1. INTRODUCTION

- 30% of the VMLRs are women and girls.
- 74% of the VMLRs were under 18 when the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was signed in 2006.
- The VMLRs were deeply affected by their experience of the ‘People’s War’ (1996-2006).

"Every participant is important"

This update provides an overview of how the United Nations Interagency Rehabilitation Programme (UNIRP) has been supporting the Verified Minors and Late Recruits (VMLRs) of the Maoist ex-combatants in their return to civilian life with sustainable livelihood. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) and the UN led Verification Process, the VMLRs were kept in Maoist cantonments for over three years, unaware of their status until they were discharged in early 2010. Following their discharge, UNIRP was launched in close collaboration with the Government of Nepal to provide support for the VMLRs through counselling, training, education and job support to help ensure their smooth rehabilitation.

Since every programme participant is important to furthering Nepal’s transition to peace, UNIRP aims to provide flexible support in response to each individual’s needs. Despite socio-political sensitivities and challenges such as VMLRs’ levels of psychosocial distress due to their war-time experiences, remarkable changes in their lives have been witnessed in these two and a half years.

2. WHERE THINGS STAND

To enable VMLRs who expressed interest to join the programme after the deadline of July 2011, UNIRP through an official request from the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction re-opened the enrolment in August and September 2012. As a result, 151 VMLRs including 69 who were referred for education or training but did not visit service providers were enrolled.

Of the total participants enrolled (2231), 73% have now graduated and 24% are still undergoing training or education. The fact that 38% of those graduated are women reflects the gender responsive approach prioritised by the programme (see Table 2).

Since post-conflict employment creation and income generation are imperative to peacebuilding and sustainable development in Nepal, UNIRP has been working closely with the public and private sectors to link program graduates to potential opportunities. Currently, 59% of training and education graduates are employed or self-employed (see Table 3). To this effect, UNIRP and the Youth and Small Entrepreneur Self Employment Fund under the Ministry of Finance have signed a memorandum of understanding that enables UNIRP graduates to access affordable loans to sustain and expand their businesses. Through continuous improvement and adjustment of the programme based on their needs, UNIRP aims to enhance VMLRs’ sustainable livelihood.

UNIRP offers four sectoral rehabilitation options for VMLRs:

1. Vocational Skills Training
2. Micro-enterprise
3. Health-related Training
4. Education

These options include individual career counselling, psychosocial counselling, business mentoring and various cross-cutting services as key components of rehabilitation support. In addition, post-training support to try to link the graduates to employment opportunities or self-employment is provided.
2.1. Key Statistics of the Rehabilitation Programme (as of 31 October 2012)

The tables below present key data about UNIRP through various stages of the rehabilitation process. Each table contains gender disaggregated data to reflect women participation.

Table 1 shows how many VMLRs contacted the programme, how many were referred to education/training, and how many enrolled in each option. Although Table 1 presents data in three groups (i.e. the total VMLR population, VMLRs discharged through the cantonment, and VMLRs who are in Nepal), it is important to highlight that UNIRP targeted the third of these groups – the 3,040 VMLRs who were present in Nepal and did not leave for work abroad. This target group is presented in Column 3 of Table 1.

Table 2 provides an overview of the 2,231 VMLRs who enrolled in training or education options, detailing at which stage of the process they are.

Table 3 shows how many of the graduated VMLRs are employed or have started their own business.

### Table 1: Key Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps in Rehabilitation Process</th>
<th>Of the total 4,008 VMLRs</th>
<th>Of the 2,394 VMLRs discharged through cantonment ceremonies</th>
<th>UNIRP Target Population: Of the 3,040 VMLRs who are not working abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female (% of 4,008 VMLRs)</td>
<td>Female (% of 2,394 VMLRs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMLRs who contacted UNIRP through the toll-free phone number</td>
<td>2,742 (68%)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>2,131 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMLRs referred for Training / Education</td>
<td>2,477 (62%)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>1,954 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMLRs enrolled for Training / Education</td>
<td>2,231 (56%)</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1,760 (74%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Breakdown of 2,231 VMLRs who enrolled for Training or Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps in Rehabilitation Process</th>
<th>Of the total 2231 VMLRs who enrolled Training / Education</th>
<th>Female ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Those still in Training / Education with set graduation date</td>
<td>529 (24%)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who dropped out</td>
<td>71 (3%)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who have graduated to date from Training / Education</td>
<td>1,631 (73%)</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Breakdown of 1,631 VMLRs who have graduated to date from Training / Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps in Rehabilitation Process</th>
<th>Of the total 1,631 VMLRs who graduated from Training</th>
<th>Female ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Those who are employed or running a business</td>
<td>953 (59%)</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. WHERE THINGS ARE GOING

The programme phase-out is scheduled for January 2013. For successful and sustainable social and economic rehabilitation of the VMLRs, UNIRP has designed a gradual and coordinated phase-out in close consultation with the interagency partners and Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction. As part of this process, the merger and closing down of two UNIRP Regional Offices in the Far-Western and Central regions was completed in September.

Upon an official request from the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) and based on the decision of the project board meeting, UNIRP re-opened the enrolment for late applicant VMLRs in August and September 2012 to enable those who expressed interest to join the programme after the deadline of July 2011 to enrol. This increased the total caseload of UNIRP from 2149 to 2,231 VMLRs. Consequently, it is expected that more than 300 participants will graduate just prior to the phase-out in addition to more than 600 graduates who will need face-to-face monitoring and individual follow-up support. The project is accelerating its post-training service provision to provide follow-up support to all VMLRs. The programme experience shows that post-training follow-up and mentoring plays a key role for their successful rehabilitation, however the wide geographical spread and the decreased number of staff will make this challenging. To reach out to every participant and to maximize positive impact, UNIRP in consensus with the MoPR is exploring the possibility to maintain a reduced staff to deliver the outstanding work such as monitoring, follow-up and mentoring especially for fresh graduates of the programme for at least six more months.
4. Success Stories

"Entrepreneurial life is better than combatant life"

Rabin Rai (29) was discharged from the Cantonment in Ilam, Eastern Nepal, as a late recruit in January 2010. After that, he worked as a stone-crush labourer at a local riverbank along with some friends. Eight months later, he decided to knock the door of the UNIRP regional office in Biratnagar to receive career counselling because he found it was very difficult to support his family with this job. After receiving thorough career counselling, he selected UNIRP’s micro-enterprise option for his new civilian career. Then he received a 10-day business induction training named Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) in March 2011 with other participants who aim to establish various businesses, “SIYB, the first training I got was very fruitful to me. It opened my eyes as an entrepreneur”, Rabin says. After that, he took a three-month ‘Cook and hotel businesses’ training. He also visited several successful entrepreneurs in the local area while he was taking three months skill training for his own business in the future. He was inspired by their success stories and thankful to the trainers of SIYB and skill training who showed a new path for enterprise. Then, he prepared a plan to run his business. He opened his lodge in Panchthar, the Eastern part of Nepal, with in kind support equivalent to Nrs.30, 000 from UNIRP. He also invested an additional NRs. 30,000 himself. The lodge is operated by him and his family who are very supportive. The lodge can accommodate five to six guests and generate an income of around 15,000 to 18,000 per month. As an additional source of income, his family has been rearing two pigs which consume the food waste from the lodge. Not only are the travellers pleased with the services provided, but also the neighbours and community are happy with the progress made by the family. He feels that the status of his family has significantly improved and they acquired local people’s trust thanks to his business. Nowadays Rabin declares, “Entrepreneurial Life is better than the combatant life”.

"UNIRP supported me when I was helpless"

If you visit Alina’s tailoring shop in Kathmandu, you may not be able to believe that the lady smiling calmly among beautiful tailored Nepali dresses was an ex-combatant. Alina (22), from a middle class family, joined the People’s Liberation Army when she was 15 years old because she lost relatives in the war. She wanted to avenge the killing of her sister and nephew. Her uncle was disappeared and brother was imprisoned during the conflict. In the army, she used to help with logistics and provide first aid to injured combatants. Following the CPA and several years in a cantonment, Alina was discharged in 2010 as a verified minor. She felt bewildered and alienated and lacked a livelihood.

"I felt very humiliated to be called a ‘disqualified’ combatant by being discharged”, she recalls. In 2011, she visited the UNIRP regional office in Kathmandu and joined the programme, which offered her a range of training, livelihood and psycho-social support. After receiving career counselling, she opted for tailoring training under the micro-enterprise option. When she fell ill during a training session, she was taken to a hospital and provided with medical treatment, nutritional support as well as psychosocial counselling and treatment by UNIRP. The support, training and regular counselling sessions improved her health and gave her the confidence and means to adapt to civilian life. In 2012, with in-kind business start-up support, she established the ‘Alina Tailoring Centre’ in Kathmandu. Now, she is able to earn Rs. 12,000 income per month. Besides tailoring services, she has started to provide basic tailoring training to seven local women at her centre. Alina now feels part of her community. Reflecting on her experience, she says: "UNIRP supported me when I was helpless and disturbed. The support opened a new horizon in my life. One day, I will establish myself as famous tailor."