

Field Visit Report



Nepal Peace Trust Fund Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation

Singha Durbaar, Kathmandu
Nepal

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Date	Activity	Programme/Project title:	Districts/VDCs visited	Participants
22 November	Monitoring of verification and regrouping process of Maoist Army Combatants	Institutional Support to the Secretariat	Nawalparasi/Rakahuli	Monitoring Team
22 & 23 November	Monitoring of verification and regrouping process of Maoist Army Combatants	Institutional Support to the Secretariat	Chitwan/Shaktikhor	Monitoring Team

1. Purpose of the visit:

1. Representatives from NPTF, EU, and GIZ paid a joint visit to two PLA main cantonments to monitor the implementation of the mandate of the Secretariat to the Special Committee in verifying and regrouping the Maoist Army Combatants.
2. The visits took place on the 22nd and 23rd of November 2011. The team visited the Division 4 in the Nawalparasi cantonment and Division 3 in the Chitwan cantonment.
3. During the visit the team met with the Coordinator (*Retired General Balandana SHARMA*) and members of the Secretariat of the Special Committee (SSC), and with the Maoist Army Commander of Division 3.

2. Mission Findings

Activity: Visit to main cantonment of Division 4 (*Nawalparasi*) and meeting with Sanandan Prashad Kurmi (*member of the Secretariat of the Special Committee*)

Mission findings:

Sadanand Prashad KURMI, member of the Secretariat of the Special Committee briefed the monitoring team about the surveying process in Division 4. The presentation seemed improvised and prescriptive the recommendations given for the visit were somehow too prescriptive.

The process started on Saturday, 19th of November, with 723 (*out of around 3,000*) Maoist Army Combatants registered as of 21st of November. It is expected that more than 800 Maoist Army Combatants will be verified by the end of the 22nd of November 2011. The process in Division 3 encountered technical problems at the beginning, such as slow internet connection and provision of the ID cards. When asked about the compliance with the deadline of the 28th of November, KURMI reckoned that they would probably need an extra two days.

In support to the process, the total eighteen surveyors (*women: 56%*) and twelve computer operators (*women: 42%*) are divided in different tents according to the activities carried out. The team could not visit the tents in this Division, as team was asked not to intervene in the regrouping process.

Arrival: The Maoist Army Combatants arrive by bus to the main cantonment where they stay until they finish the process after not more than 4 to 5 hours. Upon arrival, the Maoist Army Combatants are briefed on the different steps of the whole procedure and receive a form to fill in for their individual identification.

Identification: The first step is to verify the identity of the Maoist Army Combatants. The baseline information for this verification is the UNMIN record in English, closed in 2007. At that time Maoist Army Combatants were given a barcode, which is now used to identify them. If this barcode is lost other measures can be used to verify the individual. All this information is updated simultaneously in a data base centralised in Kathmandu.

The monitoring team realized that children and babies are not registered; there is no indication about their number.

Regrouping: the second step is for the Maoist Army Combatants to choose between integration, voluntary retirement or rehabilitation. Groups of around fifteen Maoist Army Combatants receive information on the three options. If further explanations are necessary the Maoist Army Combatants can ask on an individual basis. In addition, two telephones are made available to contact persons (*superiors/family/friends*), who can support the individual in his/her decision.

No exceptional support, counselling or information is provided to groups with special needs, such as the women and dependants or such as the disabled.

KURMI explained in detail the modalities for integration and mentioned that the existing recruitment policy on age, on educational requirements, and on marital status is flexible, but stressed that international norms cannot be ignored completely. He further elaborated that the rehabilitation package consists of sixty options for courses, starting from one year and up to three years. Voluntary retirement is based on the ranks of the Maoist Army Combatants.

At this early stage, collected data already reveal that a higher number of Maoist Army Combatants than fixed earlier opted to join the army, whilst a lower number of them are expected to choose any of the rehabilitation packages.

The monitoring team was under the impression that the overall procedure would not give enough reasonable time for the Maoist Army Combatants to make up their mind. When this remark was referred to the surveyor, he mentioned that the Maoist Army Combatants were aware of the options for quite some time and already knew which one they would go for.

Activity: Visit to main cantonment of Division 3 (*Chitwan*) and meeting with Retired General Balananda SHARMA (*Coordinator of the Secretariat of the Special Committee*) and the Commander (Rajesh) of Division 3

During the visits to Division 3, Balananda SHARMA, Coordinator of the Secretariat of the Special Committee briefed the team about the surveying process (see annex 1) and opened the discussion between the monitoring team and the Division 3 Commander Dhan Bahadur Maskey. As an illustration to the description, the team was given the opportunity to visit the different tents in which the process was taking place, unlike in the Division 4 cantonment.

The regrouping and verification process in Division 3 started on Friday, 18th of November, and until 22nd of November 1,195 (*women: 20%*) out of around 4,000 PLA Maoist Combatants were registered. In all seven Divisions 5,217 (*women: 20%*) out of around 19,500 were registered as of the 22nd of November. SHARMA reported the very same technical hitches as in the Division 3. However, he expected that the entire process in Division 3 would be over on time.

He further clarified that the GoN did not decide which data should show on the ID cards because in some cases there were irregularities/discrepancies with the UNMIN verified data

on the name, on the date of birth, on the date of enrolment in the PLA, and on the rank. Pending the final decision the issuance of ID cards is temporarily kept on hold.

SHARMA informed that 80-90 % of ex-combatants had already made up their minds prior to the start of the regrouping process. They were well informed of the options available to them through the radio/press. Special counselling sessions were given to those who were still undecided (however, it seems that no general briefing was given to the ex-combatants on the options available to them at the start of the process). Sharma added that the MoPR will launch a special package for the disabled, and for the pregnant women, and women with children.

The majority of those surveyed so far in this cantonment are asking for integration. At this stage some data is being taken that may be used to decide whether they meet the norms. However, no screening is taking place.

Those who are not opting for integration are asking for voluntary retirement (cash payments). This is the likely choice of those who are not accepted for integration (they will be resurveyed if they are not integrated).

In terms of support for voluntary retirement, the divisional commander was clear that this needed to come from the GoN. He was grateful for everything donors had done to-date, mentioning GIZ specifically, but it was now time for the GoN to pay their dues.

Rajesh, Commander of Division 3, answered to the questions asked by the monitoring team. He explained that there is no back out to the regrouping; this is the best alternative put forward to complete the peace process in the present context. For him, the seven point agreement is a right step forward in spite of a couple of uncertainties, such as rank determination for the integration for which a solution is needed.

He assumes that Maoist Army Combatants opting for voluntary retirement will pay back loans, buy land, open a small business, or go for (*short term*) training.

When asked about donor support, the divisional commander suggested that we should support community rehabilitation - i.e. building schools, health posts, roads etc in those communities to where ex-combatants would return. He was keen that the communities should also benefit from the process and therefore be more accepting of returnees.

He said no plans had been made so far to start cooperatives using the money the combatants on Voluntary Retirement receive, though individuals can always form groups and start cooperatives.

When asked about the low number of Maoist Army Combatants candidates for rehabilitation, Commander Rajesh gave his straight forward opinion on why there is no interest in the rehabilitation package:

- Ideologically, because the concept of ' *rehabilitation* ' is based on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (*DDR*) standards; in the Party's opinion *DDR* does not apply to Nepal where the conflict had no ethnic roots.—*as in Africa he added*. The Maoist Army Combatants actually fought for the communities, not against them
- Time wise: because the proposed modalities for rehabilitation imply that Maoist Army Combatants are again not fully on their own, as they need to attend classes for at least one year. This means they would lose their freedom, and therefore they would rather prefer to be free from further restrictions.

- Potential candidates are also sceptical about the success of the rehabilitation due to the ill-implemented antecedent with the VMLR
- A few are considering rehabilitation but the main disincentive for taking this option is a lack of trust in the GoN to deliver. The argument was that if the UN had failed to deliver to the verified minors and late recruits, why should the GoN be trusted to do any better?

and finally

- The rehabilitation packages offer no guarantee for a job or for a successful business after the completion of the training.

Commander Rajesh did not seem to be aware about the next steps after the regrouping ; he suggested however completing the peace process as soon as possible.

The Division Commander was keen to stress that the process was a Nepal-specific one of integration, not recruitment. Whatever NA planned in terms of screening and selection it had to respect that fact. The process also had to respect the experience and training of former combatants. Any suggestion that the process would be like standard recruitment rather than integration-tailored training would lead to problems. Bala Nanda Sharma said that NA had already identified locations for selection (but that these were not being disclosed for now), and had plans for a bridging course and timelines for the process. He said that NA was waiting for a steer from the politicians.

CONCLUSIONS

- From the observations on site as well as from the information received, the staff of the Secretariat of the Special Committee successfully fulfils its mandate
- The low success to date of the rehabilitation packages should probably be put down to their contents and requirements after being confined for five years in cantonments rather than to the presentation ('marketing') by the Secretariat of the Special Committee
- The activities and achievements of the Secretariat of the Special Committee are widely and regularly spread and elaborated in the press *—although the presentation of some reports is debatable*

RECOMMENDATIONS

- to have the ID cards distributed once the issue of the data to show is sorted out
- to monitor daily the pace of the registrations in order to stick as close as possible to the deadline of the 28th of November ; alternatively to take the necessary remedies to complete the tasks of registration and regrouping
- to envisage the modalities for the monitoring of the full processes of the three options
- to submit the final report of activities

Survey Process Annex 1



