



Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program

# Moving to Catch Up: Mobility & Migration of Ex-Combatants in Uganda

## EX-COMBATANT MIGRATION FACTORS AND LINKS BETWEEN MIGRATION AND DDR PROGRAMMING

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### Abstract

In Uganda, an estimated 1 in 5 ex-combatants has migrated from his community of origin since returning to civilian life. The DDR strategy deployed in Uganda did not account for migration of ex-combatants, nor did it look at possible impacts on migration. This missed opportunity was at times an impediment to the long-term success of the DDR effort. While many Ugandans migrate due to economic, land and marital factors, migration of ex-combatants appears to also be driven by factors unique to their ex-combatant status and directly linked to their association and time spent with rebel groups.

The study targeted areas of divergence between ex-combatant and non-combatant migration and found ex-combatants experienced realities unique from other Ugandans, including:

- Stigma or fear due to former and present affiliation with rebel groups
- Extended rebellion-driven absence from communities of origin
- Combination of stigma and absence compounding economic and land challenges
- Diminished opportunities due to interrupted life trajectories
- DDR programs and services
- Ex-combatant networks, and
- Changing societal attitudes toward acceptance and reconciliation.

The study also identified significant push and pull factors for ex-combatant migration:

- **Push Factors:** stigma, economic hardship, land issues due to stigma/absence, violence and threats, loss of property and family, fear of re-abduction, and feeling of being watched by the government
- **Pull Factors:** economic opportunities, social networks, lack of stigma/anonymity, proximity to Amnesty Commission, marriage, proximity to origin, security.

DDR in Uganda missed opportunities through the lack of a viable nationwide mechanism for tracking ex-combatants and the failure to account for migration in program design for all ex-combatants, but especially women who were found to be more susceptible due to increased stigma. Some DDR practices were found to have encouraged unnecessary migration, impeded reintegration, and/or exacerbated challenges for the ex-combatants.

To address this problem it is recommended that DDR programs:

1. Rethink the frequently employed assumption that all ex-combatants must necessarily return to their community of origin
2. Incorporate a migration strategy into the DDR country plan, and
3. Support ex-combatants who desire to stay in or return to their communities of origin.

