Burundi: Who benefits from Burundi’s Demobilization Program?

Researchers from Université libre de Bruxelles and Oxford University have studied the impact of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program in Burundi. Their study underlines the positive but limited impact on the welfare of Burundese citizens, and as a result, a risk to take up arms again. A major risk in a country currently in a very fragile situation.

The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program in Burundi has demobilized and reintegrated 30,000 former combatants between 2005 and 2010. This program is a standard ingredient of donor aid to countries in transition from war to peace, and has been applied in many (post-) conflict countries. The package consists of a series of services and financial aid given to former combatants, allowing them to reintegrate into civilian society. Burundese combatants were granted two allowances worth approximately 550$ each, one in cash and one in kind. Each allowance was approximately equivalent to the annual earnings of one farm household, hence a considerable amount.

Until now there was no quantitative, robust evaluation performed of the impact of such program on host communities.

Researchers from Université libre de Bruxelles – Philip Verwimp, Olivia D’Aoust, Faculté Solvay Brussels Schhol of Economics and Management – and Oxford University have studied this impact, following-up households.

They have observed three main results:

(i) the direct beneficiaries of a DDR program see their welfare increase;
(ii) the local economy (village) benefits indirectly from the return of the beneficiaries;
(iii) the welfare-increasing effect disappears over time. Right after the reception of the DDR grants, the beneficiaries and other villagers saw their welfare increase in terms of higher consumption, house building and renovation and economic activities. However, a few years down the line, this boom proofs to be short-lived.

“The positive spillovers do increase the range of impact of DDR programs. This is likely to ease the return of ex-combatants in their villages. But the short-lived welfare boom is not enough to prevent ex-combatants to take up arms again. In the 2010 elections, there was evidence that ex-combatants were engaged in electoral violence in the form of threats, intimidation, beatings, robbery and murder. This is
a group that has a comparative advantage in participating in violence. A return to precarious situation may have encouraged ex-combatants to take up arms again. Since the presidential campaign for reelection in spring 2015 until today, the situation has considerably worsened. Burundi is currently in a very fragile situation. Hence, the DDR packages should be given additional support, particularly over the longer term such that it helps ex-combatants to make the most of the program and creates a virtuous cycle in which savings and investments in productive assets enable households to smooth consumption”, explains Philip Verwimp, professor of development economics at Université libre de Bruxelles and co-author of the study.

“Who benefits from Burundi’s Demobilization Program”
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