables that determine the speed, the direction and level of socio-cultural reintegration.

The reintegration of ex-fighters would not be complete if it did not take into account their fears, hopes, and attitudes about adjustment or maladjustment within their new environments. Adjustment refers here to the individual's (or group's) ability to live and perform various social roles and activities without suffering excessive or unbearable psychological stress. Family relations are a vital element of social cohesion and are highly valued by Eritreans of all strata of society. Fighters were forced to cut all relations with their family, often for the whole time they spent in the field. Therefore one of the important problems faced by former fighters is the loss of ties with family or relatives during the long years of war and subsequent disorientation. For many former fighters the EPLF had replaced their family and after demobilization they felt abandoned. This sentiment is especially strong with female ex-fighters.

*Table 12: Ex-fighters' family contacts during army service*

Personal perception	Contacts with family during struggle		Total
	Yes	No	
Poor	14 (4%)	83 (22%)	97 (26%)
"So so"	24 (6%)	94 (25%)	118 (32%)
Good	20 (5%)	137 (37%)	157 (42%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>58 (6%)</b>	<b>314 (84%)</b>	<b>372 (100%)</b>

Source: Mehreteab, 2001

The great majority of ex-fighters (84 percent) had no contact with their families during the armed struggle. Therefore it is not astonishing that more than 82 percent of the former fighters did not go back to their home villages. The social consequences of uprooting, for an individual, might be estrangement and alienation from family, friends and close community, the loosening of kinship ties and the breakdown of support networks. In traditional village life, the sense of community is very strong and families are very inter-linked. Fighters missed out on this community/family life and developed their own networks to replace their loss. In the field this process was accelerated and intensified by the pro-active role assumed by the EPLF, which challenging the old cleavages of Eritrean society and forced fighters to develop a new identity, establishing boundaries between them and other

non-fighters, and sameness along the political line of national liberation from foreign rule and repressive traditions. The subject of repressive customs, laws and norms relating to women, landless peasants, displaced nomads and workers, was dealt with in particular by the EPLF, an organization prompt to change in order to protect and promote the well-being of the vulnerable. For the first time in the history of Eritrea, women were encouraged to take on a more active role beyond being mothers and wives.

Despite this history, and Eritreans' awareness of the important role of social factors in the life of any individual, especially in the case of people who have been uprooted several times, the reintegration programs developed in this country, as elsewhere, usually consisted exclusively of, and concentrated on, economic reintegration, thus repeating the mistakes of development policies centered on macro economic improvements. The same observation also applies to the support programs set up for demobilized fighters. According to W/Giorgis (1999), and as confirmed by my observations as head of *Mitias* in charge of implementing the reintegration program of ex-fighters in the early 1990s, the latter was oriented more towards dealing with economic problems than resolving social and psychological issues. It was believed that ensuring livelihoods for former fighters was of foremost importance, and it was held that if this were achieved, all other problems would gradually become less pressing and finally slot into place. Interviews with former fighters, in particular, have provided persuasive evidence that this belief is wrong, and that an integrated approach is desperately needed.

The problematic reintegration of women ex-fighters into Eritrean society paints rather a sober picture of the difficulties that can result when demobilization programs are inadequately developed. My findings in the sample survey point to the following factors which distinguish the situation of women from that of their male comrades. First and foremost is the issue of their social position: during the struggle, women enjoyed the same rights and duties as men, and underwent a process of emancipation and social transformation. Their return to civilian life, however, has embodied a return to a situation where traditional patriarchal values predominate. In general, then, women have sought to avoid returning to their place of origin in order to minimize social and family tensions. This is reflected in the pattern of their post-demobilization settlement. Although predominantly from rural backgrounds, the majority of women ex-fighters have settled in urban centers (Asmara, Keren, Mendefera, etc.) where they feel more attuned to the life style and can retain a certain degree of independence. This marks a divergence from the male ex-fighters settlement trend, which is more evenly distributed between rural and urban areas. The downside of this urban setting is that women ex-fighters find themselves existing outside traditional family and community support networks, and thus their integration is hindered. Finally, women ex-fighters carry full responsibility for the care and welfare of their children, a burden that is accentuated by the high divorce rate experienced by this group. Child care responsibility acts as a further constraint to women's engagement in training and employment opportunities.

In recognition of the severity of the problem women face, a Gender Unit was set up within *Mitias* to research the problems and needs of women ex-fighters and recommend appropriate courses of action. An initial survey conducted by the Gender Unit revealed that a significant number of female ex-fighters had spent most of their severance pay on housing and daily survival needs for themselves and their children. The study also confirmed that women now risk increased marginalization due to minimal employment prospects. They tend to live on the peripheries of towns where conditions and services are very poor, and houses are cramped and highly insecure. This problem is more acute in Asmara where living quarters are small and costs often high. In other centers such as Keren, women ex-fighters have had more opportunity to re-locate and offer each other mutual support. The realities of the present situation are, all told, far from what demobilized women expected. What this shows is that post-conflict rehabilitation processes need to take into account the new roles of women. There is a clear need to address women's acute difficulties in order to ameliorate what they are currently coping with.

When we look at the overall reintegration of ex-fighters, three different issues must be addressed:

- What happens to individuals when they go 'home'?
- How does the local community perceive them?
- How do these issues affect the overall national project of integration?

To frame these into a coherent program, overall national integration is needed. Adequate co-ordination and distortion of direction becomes a problem if there is no clear strategy, as we have seen in other countries which have gained support from external aid agencies and NGOs. Green (1998) argues that:

[Reintegration] often has no macro framework, no link to long term development strategy and little or no interaction with development allocations to the same country. A further problem of this type of approach to rehabilitation is that the speed with which programmes are identified and implemented, with the aim to do something quickly, means that they are not subjected to stringent criteria used in the appraisal of development programmes (Green and Ahmed, 1998 p. 7).

To avoid this scenario, the government of Eritrea needs to develop a policy framework that charts out the context of integration; properly describes the target group and its features; and sets out the integration strategy; time framework; elements of the program; institutional responsibilities and budget. Especially if what is being offered by NGOs or bilateral and multilateral donor community is short-term and piecemeal, an overall framework is essential for the following reasons:

- to provide a basis for deciding what fits and what do not either in the long or short run and acts accordingly
- to accept conditions when necessary and when it is important to the overall strategy

Successful rehabilitation for sustainable peace and development requires the development of a coherent, integrated, and strategic framework. Yet most rehabilitation interventions in post-crisis situations—especially as perceived by external aid agencies and NGOs—consist of individual programs that are implemented mainly at the local level and without any links with other reconstruction interventions. This “relief approach” to rehabilitation results from the absence of national policy frameworks, high degrees of donor dependence on NGOs, the short-term nature of donor funding of rehabilitation programs, and a lack of a macro framework and links to long-term development strategies. The lack of the necessary long-term resource commitments in particular means that rehabilitation programs are conceived as little more than “crisis management” interventions.

The concept of rehabilitation in complex political emergencies is different and much broader than that used in natural disasters, encompassing a whole range of diverse and complex programs ranging from demobilization and de-mining to peacemaking and political rehabilitation. The coordination of, and cooperation between Eritrean institutions, needs to be developed beyond the currently prevalent exchange of information by top-level management. It would be advisable to intensify the exchange of information and experiences on all staff levels, possibly by merging strategic units in different institutions.

There is also the danger of outside assistance killing our own capacities. For example, in countries such as Mozambique and Ethiopia, massive direct action by too many external agencies may have increased short-term service provision capacity, “but at the price of cumulative fragmentation and de-capacitating of domestic governance and social sector institutions” (Green, 1995). Consequently, the processes of disintegration and fragmentation started by the war can be re-enforced during the reconstruction phase.

## *2.5 Lessons learnt from demobilization and reintegration in 1993-97*

The Eritrean experience of rehabilitation and reintegration of demobilized fighters in the 1990s offers a unique opportunity to learn from the approach taken, its mistakes and shortcomings. The rehabilitation exercise, which was carried out by *Mitias* alone from 1993 until 1997, had many positive as well as negative outcomes. In order to avoid repeating the mistakes that were made, and to improve the outcomes of demobilization and rehabilitation programs that will take place in the future, the following points must be taken into consideration:

### 2.5.1 Institutional set-up and implementation:

- Programs should focus on supporting and rebuilding coping mechanisms and help households to take initiatives in their day-to-day activities.

- The approach should be targeted at ensuring access to assistance and opportunities for the development of the whole community, rather than specific target groups. A participatory approach involving the beneficiaries in decision making and implementation should be used. Priority should be given to rebuilding capacity (human and physical) and supporting sustainability at the local and central level. The emphasis should be on re-establishing linkages within and between communities and exploring how reconciliation can be facilitated.
- Assistance needs to look beyond moving the country back to the status quo before the crisis, and look, instead, at how to change the development pattern of the country to avoid such crises in the future.
- The settlement policy, which was one of the pillars of the reintegration exercise, had quite a number of deficits. A uniform model had been worked out, instead of different models based of regional differences. It should have encompassed the host community as much as the returnees, with special support measures for the vulnerable in each category. Also agro-pastoralists should have been seen as a group with special needs, and their specific problems addressed.
- In most settlement areas implemented so far, there is clear evidence of a lack of long-term economic activities which would have allowed the settlement community to become sustainable after termination of the support interventions.
- Agro-pastoralism is one of the neglected dimensions of reintegration support efforts. In the period following independence, strategies for the development of agro-pastoralism concentrated on improving the quality of animals, with the aim of commercializing livestock. While their achievements are commendable, a major shortcoming of these initiatives has been the tendency to neglect the provision of livestock (other than oxen) to replace the losses caused by war and drought.

### 2.5.2 Social transformation and adjustment

Fighters have accumulated a wealth of valuable managerial skills and other related experience by staying in the armed struggle. But different studies show that their informal experiences were not taken on board and not given due recognition, thus wasting accumulated human resources. Developing a system able to assess and acknowledge the results of the experiential learning and training of ex-fighters and turning them into formal qualifications would have had far-reaching positive result.

More than any other group of people in Eritrea, EPLF fighters were heavily indoctrinated with socialist and nationalist ideologies, learning and adopting new values like egalitarianism, gender equality, religious and ethnic tolerance, group solidarity, loyalty to the movement and unwavering commitment to the cause of

national independence. Ex-fighters therefore face more problems in socialization when they try to rejoin the mainstream way of life.

Fighters had developed different values, norms and attitudes while staying in their 'sanctuary' when they were 'masters' of themselves in Sahel. With independence Eritrea rejoined the outside world and became subject to rules set by others. In this context, the transition from a successful guerrilla movement to an effective administration was more difficult than anticipated.

Though many ex-fighters have a rural background, they are reluctant to return to rural areas, which shows how far they have changed due to participation in the struggle. This applies especially to women. For example, women former fighters have great difficulties in accepting the norms of the prevailing patriarchal society.

Women ex-fighters face more problems than men do in adjusting to their new environment. The gender politics all fighters imbibed during the armed struggle was that the patriarchal system, rooted in discriminatory economic structures, is the source of inequality. They were told, however, that addressing the issue of gender equality would have to wait until the main goal—national independence—was achieved. This analysis was inherited from Marxist traditions that subordinate gender transformation to economic processes. Hence, education and training, not political or social action, were considered the only appropriate modes of struggle for women in this period to improve their situation. This policy did not leave space for broader inclusive activities promoting gender equality, which in turn hindered the reintegration of women in general and ex-fighters in particular, once independence was achieved.

The tremendous social transformation female fighters had undergone during the armed struggle was not given its due weight when the process of reintegrating ex-fighters was planned and implemented. Thus their role as change agents has not been taken on board.

Social, political and economic reintegration must not only focus on ex-soldiers but should propel the whole society into a new post-crisis context. In such a situation a multiplicity of interventions is required. It is necessary to meet immediate needs and put in place systems, structures and support to allow the country and people to meet their own needs. These interventions should occur concurrently.

It can be construed that economic opportunities are pivotal in the early adjustment of ex-fighters to the conditions of civilian life. To achieve integration, social and psychological aspects have to be taken into consideration. In the case of Eritrea the emphasis of both policy and concrete measures was on economic interventions.

For reintegration to be successful, programs have to be comprehensive and well planned, taking place in a joint effort of government institutions and the donor community. The overall responsibility should remain with the government of Eritrea and all programs need to fit its overall development strategy.

### 2.5.3 Training and skill development

Skills training programs should be conceived on the basis of detailed labor market studies and should contain follow-up measures. Concrete help in job seeking and support for self-employment should complement these programs. Small loans for business start-ups are an important instrument, but have to be designed and implemented through appropriate loan schemes. Micro-credit alone should not be viewed as a cure for all presently facing emerging micro-enterprises, however. A solid system must be put in place if enterprises are to succeed in helping the vulnerable groups, especially returnees, in restarting their livelihood. The support services required by entrepreneurs might cover a range of areas and subjects, including

- management and bookkeeping
- marketing
- technology transfer
- infrastructure, energy and communication and
- supply of inputs/raw materials. The chief goal of the program is to promote profitable micro-enterprises.

*Mitias* tried to address the psychosocial problems faced by ex-fighters by means of training counselors and assigning them to different places with a high density of ex-fighters. Since this was not done rigorously its impact was limited.

Training women only in traditional female crafts was not able to help them secure jobs, and did nothing to challenge the gender bias that is entrenched in the society. According to an evaluation of the training program in traditional female crafts, it was a complete failure and was thus phased out in 1995.

In terms of employment, most male trainees were able to find work in the building sector, which has started to boom in Eritrea. Female ex-fighters are still constrained by their lack of mobility and society's traditional norms, which see workplaces such as the building sector as men's territory. To overcome this problem, there is a need for preferential hiring to break down gender biases in society.

The main shortcoming of the training programs was a lack of follow-up of the trainees and of outmoded facilities. When the training programs were conceived, the needs, wishes and commitment of the trainees were not studied.

Giving due consideration to the capacities of women would also contribute to overcoming the gender bias, and there is a need for further reinforcement of this point. Gender training and other empowerment measures should be carried out at all levels, to start with at University level in order to create a new breed of intellectuals who could elaborate a concept fitting the needs of Eritrean women. This should be complemented by an overall gender awareness campaign and by compulsory positive discrimination measures. In one excellent example, the Government garage in Asmara has trained and employed more than 40 women.

Women fighters should have their own association so that they can fight for their right and make their voices heard.

### **3. A comparison of Eritrea's and other reintegration experiences**

Demobilization and reintegration programs (DRPs) are complex operations with overlapping and interdependent phases, crosscutting issues, and many actors. This section addresses how DRPs have been carried out in other places, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, and identifies pitfalls which furnish a good basis from which to evaluate the Eritrean experience of DRPs. In a post-conflict environment, the rehabilitation of civil society structures and livelihood systems is one of the most important elements of recovery and reconstruction. Violent conflicts undermine social networks and often leave a legacy of divided societies at all levels, from the family outwards.

A number of countries in Africa have, in the past two decades, experienced processes of demobilization and reintegration after the end of violent conflicts. The demobilization and reintegration experiences in Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe have been different within their distinct political and socio-economic contexts, but they also share several similarities.<sup>11</sup>

The first demobilization procedures were regarded as an exclusively military problem. In the case of Mozambique, fighters were discharged after independence and moved to so-called production-centers, where they lived in very poor conditions. The government did not show much interest in their fate. Though many years have passed, reintegration has not yet been fully achieved. The same holds true for Zimbabwe. The new government thought that reintegration could be achieved through the support provided by family networks (World Bank, 1993). Two years after independence it became clearer that returnees, and especially the freedom fighters, needed additional help. A primarily cash-payment oriented support scheme was introduced, but it was too meager and came too late to alleviate frustration and bitterness among the demobilized.

Rehabilitation assistance should provide the framework for reviving livelihoods and civil institutions that were previously suppressed, eroded or rendered powerless by war, and should also aim to strengthen local capacities to participate in the reconstruction process. Effective civil society structures are those which ensure that local people are represented and have a voice in setting reconstruction priorities, and that central authorities are both informed and responsive to their needs and priorities. This is particularly important in post-conflict situations in which political participation allows groups to articulate their diverse interests in the formulation of reconstruction and rehabilitation strategies. Civil society can make important contributions by providing a counter-balance to the power of central authorities or

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<sup>11</sup> For more details, see Kingma, 2000c. "Demobilization and Reintegration Experience in Africa." In Pauwels (ed.) 2000. pp. 301-328.

by providing basic essential services at the local level (Harvey, *et al.* 1997). This is, of course, true nationally as well as locally. Many civil society networks—be they religious, formed to represent women’s interests, maintained by trade unions, or cooperative/peasant structures—operate at local, regional and national levels, interacting with each other and with government bodies. Thus civil society usually plays an important role by acting as a key factor in promoting participation, sustainable development and democracy. Prendergast (1997) argues that:

The primary objective of interventions in the future should be to utilize and build on the capacity of emergent civil and political structures and institutions, in order to reverse the erosion of civil society and communal cohesion (Prendergast, 1997; p. 150).

While in theory the importance of using civil society as a means of encouraging participation and reaching the grassroots is recognized, “in practice building civil society has largely been equated to funding southern NGOs” (Harvey, 1997; p. 16). Unfortunately, however, the basic Christian, Muslim, women’s, trade union and peasant civil society bodies are usually defined as not being NGOs. Those which are so defined usually have very narrow membership bases and are (when genuine) more like professional consulting co-ops than peoples’ social bodies.

If we see the Eritrean experience in this context, we can see that the protracted armed struggle shifted the center of gravity of nationalist agitation away from the civic and association dynamics of the public sphere to front-affiliated organizations. Alongside the increasingly tightly organized and disciplined structure of the EPLF, this left little space for civil society to mature and develop.

In the absence of a civil society that could monitor and steer social dynamics, the liberation movement developed an autonomous and somewhat a-political culture that changed with the time. The hierarchical organizational frames it favored encouraged a compliant culture in which the ideal of a self-empowering citizenry was somewhat restricted, and political creativity was subordinated to the cult of efficiency and rationality. The sheer brutality of the war, and the massive social dislocation it occasioned, was understood as necessitating a movement that had to be exceptionally disciplined while also being intimately attuned to the sympathies of the people (Makki, 1996; p. 481).

When designing demobilization and reintegration programs in Eritrea, the following points must be taken into account. Over the years different codes of conduct and ethos emerged across different groups that were:

- within the front and to a lesser degree in liberated and semi-liberated areas
- in the Diaspora or exile where life differed according to exposures and experiences and
- among communities, which had remained in occupied Eritrea.

After independence all these different values, norms and attitudes acted or reacted in ways that could help or hinder the process of integration. Most importantly, the main catalyst of change—the national liberation movement—no longer existed. In

the post-conflict period, it seems that economic development and national reconstruction, not political orientation, are the main concerns. The question remains how far this approach will provide an enabling framework for the reintegration of different groups in general, and ex-fighters in particular.

In the process of reintegration, in Namibia attitudes of those who stayed has been reported to be generally favorable toward the settlement and economic integration of returnees (Pendleton et al, 1992). In many cases, returnees seem to be socially accepted and appear to play an important role in communities, through participating in traditional village councils. Most local people seem to recognize and respect the knowledge and experience which returnees have brought back from abroad, including their organizational and problem-solving skills.

The same is true for ex-fighters in Eritrea, who remember the attitude of the civilian population towards their homecoming as a 'honeymoon'. Everybody was euphoric: those who came back and those who received them all showed how happy they were, even though they might express it differently. The homecoming of their sons and daughters who fought for the country's independence was a great event for all community members. Nevertheless, from the beginning, a few former fighters were faced with no warm welcome. Some ex-fighters mentioned that they had drifted apart from their family and relatives. The main reason they gave was that staying in the armed struggle had changed them a lot and that a communication gap had developed in the process.

Rural households have often relied on assistance from members of the extended family, through pensions, remittances from contract labor, or wages and salaries from work in nearby towns. The general contribution of agriculture to their household income is often insufficient and therefore a family is forced to apply a "multiple income strategy." As a result, a large number of returnees have left their rural homestead to look for wage-employment in order to support themselves and to be able to contribute to the cash-income of the family (Green and Ahmed, 1998).

In order to become self-sufficient, in the Namibian case, many skilled or semi-skilled ex-combatants tried to start up small businesses. However, a major impediment to realizing their aspiration for self-employment has been a general lack of funds and difficulty in obtaining credit. The First National Development Corporation, (FNDC), a parastatal aimed at supporting and funding small-scale enterprises in communal areas, only gave support to a very small number of returnees in the Ovamboland area (Namibia). Many returnees have tried to acquire credit but have become discouraged by the lack of success (Tames, 1992).

Although already a general problem, ex-combatants have intensified the rate of rural-urban migration in Namibia. The limited resources among rural households for accommodating returnees and their families have inevitably forced returnees to migrate to urban and peri-urban areas to look for wage employment. Another reason that returnees migrate appears to result from experiences in exile where many of them have undergone major cultural and social transformations and/or got used to urban life (Rogge, 1991; Mwaze, 1990). Moreover, some of the returnees

have experienced adversity with the local crops and methods of cultivation because they have become used to agriculture in a different environmental and climatic setting. Finally, many returnees lack any experience in agriculture because their experience in exile was essentially in urban areas, or they worked as casual wage laborers.

The longer such ex-combatants are unable to create their own source of income, and the longer they remain dependent on their rural hosts, the greater is the economic burden on their families or friends and the more likely the emergence of tensions between the members of the household. Bearing testimony to this, feeling of dependency and frustration were found to be increasing among Namibian returnees. Their inability to contribute to the income of their extended family system appeared to block their entrance into networks of rural kinship (Preston, 1993). This history provides a set of issues against which to view the integration policy of the Eritrean government and construct an agenda for analyzing the experiences of integrating returnees in Eritrea.

Another major problem that is left un-addressed by governments emerging from armed conflict, is the question of what happens once the returnees are back 'home' and start fending for themselves. Their presence tends to be forgotten until they pose a threat to the ruling power. For example, an estimated 300,000 people left Zimbabwe to seek refuge in many countries of the world. Another two million rural people were internally displaced after having been herded into "protected villages" by the settler regime as part of its strategy to sabotage the war of liberation. But when independence was achieved, returnees found there were neither sufficient resources nor the necessary social backup to facilitate their reintegration into the society they had struggled to liberate. Their voice was heard only when they started demonstrating against the government. Writing about their situation in the early 1990s, Musemwa put it vividly:

'Son of the soil' during the armed struggle; 'squatter' after independence.' The irony in this statement encapsulates the predicament in which many ex-combatants find themselves today, thirteen years after independence. For most of the now destitute ex-combatants...the struggle in Zimbabwe was "a revolution that lost its way" ... the raw deal they got ... when they were demobilized. ..."There will be plenty at home"... didn't materialize... the very people they put into power...have become oppressively rich (Musemwa, 1994; p. 44).

Similarly in Eritrea, in an incident which took place in May 1993, EPLF fighters expressed their dissatisfaction with continued voluntary national service by demonstrating in the streets of Asmara. Their outrage was, and is, a potent reminder of what the future holds if timely preventive measures are not instituted.

### *3.1 Demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants: a special dimension of post-war recovery*

The end of the Cold War and a decade of economic deterioration created an atmosphere which was favorable, globally, to downsizing military capacities. Countries emerging from armed conflict, but also ones which were at peace, were exploring ways to reduce their military expenditure with a view to shifting scarce resources towards redressing persistent poverty. In this changing context, the integration of ex-combatants has constituted a vital element of the transition from war to peace.

The processes of the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants is essential for both political and economic reasons. Successful demobilization and reintegration efforts can build mutual confidence among former adversaries; thereby reducing the risk of renewed hostilities. The experience of many war-torn societies indicates that when effective demobilization and reintegration programs were not, or could not be implemented, fragile peace arrangements could be jeopardized and conflicts re-ignited (World Bank, 1995).

Worldwide, the record of demobilization over the past decade is quite impressive. The total number of armed forces personnel has declined considerably and continuously since 1989. Following the 1987 Cold War peak of 28.8 million military personnel, the number dropped to 22 million by 1998 (Kingma, 2000). Especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, the nineties could be called a decade of demobilization. A survey of demobilization in Africa in the early and middle part of that decade shows that it has occurred in the following circumstances:

- After a peace accord between fighting parties
- After the defeat of one of the fighting parties
- With a perceived improvement in the security situation
- As a result of a shortage of adequate funding
- Through the perceived economic and development impact of conversion or
- As a result of changing military technologies and/or strategies. (Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2000)

Decisions to demobilize are based on specific military, political and socio-economic circumstances or events. In Angola and Zimbabwe, where peace was reached based on a compromise between opposing forces, demobilization was seen as a tool for preventing further outbreaks of violence, and more emphasis was placed on negotiating a reductions in size of the different armed forces involved (World Bank, 1993).

### *3.2 Chances and risks of demobilization and reintegration*

Successful demobilization necessarily involves a well-structured reintegration program. Demobilization that discounts the social, economic, and political factors

inherent in the reintegration process risks endangering peace arrangements and leading to renewed fighting with its inevitable humanitarian implications (World Bank, 1995). On the other hand, all positive effects of timely and properly managed demobilization or repatriation are spoiled by the often long term negative effects of inappropriate integration efforts.

The longevity of conflicts influences demobilization and integration efforts in a variety of ways—by one means, through the destruction of national infrastructure and the weakening of public-sector institutions by extended periods of fighting. On top of that, the drain of human capital, the very substantial movements of refugees and IDPs, all add to the logistical and technical challenges involved in organizing and sustaining demobilization [repatriation] and integration programs (Berdal, 1996). Especially among ordinary soldiers, the expectations of a decent life, that is of getting employment and enjoying increased welfare, are usually high when most, sometimes all, of their adult life has been spent in the field. For them in particular, the longevity and legacy of war have profound economic and social implications, which not only complicate the transition to peace, but can also make the very prospect of demobilization less attractive than continued fighting.

Having served in the military for many years, ex-combatants have been socialized according to military principles. Their training makes them follow orders without asking too many questions, and as a consequence, they tend to be reluctant to seek explanations or to participate actively in demobilization and reintegration programs. The Zimbabwean experience shows that training in participative approaches to planning and decision-making can help ex-combatants to overcome this attitude (ILO, 1995). The integration of demobilized combatants is further complicated by the fact that it generally occurs under very bad circumstances. The country and its economy are often devastated and the government has limited resources. Hundreds of thousands of returning refugees are also needy and the political period of transition implies insecurity and risks.

The long-term objectives of the integration process are to enhance economic and human development (Kingma, 1996) and to foster and sustain political stability, security and peace. Collier and Pradhan argue that ‘the longer a society stays in a state of civil war the more do conventions of legitimate conduct decay’ (1994; p. 120). They conclude that the restoration of peace is tightly linked to the reconstruction of systems of legitimacy.

In addition to its peacebuilding role, demobilization also offers new possibilities. Security in a country, as well as national reconciliation, are necessary preconditions for sustainable human development, but a war-torn society can, in peacetime, find new ways to solve emerging conflicts. Some of the most significant potential in the group of ex-guerrilla fighters can be found in this arena: unlike government soldiers, who merely carry out a job, most liberation fighters feel committed to a mission. They show commitment, discipline and motivation to achieve their goals. Even though they often do not have many formal professional

skills, they are in general better educated than the average person is, and more qualified when it comes to community-oriented social behavior.

This spirit is essential to peaceful reconstruction—which is why education and vocational training, which can do a lot to build self-confidence and respectability, redirecting the individuals' energy to useful activities and building hope for the future—is so important (ILO, 1995). Furthermore, training can be therapeutic and help to reduce trauma caused by the loss of family members and friends. With proper training, ex-combatants begin to recover from their experiences. They can find a new identity during the training process and through meaningful and productive activities.

Most studies on the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in post-conflict African countries tend to give a minor role to the aspect of utilizing their existing skills. They conclude, from surveys, that most ex-combatants have no or only very few skills and knowledge (ILO, 1995; Klingebiel et al, 1995; World Bank, 1993). As a consequence, little consideration is given to effective utilization of the existing competence of ex-combatants.

Yet the integration of ex-combatants usually takes place in economic, social and cultural environments that determine constraints as well as opportunities. When social capital has been eroded and ethnic or regional tensions prevail, integration is extremely complex and difficult to achieve. For example, Ugandan ex-combatants were generally well received by communities in the central and south-west regions of the country where the National Resistance Movement had its support base, but those attempting to resettle in the east of the country initially faced community hostility. In Namibia some Ovambo ex-combatants who had fought on the losing side faced resentment on their return to the northern part of the country (Colletta et al, 1996). Alongside their material needs, ex-combatants have to deal with the sudden loss of their former comrades and the aims and ideas for which they have lived and fought. They may feel abandoned and superfluous if they do not find a new economic, social and psychological standing in the community (World Bank, 1998). Integration is also affected by the conditions prevailing in the home and family environments.

Last but not least, reintegration depends on the capacities of the individual. Whatever the setting may be, only a few of those who return are flexible and adapt quickly. The majority face problems (Preston, 1993). For example, while Namibia's transition to democratic nationhood has been smooth and advances have been made to reconcile differences between formerly opposed groups, many difficulties have been encountered in trying to achieve social and economic integration and advancement of those who fought compared to those who stayed behind.

### *3.3 The special case of women ex-combatants*

Within the liberation movement in Namibia, women played a prominent role mainly as civilians and through service to the People's Liberation Army of Namibia

(PLAN). In the 1980s, about one third of active PLAN members were women (World Bank, 1996). They were proud of their record in combat, although few were unit leaders. Most provided support services as radio officers, health assistants and caterers. Over the years, many had seized the scarce existing opportunities to obtain qualifications (Preston, 1993), rallying under the double banner of fighting colonial and male oppression. They expected, at the war's end, to have the same opportunities as men and to play an equitable part in the structuring of the new state which would have been a just reward for their contribution. However, the initial exclusion of women from the army shattered illusions that the new state would be more committed to egalitarian gender structures than the apartheid regime (Nathan, 1993). Even the few who were eventually admitted experienced dissatisfaction with their roles and prospects, especially if they had previously held positions of seniority in the liberation forces.

In spite of their involvement in nationalistic struggles in such diverse parts of the world as Zimbabwe, Nicaragua and China, women have rarely achieved visible leadership roles during the post-conflict period. And the reinforcement of existing household relations has meant that women have usually remained in, or even returned to, subordinate positions (Seidman, 1993). Many international examples convey analogous scenarios—that after conflict, in times of peace, women's place is regarded as being in the home. Another way women are marginalized is in the conflict resolution process. In the reconstruction period, dealing with conflict remains a male dominated issue (McKay, 1994).

In El Salvador, women ex-guerrillas were pressured to put aside their needs in the name of peace (Enloe, 1993). Such an attitude is not unique to Third World countries. As Enloe has observed:

Polish women are being urged to worry less about unemployment...and to take more satisfaction in bearing children for the sake of nationalist revival. Angolan women are being urged to put their own needs as women on the political back burner for the sake of keeping afloat the fragile boat of post-Cold War Angolan democratization (1993 p. 257).

Similarly, Edward (1994) reports that the dedication to and sacrifices for the common cause of those women who participated in Marxist liberation movements in Central America did not translate into leadership in post-war civil institutions. As a result, "Nicaraguan women warn Salvadorian and Guatemalan women not to equate participation in the armed struggle with gender equality." (Edward, 1994: 52). The same applies to Africa. Urdang (1989) observed in Guinea-Bissau how little change had taken place at household level after war. Although the liberation of women was part of the ideological perspective of building a new society, women have been actively called upon to leave aside gender issues and wait for the "appropriate" time to tackle them. In Somalia, women who desired to help shape the reconstruction of their country were faced with the consequences of breaking tradition when men felt threatened by their new roles in the country. The most

active women community workers were shut out of negotiations towards peace and reconstruction, and women were excluded from nearly every formal meeting at which Somalia's future was being determined (Osman, 1993).

Writing about South Africa, Mathabane (1994) cites the significance of women's involvement in the national freedom struggle and states that when negotiations began, women insisted that their agenda must no longer be ignored, postponed, or compromised: "They [insisted] that their emancipation should not be regarded as incidental to the overall liberation from apartheid. The two struggles are indivisibly linked" (Mathabane, 1994; p. 346). He observes that South African women wanted "to ensure that South Africa [didn't] go the way of many independent states in Africa where women contributed as much as men to the overthrow of colonialism and yet find themselves still oppressed, discriminated against, and treated as second-class citizens."

Seidman (1993) states that "since at least the turn of the century, nationalist movements have regularly promised to improve the status of women; before taking power, they have pledged to end gender-based subordination. Just as regularly, however, most of these promises have gone unfulfilled" (Seidman, 1993; p. 291). Seidman attributes several causes to the maintenance of the gender status quo, including the fear of dividing the "imagined community" on which a nationalist ideology is built by placing emphasis on national unity instead of gender equality. Further, Seidman describes the dilemma faced regularly by nationalistic leaders:

Even when they sincerely hope to challenge the subordination of women, their efforts to maintain a popular base requires them to respond to supporters' demands, articulated primarily by men who generally have little immediate interest in challenging gender subordination. These demands frequently involve the reconstruction of beleaguered peasant households, even when that means reconstructing gender inequality (Seidman, 1993; p. 292).

The situation of Eritrean women in general, and that of women ex-fighters in particular, is not much different from that of other post-liberation societies. During the armed struggle it was usually perceived that social transformation—and thus gender equality—had improved. After independence, however, we have increasingly been forced to see that what was done was only window dressing and that the male bias is still well entrenched.

#### **4. Planning of Demobilization and Reintegration Program 2001**

##### *4.1 Context and aim*

Whereas the 30 year-long liberation struggle was a typical guerrilla war fought by highly motivated volunteers with the aim of gaining national independence and sovereignty, the so-called border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which lasted from May 1998 until December 2000 when the Peace Accord was signed, was a conventional interstate war. It had similarities with other wars in Sub-Saharan Africa

in its regional dimension: by co-operating with opposition groups or secessionist movements, the war contributed to the ongoing instability in the Horn of Africa. Dissidents were armed and attempts were made to undermine the position of the enemy. This particular conflict was, however, unique in the sense that it was the only recent armed conflict in Africa fought by regular armies on both sides, according to the rules of conventional interstate war and not involving civilians as combatants. It also differed with regard to the massive number of soldiers killed on both sides, the exact number of which has not yet been revealed.

The greatest difference between the war of liberation and the ‘current border war’ is certainly the way the armed conflict came to an end. The Eritrean liberation war ended with an outright military victory of the EPLF, without any outside interference, and the immediate departure of all Ethiopian occupation forces. The so-called border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, by contrast, only came to an end as a result of a long process of international mediation, and after the Ethiopian army had occupied large parts of Southern and Western Eritrea. The Peace Accord provides for the deployment of a 4 200 strong UN peacekeeping force along a 25 kilometer-long Transitional Security Zone inside Eritrea, after the withdrawal of the Ethiopian army, which was—more or less—completed by the beginning of March 2001.

The caseload of internally displaced people (IDPs) is much higher than it was during the liberation struggle. During the recent war, 1.1 million Eritreans—that is more than one-third of the total population—were forced to leave homesteads that were located in the war zone, or areas occupied by enemy troops. Contrary to the situation in 1991 when the rainy season all over the country was particularly good, in 2001 Eritrea experienced its fourth year of prolonged drought, thus increasing the number of people living on relief to 57 percent of the entire population. Also the heavy damages inflicted by the enemy troops in the invaded regions of Debub and Gash-Barka will have to be repaired and land mines will have to be cleared before returnees can start working in their fields.

The context in which the present demobilization and reintegration exercise will have to be carried out is also marked by a significant change of attitude in the Eritrean civilian population as well as the international community. In 1993, the Eritrean civilian population readily accepted that the heroes of the liberation war, to whom they owed national independence, sovereignty and dignity, got preferential treatment that would allow them to compensate, at least partially, for their sacrifices. In 2001 the situation of the whole society had undergone rapid change. Currently the civilian population is convinced that the whole country has to be compensated for its sacrifices: the children, spouses, mothers and fathers who went to fight, and the family members who had, in the meantime, to live without their support in the struggle of everyday life.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the 1990s a tremendous change has taken place in world—that is Western—opinion concerning conflicts in Africa. The Eritrean liberation struggle may be considered as the last of a series of wars shaking

the yoke of colonialism, which was generally seen as a legitimate undertaking. In this context the leaders of successful liberation wars like Yoweri Museveni from Uganda, Meles Zenawi from Ethiopia and Isayas Afworki from Eritrea were applauded as a new brand of African statesmen. On the other hand, the economic stand-still and political set-backs which most African countries have experienced since the 1980s has led to an increasing attitude of “afro-pessimism” which denies African countries the right to wage wars even for legitimate defense. Thus a war fought for “a couple of square kilometers of barren land”, by two of the poorest countries of the continent, was labeled by the media as a “fight of two bald men for a comb.”

During the last war, 300,000 Eritreans were mobilized—that is nearly 10 percent of the entire population, or more than 50 percent of the population of working age. The percentage highest for men, as they form 80 percent of the fighting force. This drainage of the labor force had a tremendous negative effect on the economic life of the country, which in certain sectors nearly came to a standstill. In order to fund the war effort, large portions of the country’s scarce material and financial resources were diverted from productive sectors to the military. Demobilization and reintegration is meant to reverse this trend and free up all kinds of resources for development. Additionally, by announcing its intention to proceed at a large scale and to achieve the prompt demobilization of soldiers, the Eritrean government has demonstrated its commitment to sustain the ongoing process of peacebuilding.

The main objectives of the forthcoming demobilization and reintegration program will be (GOE, 2001):

- To contribute to economic recovery and fiscal stability through the reallocation of public resources from military to social and economic investments
- To support the demobilization and reintegration of up to 200,000 soldiers into sustainable productive activities, in a phased program expected to begin in October 2001 for a period of up to five years and
- To mobilize and strengthen the capacities of local implementing partners, such as government ministries and departments, local and international NGOs, private sector firms and community organizations, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of services to demobilized soldiers. (GOE, 2001)

#### *4.2 Target groups*

The 300,000 Eritreans who had been mobilized by general conscription during the recent war came from different categories:

- 40,000 were soldiers of the regular army
- 40,000 were re-mobilized ex-fighters (out of 54,000 demobilized during 1993 – 1997)

- 220,000 were people who had been in National Service (those who were doing their national service when the war broke out, plus those who had been trained before), militia or retired fighters who were considered as army reservists

An estimated of 200,000 of them will be demobilized progressively, with priority treatment for chronically ill, disabled and female soldiers. With the intensity of the recent war, the caseload of disabled soldiers is expected to be very large.

Up to now only the criteria for the soldiers to be demobilized during the first phase have been established: female, disabled, over aged and economically essential soldiers are to receive priority. For the following phases, no selection criteria have yet been officially released, but will be declared by the MOD which has to wait until the profile of the whole army is known. Although there were limitations to the quality of data, and the sample used a socio-economic survey of 3000 members of the Eritrean army, useful data was gleaned that was used in the planning processes.<sup>12</sup> Of the sample surveyed:

- 54% are between 20 and 29 years of age
- 16% are between 30 and 34 years of age
- 49% are married (95% of spouses of respondent undertake household activity with no monetary income)
- 73% are heads of households and the average family size is 5,9
- 47% are single
- the main skills were farming 28%, driving 17%, masonry 16%, carpentry 10%
- 16% consider themselves disabled and
- 13% claim that they have psychological problems

The survey indicated that if discharged:

- 36% would want to go farming (40% own livestock, 52 % have access to farm land and, of those 53% own the land and 44% indicated that the land is family owned)
- 28% would continue with their old job (77% had worked before being mobilized)
- 73% would return to their families and relatives for assistance, 43% to private organizations and 27% to friends (94% of respondents live with their parents or families)
- 10% would want to pursue higher education and
- 10% wanted training (54% indicated that they had skills and 45% indicated that they do not have skills)

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<sup>12</sup> Socio-economic survey for the DRP carried out by the Demobilization Task Force with the Office of Central Statistics in February-April 2001 (available on request).

The major information that they required is:

- 61% employment opportunities
- 42% access to land
- 32% housing
- 30% education opportunities

The general assessment was that most soldiers were literate and have a home to return to. Many have skills and pre-mobilization work experience as well as access to land. At the same time, very few own any assets other than land and livestock, and the incidence of disability and illness appears high. Social re-integration is expected to be fairly smooth. As for economic re-integration, the possibility of returning to pre-war jobs as well as farming is expected to ease the burden on program implementation.<sup>13</sup>

#### *4.3 Approach*

As soon as the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) liaison officers and military observers were in place and the deployment of the UNMEE peace keeping force had started, the GOE announced its readiness to prepare the demobilization and reintegration of a large part of its army. Willing to build on international experiences and best practices, it asked in December 2000 for international technical and financial assistance for the forthcoming Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DRP). The government's request came at a critical time, at the appropriate moment to grasp the opportunity that the potential peace dividend presents.

The DRP is expected to facilitate the reallocation of public resources from military expenditures to productive and social investments, and thereby to free up resources for development, while demonstrating the government's commitment to the peace process through the effective preparation and implementation of the DRP. The conceptualization and preparation of the DRP was done by a multi-donor assessment mission during a workshop held in Asmara between 15 January to 8 February 2001, together with representatives of the Eritrean line ministries and various national institutions. The Multi-Donor Assessment Mission was composed of 19 team members, among them four Eritreans. On the request of the GOE the World Bank acted as team leader, in close collaboration with UNDP. The mission received technical and financial support from the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, the Embassies of Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway, as well as from Consultant Trust Funds from Belgium and Switzerland (GOE, 2001). The objectives of the multi-donor assessment mission were to:

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<sup>13</sup> Socio-economic profile—a preliminary analysis made on 26 May 2001. Modular layouts of organizational charts of ZO's are reflected in Charts 1.2 & 1.3 in accordance with tentatively projected caseloads.

- provide technical assistance to GOE for preparing and implementing the demobilization and reintegration of Eritrean soldiers into civilian life
- prepare a DRP proposal with GOE to be submitted to Eritrea's development partners for financial and technical support

According to the draft of the DRP of 5 February 2001 the approach of the DRP is meant to be holistic:

Integrated assessment and planning will be required at regional level to ensure that the return, resettlement and reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returnees and demobilized soldiers is closely co-ordinated with the rehabilitation programs, mine clearance activities and the restoration of basic services (GOE, 2001).

In view of the fact that, up to now, there has been no national concept for an overall integrated rehabilitation program, the declared intention to conduct an integrated assessment and planning process will obviously not be possible. Many interventions that are currently in process at community level are similar if not identical in nature, and target the same geographic locations. It is important to note that many of the components of the economic reintegration package are the same as many of the kinds of assistance envisaged for reintegration of other war-affected groups. The reintegration exercise of 1993-1997 clearly demonstrated the importance of such an approach. Even if repatriation and demobilization involve different actors and have to follow distinct patterns, the situation changes afterwards, in the reintegration phase. Once the refugees have become returnees and the combatants have been demobilized, their needs are not so different any more and can often be addressed by one program under one authority.

However, the same excuse is given as in many similar cases of reintegration: time pressure is forcing implementers to follow a target group orientation and compartmentalization of support measures. What is needed here is to develop a national co-ordination plan that accommodates the different intervention of bilateral, multilateral and NGOs reintegration interventions.

4.4 *Outline of the DRP programs*

4.4.1 Development objective and program purpose

	<b>Intervention logic</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Verification</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
<b>Development objective</b>	Demobilized soldiers are re-integrated into their communities and the economy.	5 years after 200,000 DS (with adequate participation of women) are settled in family and community life and the majority are engaged in gainful economic activities.	Participatory monitoring and evaluation, client satisfaction surveys, tracer studies, interviews.	The Eritrean economy is regenerated and grows. Government frameworks and initiatives are in place. Peace is sustained.
<b>Purpose</b>	To create an enabling environment where DS have access to: counseling and rehabilitation services to facilitate re-entry to family and community life to the economic opportunities within the macro-economic framework and initiatives of the GOE.	DS access the counseling and rehabilitation services that are facilitated by the DRP. DS access the economic re-integration services facilitated by the DRP.	DRP database of DS accessing services. Monitoring and evaluation system reports.	Sufficient funding is received. Sufficient national capacity developed to implement the programs designed.

Contrary to the first demobilization and reintegration exercise, in the present context the majority of the demobilized soldiers will not be considered to be particularly disadvantaged. Therefore the DRP, especially in the regions of Gash-Barka and Debu, must co-ordinate closely with programs supporting the return and reintegration of other target groups and support to reintegration should be inclusive rather than exclusive. The return of demobilized soldiers to Gash-Barka and Debu will also depend on the progress of de-mining activities.

#### 4.4.2 Content

According to the First Draft of the Demobilization and Reintegration Program of 2 February 2001, in line with international best practice, and taking into account the previous Eritrean experience, the Eritrea-DRP would contain the following support measures. Demobilization and reinsertion includes:

- health screening and eventually medical treatment; pre-discharge orientation
- counseling in the communities of settlement
- sensitization of host communities
- provision of assistance in kind to cover basic needs of ex-soldiers' families (mainly food aid) for 6-12 months and/or payment of two installments of entitlement (1100 for regular soldiers and 400 for reserve soldiers)

The detailed interventions looks as follows:

#### 4.4.3 Social reintegration measures

Social reintegration measures consist of first line counseling offered as soon as the demobilized soldier arrives in his/her respective Sub-Zoba/Zoba. It will cover the local arrangements, i.e. the role of the local DRP offices and what they can offer. Peer group counseling for which Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MLHW) has developed a training program, will be significantly supported by the University of Asmara. To promote the social reintegration of ex-soldiers, the DRP in co-operation with MLHW and other relevant organizations will carry out activities aiming at strengthening community social capital, e.g. adult education, sports and cultural activities for all members of the community. Specialized counseling and referral services will be delivered in co-operation with governmental and non-governmental providers in the following areas:

- Technical and skills training linked to the needs of the labor market
- Employment opportunities within both the public and private sector, including public works
- Psychosocial and family counseling
- Counseling on HIV/AIDS and malaria prevention
- Counseling on the rehabilitation needs of the war-disabled
- Counseling on the specific needs of women ex-soldiers and female family members of ex-soldiers.

#### 4.4.4 Economic reintegration activities

Apart from the special counseling activities mentioned above, the ER-DRP will offer skills development and training programs linked to the promotion of employment and self-employment, micro-enterprise support schemes and rural development activities, on the ground of information provided by the labor market

and economic sector analysis. The programs will specify to all providers that at least 50 percent of the participants/clients should be demobilized soldiers. In the case of disabled demobilized soldiers, family members can have the same access as demobilized soldiers. By using integrative criteria for access to these support measures, the DRP is designed to be an integral part of the broader post-war economic recovery process and will promote community cohesion and economic recovery at the local level.

In the first draft of the DRP, it is observed that large-scale economic sectors are currently experiencing a serious lack of adequately trained workers and a small labor pool. Likewise, the micro and small sector (considered the fastest growing employment sector) is greatly under-skilled. Thus demobilized soldiers without the needed skills will have significant difficulty entering the shattered economy which has little absorptive capacity—particularly in the medium and large-scale formal sector. The reconstruction of the country and the regeneration (and growth) of the economy will require a training system that is market responsive and stimulates increased production and enterprise, particularly in the micro and small sector.

The main problems of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system are described as follows:

- the capacity to train at a scale required by the economy does not exist and will not be able to cope with the anticipated intake of demobilized soldiers. In addition, capacity has been substantially reduced as a result of the war
- there is a severe dearth of TVET instructors in all institutions with many instructors still mobilized in the military
- most staff have inadequate formal preparation for their teaching and insufficient contact with and experience in the industry/economic sector
- there is a severe lack of training equipment particularly concerning modern technology
- institutions are short of training consumables and are thus unable to provide effective practicals
- there are no text books available for technical subjects
- there is a need to update curriculum and regulations
- no capacity exists to train people specifically for the micro and small scale economic sector
- no national system of certification and assessment exists, which limits comparisons between different training sources and determination of the level of skills acquired and
- in general quality in the system is greatly in need of improvement.

It is clear that, unless capacity within the system is rapidly increased, it will not be able to provide for the immediate and substantial challenge faced by the Eritrean economy especially in the imminent period of reconstruction.

#### 4.4.5 Particular difficulties faced by women

Exactly as was experienced during the first demobilization and reintegration exercise, and in other cases as mentioned in sections 2 and 3, women face many more difficulties than men in trying to readjust after having laid down arms. This applies especially to female guerrilla fighters who participated in protracted struggles for national independence and social revolution. The current demobilization of women soldiers will create fewer difficulties. Nevertheless, in order to assure the smoothest reintegration possible of demobilized women soldiers, to help ease the problems widows and spouses of soldiers are facing, and to offer an opportunity to enhance gender equality in Eritrean society, the ER-DRP will address the gender issue with a threefold approach:

- Women will be fully integrated in all planned program components
- Accompanying measures will be instituted to encourage women's participation in all program components
- Special measures will be developed to respond to needs and constraints arising from women's special family and community responsibilities, with special consideration for particularly vulnerable women.

These measures will have special implications for the implementation structure of the ER-DRP: it has to be made sure that every department/service/agent will be gender aware and act accordingly. Therefore the DRP offices will have to be staffed with gender specialists responsible for:

- Developing and implementing special women's programs
- Training and assisting the other implementing bodies to be gender aware
- Helping and advising them in the development of appropriate accompanying measures.

*Table 13: Stages of the Eritrea Demobilization and Reintegration Program*

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
<b>Demobilization</b> <i>Civilian Identity</i>	<b>Reinsertion</b> <i>Package of Benefits</i>	<b>Reintegration</b> <i>Sustainable Livelihoods</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• disarmament</li> <li>• socio-economic profiling</li> <li>• data processing</li> <li>• health screening</li> <li>• HIV-aids counseling</li> <li>• information dissemination</li> <li>• pre-discharge orientation</li> <li>• civilian ID card issuance</li> <li>• discharge</li> <li>• transportation</li> <li>• arrival counseling</li> <li>• sensitization of communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• food</li> <li>• shelter</li> <li>• clothing</li> <li>• health</li> <li>• education</li> <li>• household effects</li> <li>• local transportation</li> <li>• cash payments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information, counseling, and referral</li> <li>• facilitation of access to land</li> <li>• facilitation of access to credit</li> <li>• apprenticeships/vocational training</li> <li>• formal education</li> <li>• employment support</li> <li>• micro-projects</li> <li>• support to special target groups</li> <li>• community services</li> </ul>

Source: GOE, 2001.

Before the outbreak of the ‘border war’ there was a loss of momentum and, perhaps, a reversal in the movement to fully integrate women into the mainstream. A significant number of women had undergone training, in sectors which traditionally were male domains. The mobilization of so many men has also meant that women had to take jobs that were previously held by men. This is a blessing in disguise and should be exploited as much as possible to break the gender bias. There is a need to keep up the momentum and exploit it to promote long-term gender equality.

At this stage of the ER-DRP, it is premature to discuss the envisaged effect or impact of the different measures aiming at social and economic reintegration, as they are still a work in progress. Nevertheless it seems useful to present some important characteristics of the main sectors or aspects of support activities, as well as examining existing bottlenecks.

#### 4.4.6 Bottlenecks

Given that adequate human resources and institutional capacity are major obstacles in all sectors, each component must include targeted capacity-building measures which are not meant to substitute for longer term capacity-building programs being undertaken by the GOE. To overcome the current bottleneck there is a need to

conduct on-going capacity-building to meet the country's demand. At the present stage the lack of funds is certainly the main bottleneck.

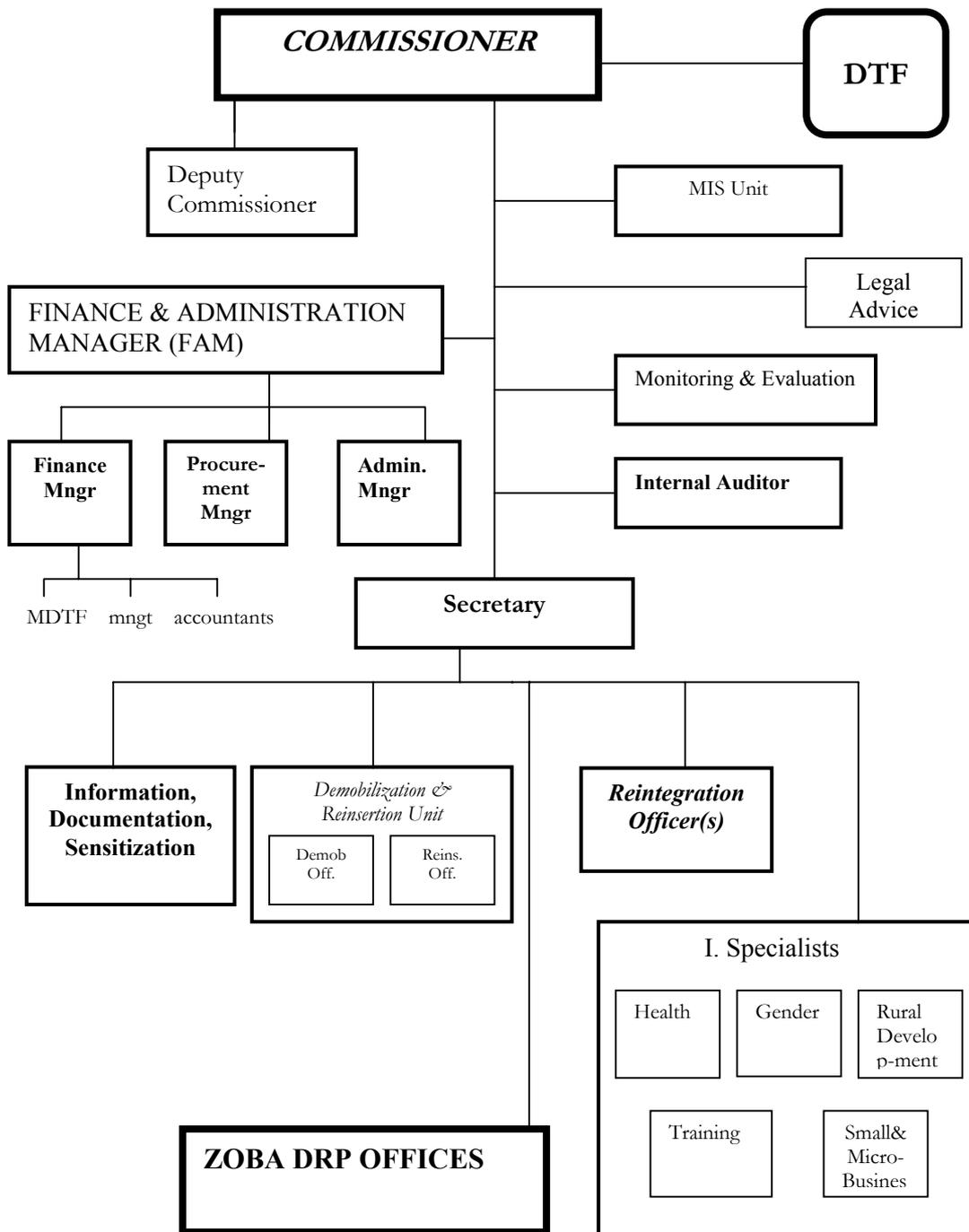
#### 4.4.7 Institutional Set-up

The institutional structure is meant to be lean, with highly qualified local staff, and will be supported, if required, by international technical assistance. Local implementing partners, such as ministerial departments and services, national and international NGOs and private enterprise will assist it.

**5. General organizational lay-out of the DRP**

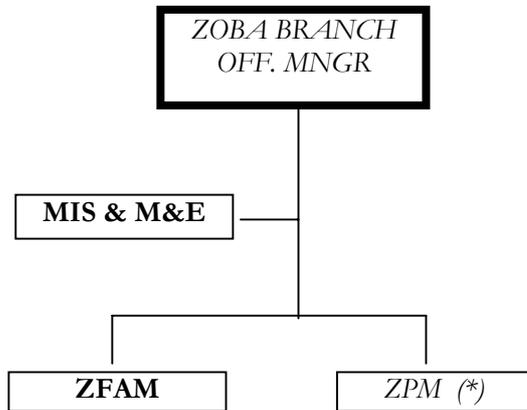
Organization's Diagram: Demobilization & Reintegration program (DRP): National Coordination Office

Chart 1.1



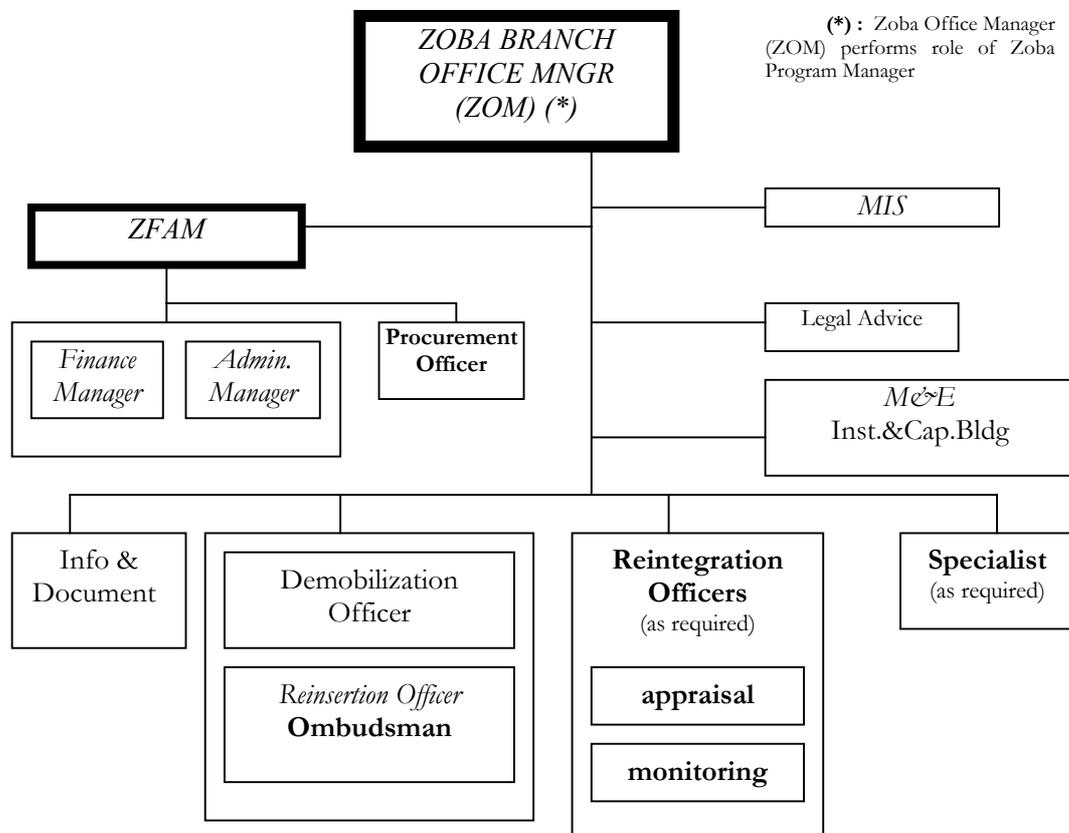
Organization's Diagram: Demobilization & Reintegration program (DRP): ZOBA  
DRP OFFICES

Chart 1.2 Basic Structure: (3 staff)



(\*): ZPM to be performed by Zoba Branch Office Manager

Chart 1.3 Large Scale Zoba DRP Office: (up to 25-30 staff)



The commission is officially established by proclamation and controls the National Commission (NCDRP) which consists of a National Committee and a secretariat. A commissioner, a Deputy Commissioner and a Secretary are nominated to manage the NCDRP. The Commissioner is chairman of the National Committee, which is in charge of policy and strategy. The National Committee, through the commissioner, reports to the President and liaises with the various Government institutions at national and *Zoba* levels. This approach is in direct conflict to the work in progress in the *Zobas*, for all the activities are coordinated by the local government. This approach will create a serious problem once implementation starts.

The Commissioner is in charge of the Secretariat and its operations and performances, while the Finance and Administration portfolio is being delegated to a professional FA-Manager. The Commissioner will be in charge of compliance with regular outside reporting requirements including planning and budgeting, of co-ordination with donors, UN and NGO partners as well as with the WB, and will fulfill the function of legal personae on behalf of the NCDRP. In order for the Commissioner to fulfill these responsibilities responsibly s/he will organize bi-weekly co-ordination meetings or more frequently if/when requested.

The Secretariat comprises a national co-ordination office (NCO) and will open various *Zoba* or/and sub-*Zoba* DRP branch offices (ZO's). The PM and the FAM operate from within the NCO. The ZO Managers report to the PM. The ZO Managers will keep the *Zoba* Officials briefed through the *Zoba's* Development Committees, and the DRP furthermore liaises with the *Zoba* Officials through the Commissioner, on behalf of the National Committee. The Commissioner will closely liaise with the Demobilization Task Force (DTF) created within the Ministry of Defense (MOD) to coordinate demobilization and reinsertion activities.

The *Zoba*/sub-*Zoba* offices (ZO) comprise the FAM department, while the MIS-M&E unit and the ZO Manager directly manages the Program Management Department. The configuration of each ZO will be modulated in function of the needs and caseloads in their areas of intervention, but as the DRP is not an implementing agency, instead sub-contracting its activities out to local or national "implementing partners", the ZO staffing will remain very streamlined. The number of ZO's will remain small, and should not exceed 10 (ten).<sup>i</sup> The structure and staff of the ZO's may in time change in accordance with fluctuating needs.

### *5.1 Liaison with the Demobilization Task Force (DTF)*

The Demobilization Task Force (DTF) within the Ministry of Defense (MOD) is in charge of the discharge/demobilization of the soldiers in a series of batches over a period of 18 to 24 months. The discharge will be organized on the basis of three main criteria:

- soldiers needed for national security purposes will be released last, and those inessential for the military operations first (disabled, vulnerable)

- soldiers who are essential or important to revitalize the countries' economy, in the government, the non-governmental or the private sector, will be given highest priority in the discharge agenda and
- soldiers who wish, for personal reasons, to be released will be given priority in the discharge agenda.

Prior to, and during the discharge/demobilization process, the DRP—in collaboration with the DTF—organizes a general survey, which will be conducted on a continuous basis. This comprises data on soldiers' personal and family situation and previous status in society, but also about their intentions where to relocate and what to do after demobilization. These data are an important source of information for the DRP's development, and will also serve its monitoring purposes. The data will be processed in the Secretariat's MIS.

The DTF will be in charge of organizing the discharge of the soldiers-to-be-demobilized. The discharge activities comprise “military obligations” and “civilian obligations”. The DTF will officially discharge soldiers in discharge centers located in the premises of the Ministry of Defense. After discharge the DS will be transferred to demobilization centers outside military installations where “civilian obligations” will be managed by the DRP.

### *5.2 The role and function of the National Committee and the Commissioner*

The National Committee (NC) is in charge of DRP policymaking and co-ordination, and of auditing the performance of the Secretariat. This OM provides ample instruments for the NC to perform the following duties and responsibilities:

- The regular and irregular NC-meetings—held at least once each quarter as per Proclamation
- The regular Secretariat's progress and performance reporting
- The annual investment strategy and planning exercises
- The internal audit reporting
- Three external audit being conducted regularly: two of which are mandatory by credit agreement—the financial and the management audits—and the technical audit being discretionary
- The revision of procedures in the OM and finally
- The annual or bi-annual performance reviews.

### *5.3 Resources and capacities*

Up to now no calculations have been made concerning the total cost of the ER-DRP. According to information contained in the First Draft of the ER-DRP of February 2, 2001 concerning the TSN for demobilized soldiers for their reinsertion, an amount of US\$ 200 million is proposed for the institutional set-up of the reintegration component.

5.4 *Assessment of the current demobilization plan*

The draft demobilization and reintegration program that was designed by 19 national and international consultants between January 15 and 8 February tried to address the shortcoming of the first demobilization and reintegration exercise undertaken in Eritrea. How this program will fare when it is put into practice remains, however, to be seen. Despite all its good intentions, it has one major flaw: it attempts neither to provide a comprehensive concept nor an integrated strategy for the overall post-war recovery process in Eritrea, because its ongoing programs and projects are target-group and/or sector oriented. The government of Eritrea did not come up with an integrated strategy through which different organizations and donors can come together effectively behind a Government-led recovery vision for the transition period. The first demobilization and reintegration support program suffered from the same un-integrated approach. It is argued that programs or projects will be coordinated at field level, but in my view, it is doubtful whether coordination of the lower limbs is possible without coordination at the head.

The Eritrean Government attempted to modify conventional demobilization and reintegration programs in accord with its preference for the principles of cooperation and partnership in order to ensure that the war-born sense of self sufficiency and independence will not be lost amidst bureaucracy and aid conditionalities. In 1993, the Government of Eritrea established a national execution plan through which the integration program of returnees and related development projects were to be implemented. This was to involve the line ministries rather than UNHCR or NGOs. The emphasis was on capitalizing on the experiences gained during the long armed struggle in identifying issues and carrying out development programs. But in the current demobilization and reintegration program, it is indicated that the implementation of projects or programs will be on the basis of comparative advantage. This is a positive trend, which gives space for NGOs to play a role in the recovery program.

The Government of Eritrea decided in 1994 that a bilateral approach in its relations with donors should replace the existing multilateral framework. This bilateralism entailed the Government negotiating with the individual donors and signing bilateral agreements with each one regarding their involvement in development processes of the country (ERRA, 1995). But each donor agency has its own, often sectoral, approach. Unless a comprehensive strategy for recovery that conceptualizes reintegration in the overall development program is worked out, then, the outcome will be piecemeal and implementation ad hoc.

It has been argued that re-integration can be only successful if it is planned and implemented within the broader context of rehabilitation, which in turn is seen as part of a long-term development concept. It seems that the Eritrean Government was well aware of the importance of the issue and the place of re-integration within the overall rehabilitation concept, given that it declared the reintegration of returnees as priority number one. It was also aware of the necessity to link

repatriation or demobilization closely to re-integration, and to consider it as a complementary exercise. Nevertheless, a comprehensive national framework, in which all sectoral strategies could unfold, was missing, and implementation was more or less ad hoc. This lack was aggravated by the absence of mechanisms to link the interventions of aid agencies—themselves conditioned by the rules of funding agencies—to the national strategy and institutions.

Given the complexity of rehabilitation in post-conflict situations, it is also important to rethink through whom rehabilitation aid is channeled. NGOs, for instance, have been relatively successful in rehabilitation initiatives in the aftermath of natural disasters such as droughts. But the focus of rehabilitation initiatives has often been on specific operations that have lacked the kind of coherent, integrated framework needed for realistic, sustainable, macroeconomic and household livelihood rehabilitation. More than anything else successful development requires development of an integrated strategic framework that “identifies priority areas, allocates appropriate resources for them, and relates interventions to the achievement of the twin objectives of peace and development” (Kumar, 1997, p. 34). Part of the problem is:

The absence of mechanisms to link donors with a national policy framework, combined with the high degree of donor dependence on NGOs for project design and implementation [which] tends to reinforce the inclination of rehabilitation programs to adopt the highly decentralized, un-integrated approach of relief rather than those of development (Macrae, J. 1997; p. 197).

The international actors (NGOs and donor agencies) are not going to provide a solution to the entire problem Eritrea is facing. They can provide small additional resources, but in doing so, will impose their political conditions. In order to decide what works and what does not, then, there is a need for an overall strategy of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration. A policy framework should be worked out that charts:

- a description of the target group and its features
- the integration strategy
- time framework
- the elements of the program
- institutional responsibilities and budget

Thus the government will be able to maneuver even if what is being offered by donors is a short-term and piecemeal approach. An overall framework is essential for the following reasons:

- to provide a basis for deciding what fits and what does not either in the long or short run, and to act accordingly
- to accept conditions when necessary and when it is important to the overall strategy.

It must be remembered that the short-term nature of donor funding of rehabilitation programs does not easily lead to achieving sustainable rehabilitation efforts that are directed toward sustainable peace and development. Because of a lack of long-term resource commitments by the international community, many rehabilitation programs are little more than crisis management interventions. They are neither conceived nor implemented as sustainable programs.

## **6. Conclusion**

The cessation of hostilities, or at least the ebbing of widespread-armed conflict, provides an opportunity for war-torn peoples and countries to rebuild their societies, economies, and polities, and to start reforms and restructuring. This is currently the case in Eritrea. At least three main reasons can be given why the integration of ex-combatants is—in the 2000s as much as it was in the early 1990s—an important factor for the country's stability and progress. In the first place, in many cases combatants' social ties with their families or places of origin have been dislodged, while their diverse experiences have made it difficult for them to settle into the sort of 'normal' life they might otherwise have led. Secondly, since they form a sizeable group, Eritrea's political stability and development depends to a large extent on the successful integration of this group. Thirdly, their experiences during the struggle have often given them skills, abilities and insights that can be used in the process of development. On the positive side, then, they might be assets to the young nation if their experience is properly harnessed. On the negative side, however, they can become a destabilizing factor if a large number of them fail to reintegrate into civilian life.

The demobilization and reintegration of ex-fighters represents a great challenge. Since it constitutes an integral part of the overall transformation of Eritrea from a war-torn to a reconstructed country, both the opportunities and the constraints that exist in the country in the present-day are shaping this process. Of particular significance is the fact that the Eritrean Government has the political will and vision to reintegrate ex-fighters within the wider context of rehabilitation, but lacks a comprehensive strategy for reconstruction rehabilitation and reintegration.

Given the complexity of rehabilitation in post-conflict situations, it is also important to rethink through whom rehabilitation aid is channeled. NGOs, for instance, have been relatively successful in instituting rehabilitation initiatives in the aftermath of natural disasters such as droughts. But the focus of rehabilitation initiatives has often been on specific operations, and they have lacked the kind of coherent, integrated framework needed for realistic and sustainable macroeconomic and household livelihood rehabilitation. More than anything else, successful development requires the development of an integrated strategic framework that identifies priority areas, allocates appropriate resources for them, and relates interventions to the achievement of the twin objectives of peace and development.

We cannot expect the donor community to come up with an integrated strategy for the transition process which is currently unfolding in Eritrea. It is the sole responsibility of the government of Eritrea to do this work, and to establish a coherent program through which different organizations and donors can play a constructive role in the rehabilitation of the country.

For effective economic reconstruction to take place in a post-conflict situation, the primary task is to understand the costs of the war and to establish priorities for economic recovery. At the macro level, such priorities should include establishing macroeconomic stability and promoting economic reform in order to reverse the extreme macroeconomic disequilibria that characterize highly distorted war economies. These arise partly from flawed pre-war economic policies pursued by governments and aid agencies, but are compounded by economic policies during the war. Achieving macroeconomic stability is essential for the transition from a highly distorted, survival-oriented war economy to a more household-friendly market and livelihood-oriented economy, and for providing the basis for sustainable economic recovery and growth. However, models of economic reform in peacetime may be inappropriate and even counter-productive in post-conflict reconstruction unless macroeconomic policies encourage peace building and political rehabilitation. At the micro level, this means providing support to households to rebuild their livelihood systems—and specifically, paying greater attention to the new role of women in the aftermath of war.

### *6.1 Lessons learned*

1. In the second demobilization and reintegration process, social reintegration is considered as important as economic integration, which was the main field of intervention in the first demobilization and reintegration program.
2. The institution in charge of Reintegration II has a clear-cut structure and a clearly defined responsibility: it is a coordinating /supervising structure which does not intervene in practical implementation, whereas *Mitias* was at the same time working in implementation, facilitation, lobbying and co-ordination.
3. Gender aspects were neglected during the first phase of *Mitias*. It was only at a later stage that a gender unit was added (although it was disbanded after the merger with CERA). In the present demobilization and reintegration program, gender aspects have been taken on board starting from the beginning of demobilization.
4. The training component of the present program will be developed according to the needs of the labor market. This was not the case during the first exercise, due to a total lack of information about these needs. Furthermore, qualifications that have been acquired through informal skill training will be recognized.

5. Government institutions will not have the monopoly of implementation; instead, NGOs and the private sector will contribute to recovery according to the comparative advantages they bring.
6. The first demobilization and reintegration exercise was based on the result of an extensive survey carried out before the start of the activity. A similar exercise is under way so that the various components of the DRP can be designed according to the actual profiles of the soldiers to be demobilized.

#### 6.2 *Lessons not learned or not used*

1. As in the first demobilization exercise, up to now there is no comprehensive national framework for overall recovery, which remains to be worked out by the government.
2. An integrated approach comprising Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (the so-called RRR or triple R approach) which addresses all categories of war affected people, is lacking.
3. Development of this integrated approach would help avoid the inappropriate institutional set-up of specific target groups. In the reintegration field particularly, a number of different organizations have designed community-level interventions aimed at specific target groups such as ex-refugees, internally displaced people, deportees or ex-fighters. Many of these interventions are similar if not identical in nature and target the same geographic locations. It was this problem that forced the merger of ERRA and CERA. If repatriation and demobilization involve different actors and have to follow distinct patterns, the situation changes afterwards, in the reintegration phase. Once the refugees have become returnees and the combatants have been demobilized, their needs are not so different any more and can often be addressed by one program under one authority. Comprehensive efforts must be made to ensure that programs are not duplicating themselves to address each different group.
4. External technical assistance is still mandate driven, target group oriented and given in a piece-meal way which is hampering the establishment of the above-mentioned national framework.
5. Whereas both demobilization and reintegration support programs emphasize the importance of self-help and community support, in reality, the participation of beneficiaries and local communities in designing programs was, and still is, non-existent. This applies especially to the vital issue of land use, but also to other important questions like participation in planning and implementing local projects. The support measures offered have also done little to build on the personal coping strategies of the people.
6. The weakness of *Mitias* in monitoring and evaluation, which was emphasized by the downscaling of the program after the merger, has resulted in rare and scattered appraisals of the various components of the programs. This, in turn, is

preventing the present program from fully using the lessons from the first program.

### *6.3 Recommendations*

1. There is a need to create a new institution that can address the reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration of the entire vulnerable group under one authority.
2. Special attention should be paid to the psychosocial needs of the different categories of demobilized soldiers (veterans, national service, women, etc.).
3. The participation of beneficiaries and local communities in the designing of concrete projects (economic as well as social and political), should be encouraged.
4. The special needs of women soldiers should not only be addressed by specific support measures, but should be mainstreamed in the overall recovery program, and women's leadership must be promoted.
5. In order to be able to take informally acquired skills into due consideration, a methodological framework for their appraisal will have to be worked out before the different training curricula are devised.
6. In order to prevent outside assistance from undermining or even killing Eritrea's own capacities, it is necessary to redefine the principles of a national policy aiming at self-reliance as well as the sectors and the space where external assistance would be needed.
7. The most important and urgent task is to work out a comprehensive national framework with an integrated approach, which would then provide the basis for an appropriate institutional set-up encompassing all categories of support measures from relief to development.
8. ERREC must be left to work only on emergency related programs or projects—for which it has the necessary competence and experience of rehabilitation and reintegration for more than 25 years. Programs or projects should be handed over to institutions that deal with reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration.

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