

Socioeconomic Rehabilitation of Verified Minors and Late Recruits



Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLRs) participating in a formal discharge ceremony in early 2010

The past two years have seen remarkable changes in the lives of Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLRs), following their discharge from the Maoist cantonments in 2010. Many of the VMLRs have started to make a positive impact on the community through skills training, education, employment and enterprise schemes. They return to their communities with renewed energy and enthusiasm with the hope of reintegrating into civilian life. For them to do so, however, requires the community to play a significant role in creating a conducive environment for the return of ex-combatants. The way forward is in the hands of the VMLRs and their communities which will ultimately play a part in the peace process of Nepal.

Background and Context

Following the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Seven Party Alliance and CPN-Maoists on 21 November 2006, significant efforts have been made to rehabilitate former combatants of the “peoples’ war.” The CPA was followed by the Agreement on Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies (AMMAA), which outlined ways for monitoring arms and armed personnel. This Agreement was signed by the respective parties and witnessed by the

Special Representative of the UN Secretary General. AMMAA stipulated that weapons were to be handed in and stored and that combatants to stay in cantonments. Under the guidance of the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), UNDP and UNICEF conducted the registration and verification of Maoist army personnel in seven main and 21 satellite cantonment sites. This verification process resulted in the identification of 19,602 combatants as members of the PLA and 4,008 combatants as Minors (born after 25 May 1988) or Late Recruits (recruited after 25 May 2006 ceasefire), known as VMLRs.

In accordance with the AMMAA, VMLRs were not eligible for inclusion in the Maoist army and were not to be permitted to remain in the cantonments. Under the leadership of UNMIN, the UNCT worked in close collaboration with the Government of Nepal (GoN) to develop a framework to provide assistance for the smooth rehabilitation of the VMLRs back into civilian life. The support work was guided by recognized international standards and best practices, consistent with needs and rights-based humanitarian approaches. Due consideration was given to the local context of Nepal. The actual programme in developing the discharge and rehabilitation process has been a collaborative effort between UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO and GoN.

On 16 December 2009, a UN Security Council mandated “Action Plan Between the Unified Communist Party of Nepal - Maoists, the Government of Nepal and the United Nations regarding the issue of Discharge and Rehabilitation of Maoist Army Personnel verified as Minors” signed by GoN, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (UCPN-M) and the UN. The Action Plan laid out the overall framework for the discharge process and stipulated that rehabilitation opportunities would be available to all VMLRs. The discharge process as detailed in the Action Plan was implemented successfully through a UN integrated operation, and was completed on 8 February 2010. 60% of the 4,008 VMLRs (those found present in the cantonment) were discharged over a 33 day period. The remaining 40% of the VMLRs (absent during the discharge ceremonies) were officially discharged in



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a declaration by the UCPN-M in March 2010. The successful discharge and rehabilitation of the 4,008 VMRLs has been considered a strategically crucial step in ensuring long lasting peace in Nepal.

Evolution of UNIRP

The discharge of VMRLs from cantonments is both an example of a successful collaborative UN effort, and also a milestone in the peace process. Building on this success and tapping into the institutional strengths of relevant UN agencies, the United Nations Interagency Rehabilitation Programme (UNIRP), a joint initiative between UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and ILO was set up to ease the successful transition of VMRLs into civilian life. UNIRP launched in June 2010 and is scheduled to be completed in 2013, operating with a total budget of USD 11.4 million. The programme is funded by the UN Peace Fund for Nepal (a multi-donor trust fund supported by the governments of Canada, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom).

Rehabilitation Options

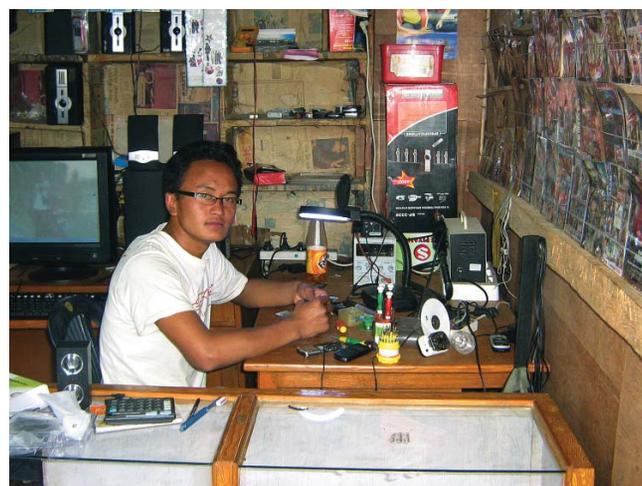
UNIRP currently offers four rehabilitation options to VMRLs, including Vocational Skills Training, Microenterprise Development Training, Educational Support, and Health related Training and Education. These options also include post-training support to try to link the graduates to real employment opportunities or self-employment. The programme is being implemented through five regional offices spread across Nepal's four development regions, with the central office situated in Kathmandu.

Progress Update

As of July 2011, 68% of the 4,008 VMRLs have accessed the programme, 60% have received detailed counselling and 54% have actually enrolled in the programme. Out of the total participants enrolled, 66% have completed training while 25% are currently in training or education programmes. 56% of those graduating from the programme have been offered employment or have started their own business. The programme is working closely with the business community, the private sector and I/NGOs to support sustainable employment or self-employment of participants after graduation, to foster reconciliation and to facilitate their social and economic reintegration into the community.

Elements of Community Reintegration and Cross-cutting Support

With a significant number of women VMRLs (30% of the 4,008 VMRLs), in accordance with the provisions in UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979), the programme has timely responded to the gender specific needs of the participants, particularly women and girls. During the training and education programmes, every effort is made to ensure that gender related issues do not prevent women from participating in the programme. Amongst others, UNIRP is providing nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating mothers; childcare facilities; special baby food and childcare grants for children under-5; maternity/paternity support, and special allowances to



A graduate of Micro-enterprise Development option working in his Mobile Repairing shop

girls/women who are studying away from their home.

Under the education option, community schools are supported by the UNIRP which benefits the community children as a whole. The programme also sponsors one vulnerable child from the community for every two VMRL participants enrolled in schools.

UNIRP worked closely with training service providers and training institutes at the local level for the benefit of wider communities. Through this initiative, capacity building, training and orientation programmes were conducted by UNIRP at regional levels, which will ultimately aid the social reintegration of the ex-combatants. Capacity development of local service providers and the business community have also contributed to the social and economic rehabilitation of the ex-combatants.

Psychosocial counselling and support has been provided throughout the rehabilitation support to assist VMRLs in overcoming stress often associated with stigmatization experienced by ex-combatants attempting to reintegrate into their communities. Special considerations are made in light of the unique socio-cultural issues in Nepal which also includes a referral system for long-term and clinical support.

The programme has been actively engaged with communities by conducting peacebuilding activities. These activities facilitate interaction and joint initiatives between participants and local community youths as a way to build trust and restore social cohesiveness.

The programme has adopted a rigorous innovative approach to monitoring. It has designed monitoring tools particular to each training option that assesses the needs over the entire period. The information collected then feeds into an online information management system which can generate reports based on specific requirements.

Public Information

Public information and sensitization has remained a challenge due to the politically sensitive nature of the rehabilitation programme. Despite the limitations, a public information and communication strategy has been developed and is being implemented to raise awareness and gain community support. More importantly, the programme managed to reach 88% of VMRLs who are in Nepal.