

The Impact of Employment on High-Risk Men in Liberia



Without special attention to creating economic opportunities for ex-combatants, they may be more likely to join rebellious groups, commit crime, and otherwise threaten political stability. In Liberia, researchers tested the effect of an intensive agricultural training program on employment activities, income, and socio-political integration. The program increased participants' employment in agriculture and average wealth and decreased the amount of time they spent in illicit activities.

Policy Issue

In post-conflict societies, the challenge of reintegrating ex-combatants and war-affected youth often outlasts the formal demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants. These programs, conducted in war's immediate aftermath, form an important part of a policymaker's post-conflict toolkit. However, without special attention to creating economic opportunities for ex-combatants, these poor and underemployed men are more likely to rejoin rebellious groups, commit crime, and otherwise threaten political stability.

Evaluation Context

Liberia has experienced two civil wars in the last thirty years, from 1989-1996 and 1999-2003. Even in 2009, six years after the war ended, a large number of ex-combatants and other young, poor, and underemployed men continued to make their living through unlawful activities, including unlicensed mining, rubber tapping, or logging. While the security situation had steadily improved since 2003, the government, the UN, and NGOs feared that these youth were a possible source of instability, particularly in hotspot regions where mining, rubber tapping, or logging and the allure of "fast money" attracted young men from around the country. These youth could also be recruited into regional conflicts as mercenaries. In an effort to reintegrate these young, underemployed ex-combatants, the NGO Action on Armed Violence (AoAV) implemented a program to train them in agriculture, a major source of employment and income for rural Liberians.

Details of the Intervention

Researchers tested the effect of AoAV's intensive agricultural training program on employment



RESEARCHERS

Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman

COUNTRY

Liberia

PARTNERS

Action on Armed Violence, Italian Children and Youth Trust Fund, Network for Empowerment and Progressive Initiatives, Spanish Trust Fund for Impact Evaluation, Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF), United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, United Nations Peacebuilding Fund in Liberia, Yale Economic Growth Center

PROGRAM AREAS

Peace and Recovery, Social Protection

TOPICS

Cash Transfers, Conflict, Crime, Crisis, Training & Mentoring, Ultra Poor, Violence

TIMELINE

2009-2011

activities, income, and socio-political integration. This program was broader and more intensive than most ex-combatant reintegration programs and was designed to rectify some of the main failings of prior demobilization programs: it focused on agriculture (the largest source of employment in Liberia), it provided both human and physical capital, and it integrated economic with psychosocial assistance. It also targeted youth at natural resource hotspots that presented the most immediate security concerns.

AoAV took youth selected for the program to residential agricultural training campuses, where they received 3-4 months of coursework and practical training in agriculture, basic literacy and numeracy training, psychosocial counseling, along with meals, clothing, basic medical care, and personal items. After the training, counselors facilitated graduates' re-entry with access to land in any community of their choice. Graduates received a package of agricultural tools and supplies, valued at approximately US\$125. The program's total cost was approximately \$1,275 per youth.

AoAV recruited twice as many youth as it had space for in its programs, and researchers randomly assigned half of the youth to a treatment group (that was offered a spot in the program) and half to a comparison group that was not offered the program. Researchers compared these two groups 18 months after the program to see the effect of the intervention on agricultural livelihoods, shifts from illicit to legal employment, poverty, social integration, aggression, and potential for future instability. Despite widespread migration, 91 percent of the youth were found at the time of the endline survey.

Results and Policy Lessons

The program increased participants' employment in agriculture and decreased the amount of time participants spent in illicit activities. There was an increase in average wealth but no effect on measures of social engagement.

Engagement in agriculture: More than a year after completion of the program, program participants were 15.5 percentage points more likely than the comparison group to be engaged in agriculture, where 61 percent worked in agriculture. Interest in and positive attitudes toward farming was significantly higher among program participants. *Illicit activities:* The program had little impact on the rate of participation in illicit activities like mining, but program participants spent fewer hours in illicit activities, as work in agriculture seemed to partially substitute for illicit activities.

Income and wealth: There was a sizable increase in average wealth, driven by increases in household durable assets rather than cash income.

Social engagement, citizenship, and stability: The program seemed to have little effect on peer groups, risky social networks, anti-social behaviors, or community engagement and leadership, which were the main aims of the counseling and life skills sessions. There was also no effect on attitudes towards violence and democracy.

Interest and mobilization during violence in Cote d' Ivoire: Conflict broke out in Cote d' Ivoire during the study. Self-reported rates of interest in the violence and mobilization were fairly low among the entire sample, but they were especially low among program participants, who were 24 percentage points less

likely to engage in any of 12 recruitment activities, compared with 94 percent of the comparison group engaging in at least one of these activities.

More information can be found in the policy brief [here](#) (PDF) and full paper [here](#).

GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS

101 Whitney Avenue
New Haven, CT 06510 USA
+1 203.772.2216 | contact@poverty-action.org

poverty-action.org