

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF RWANDAN CHILD SOLDIERS

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Abstract

This study investigates the situation of Rwandan youth ex-combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Specifically, the study examines how and why young people become involved in conflicts as fighters, how the conflict impacts upon them, and how the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration programs set up by international aid agencies attempted to address the youth's special needs as they relate to reintegration in their home communities.

By employing qualitative semi-structured interviews and group discussions with demobilized ex-combatant youth and other stakeholders in northern Rwanda, the study examines how the Western model and assumption of childhood and child soldiering has so far dictated the approaches of international aid agencies in response to the needs of young people in armed conflicts. The study challenges some of the assumptions and argues for a more representative and focussed approach that emphasizes on the socio-cultural context of the ex-combatants. The research shows how and why some youth voluntarily join armed groups. It also highlights the resilience of the youth in the midst of conflict and their ability to rebuild their lives.

The findings of the research have some implications for the way the international aid agencies conceptualize and provide assistance to the young people affected by armed conflicts. It challenges the assumption held by the aid agencies regarding the exclusive emphases on victimization and trauma counselling, and refocuses on the need to rebuild the youth's resilience and coping strategies.

Key Terms

Youth ex-combatants ; Childhood ; Passive victims ; Active participants ; Reintegration ; Community acceptance ; Psychological counselling ; Trauma ; Western model ; Resilience

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List of Acronyms

AFDL	Alliance des Forces Démocratique pour la Libération
ALiR	Armes pour la Libération du Rwanda
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child (of the UN)
CP	Child Protection
DDRR	Disarmament Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOMOG	West African Peacekeeping Mission
FDD	Forces de défense de la démocratie
FDLR	Forces Démocratiques de libération du Rwanda
ICD	Inter-Congolese Dialogue
ICRC	The International Committee of the Red Cross
MONUC	UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
PTSD	Post-trauma Syndrome Disorder
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RANU	Rwandese Alliance for National Unity
RTL	Radio et Télévision Libres des Mille Collines
RDR	Rassemblement Démocratique pour la Rwanda
RCD	Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
RDRC	The Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission
SC UK	Save the Children UK
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNLA	Ugandan National Liberation Army
UNMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1. Background

This dissertation has grown out of interest that I developed in the subject due to my professional experience working as a consultant with youth ex-combatants between January – August 2004 in Kigali, Rwanda and in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The empirical research was conducted together with another colleague focusing on the cross-border disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) of Rwandan youth associated with armed groups in the DRC. The study included field research in Northern Rwanda, Ruhengeri province and in Eastern DRC, Goma and Bukavu provinces.

The research, commissioned by the UK's Department for International Development and Save the Children UK, aimed at investigating the main reasons as to why children join armed groups, what the impacts were and finally to come up with recommendations on youth-friendly DDRR programs. In addition, the question of why very few children, particularly girls have come forward for demobilization, was also one of the main objectives of the study. The findings and recommendations of the research were intended to be used as an advocacy tool for the humanitarian agency, and to create awareness for possible funding from donors. Therefore, the research was framed in such a way as to emphasize the suffering and horrifying experiences of Rwandan youth combatants who were associated with armed groups in the DRC.

As the research progressed, however, I started to question some of the perceptions as well as assumptions that we (myself and other humanitarian practitioners) had regarding conflict and youth. I began to question some of the perceptions and predetermined ideas regarding the nature of children and childhood, and of armed conflict and its social, psychological and emotional consequences. Despite keen efforts, other similar research on youth and armed conflicts tend to downplay the significant contribution and insights of the young ones (Boyden & de Berry 2004: 248).

There is no doubt that modern armed conflicts have devastating consequences on civilian population in general and the young ones in particular. As all-out warfare between states gradually led to long-term, low-intensity conflicts within boundaries among militia and state fighters, the scale of civilian casualties and death had increased dramatically in recent times. Between the 1890s and 1990s, civilian casualties had risen from 5 per cent to 90 per cent respectively (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 4). Civilians became direct targets and victims of brutal conflicts as battle sites moved greatly from less inhabited border areas to the heart of civilian life in cities, villages and towns. As a result children and youth were often affected disproportionately as they became the deliberate targets of armed forces. According to sources, over 2 million children had been killed during the last decade, 1 million orphaned and over 6 million seriously injured or permanently disabled (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 4). During the Rwandan genocide in 1994, 56 per cent of children had seen children kill people, and nearly 80 per cent had lost immediate family members.

One of the trends relating to young people and armed conflicts was their use as soldiers. To date, there are 300,000 youth under the age of 18 who have been recruited into government forces, rebel groups and other non-state armed groups (Amnesty

International 2003: www.amnesty.org). About half of these youth combatants were found in Africa. In the case of Rwanda, for example, it was estimated that there were over 2,000 youth combatants associated with Hutu rebels in the DRC.

No wonder then that there existed a significant literature that mainly focused on the forced nature of young people's recruitment. Aid agencies often framed their analysis on the assumption that all children, including Rwandan youth combatants were forcefully recruited by armed groups. It was believed that their participation in the conflict resulted in devastating psychological and social consequences with mass dysfunctionality in the present as well as future lives of the youth. Assumptions of this kind have led to the generalized perception that youth's involvement in political and military actions were primarily the result of compulsion, coercion and brainwashing (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 9).

While my research does not intend to downplay the horrors witnessed by Rwandan young people at the hands of various guerrilla fighters, I tended to focus on their active participation, resilience and coping strategies amidst the brutal conflicts that have been raging in the Great Lakes Region. The study challenges the generalized notion of child victimization as a result of participation in armed conflicts. It challenges the argument that all youth combatants suffer from psychological trauma and are in need of individualized emotional counselling to help them cope with the situation. Rather, the research emphasises the wider socio-political context of children in armed conflict. So far, this is an area where there has been little academic research undertaken. As far as the Rwandan youth ex-combatants are concerned, the only available study was programmatic literature prepared and used by humanitarian aid agencies, who advocated individual trauma counselling for war affected youth. This research hopes to bridge this knowledge gap and provide suitable data for future research.

1.1. Problem Statement and Research Questions

The frequency of armed conflicts around the world has significantly grown during the course of the twentieth century, with much of the conflicts taking place internally among state and non-state parties. Civilians, particularly young people have become the primary military objective as modern hostilities take place in cities, streets and homes. The categories of 'civilian' and 'combat' are extremely blurred as youth, their families and communities emerge as both victims and perpetrators (Boyden & de Berry 2004: xi). The young are actively recruited by fighting forces and used as combatants, cleaners, spies and bush wives. These situations often bring the young fighters into conflict with the law, making the post-conflict reintegration difficult for them.

The extent of civilian suffering, including those of the young ones, has received global recognition. As a result there now exists significant literature dedicated to young people affected by armed conflicts. Much of the literature and programs on young people generally tend to focus on the forced nature of recruitment and the catastrophic impact of conflicts. The major objective of the literature is to assess the prevalence of distressing psychological and emotional sufferings, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Hart 2002a: 36-39, Boyden & de Berry 2004: xiii).

Despite the obvious relevance of this model, there remain major gaps in understanding the complex nature of young people affected by armed conflicts. Further investigation is required in order to balance the weight of research that has so far focused on the negative impact of conflicts on individual mental health with study that looks at the socio-political nature of armed conflict. More study is needed that goes beyond the exclusive emphasis on the psychological and social trauma and consider the wider societal dimensions. We need to analyse the way in which childhood is conceptualized and

experienced among different societies and cultures. It is important to investigate the possibility that in some situations, young people may participate in armed conflicts as a reasoned strategy and as the most desirable option within the range of choices available to them (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 9).

In light of this background, the following specific research questions have to be answered in order to change and rectify the wrong ideas, misconceptions and false assumptions:

- i) Why and how Rwandan youth became involved in armed conflict, and how do they cope with their situation?
- ii) What are the effects of armed conflict on child ex-combatants? Are youth ex-combatants always the victims of conflicts?
- iii) How do the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programs established by aid agencies seek to identify and address child ex-combatants' needs as they relate to reintegration in their home communities?

These three research questions serve as guidelines in the search for answers to the problem statement. They also serve as tentative hypotheses in this qualitative study.

1.2. The Aim of the Study

The manifest purpose of the study is to provide scientific answers to the aforementioned three research questions. In order to attain this goal, a functionalist perspective is emphasised to analyse existing literature and data gathered from the field research, as well as guidelines of international organizations relating to child ex-combatants. This information will be qualitatively analysed as it relates to every particular case.

The latent aim of the study is to child protection organizations and humanitarian agencies to review their approaches, policies and practices in framing their programs and interventions, not only in the Rwanda-DRC situation, but also in other countries that embark on similarly sensitive post-conflict demobilization and reintegration programs for young ex-combatants.

Based on interviews with young children and literature consultation, this qualitative study will focus on key issues such as socio-cultural and economic dynamics in relation to youth in armed conflicts. Through this framework, I will present some of the conventional assumptions and ideas, and then assess recent research for a revised view. This approach will shift the paradigm in theory from one that focuses on the forced nature of youth recruitment, trauma and total negativity of conflict to one that sees conflict in a social and cultural context. Finally, the research will attempt to provide some future recommendations.

1.3 Basic Hypotheses and Central Theoretical Statements

A functionalist perspective is employed as a research tool to analyse and interpret the identified research problems, and to attain the aim of the study. The functionalist approach holds that all societies have certain basic needs or functional requirements which must be met by certain institutions or parts of society for the survival of the whole. The approach is concerned with the contribution these various parts of society make towards social order and stability.

The functionalist perspective is therefore suitable to analyse this research. With a functionalist perspective, the main viewpoint of the study is that the effective reintegration of youth ex-combatants is essential for the Rwandan society to run

smoothly and harmoniously. The disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) of youth ex-combatants are directed to reach specific goals or to fulfil specific functions in society, namely the stabilization of the youth's lives and that of their families, communities as well as the functionality of the DDRR programs.

In order to guide my qualitative sociological research and with reference to the three research questions stated, the following tentative hypotheses and central theoretical statements are described:

1) Youth ex-combatants should not be considered as immature children who are always forced by adults to join armed groups. In addition to coercive and forced recruitment, some youth and young people become involved in armed conflicts and join armed groups voluntarily for varied, and sometimes justifiable reasons including to escape poverty, for protection and some times due to ethnic/political alliances with the armed groups. Some girls join armed groups for the same reason as boys, making a deliberate choice to become soldiers because having a gun is likely to provide protection against being raped, abused or killed in a situation of civil strife. Some boys as well as girls seek physical protection and emotional partners from armed groups in order to escape sexual and domestic violence and to eventually have stability in their lives. In this way, youth participation in armed conflicts some times makes sense in Rwanda and in many African countries for that matter. The research does not attempt to justify youth participation in armed conflicts. Instead it attempts to understand some of the socio-cultural practices and meanings surrounding the youth that make the participation in conflict somehow more understandable.

2) How armed conflicts affect youth ex-combatants varies from individual to individual and does not always constitute a totally negative effect. While there are many cases

where war negatively affects youth's social, physical and psychological well being, this does not mean that all conflicts always result in mass dysfunctionality. Age by itself is not the only determinant factor of vulnerability, and despite immense sufferings, young people often exercise remarkable resilience. In some cases, they could even gain certain advantages out of their participation in armed conflicts, including the sense of pride, maturity and respect from their families and communities. The underlying assumption of this view is that while war may cause many of the young ones to become extremely vulnerable, this does not mean that they are passive victims of adult wars. Instead, young people employ ingenious survival strategies, and they have positive aspirations, hopes and achievements (Vandergrift, Lochhead & Steinmann 2002: 8). War might cause scars of psychological and social trauma but the scars do not necessarily stay with the young ones for the rest of their lives. What is often neglected by some scholars and humanitarian aid agencies is that there are several personal, social and political circumstances which mediate youth's war experience and influence the way in which they are affected by the effect of conflicts. The notion of inevitable vulnerability and passivity of young people in armed conflicts prevents us from understanding the wider socio-economic and political dynamics that greatly influence the manner in which youth are affected by armed conflicts.

3) The Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programs designed by international aid agencies often rely on the assumption that the majority of youth are abducted or forced by armed groups to join, and that they are all victims of mass trauma that needed to be treated. As a result of this assumption, aid agencies rely on a universal intervention mechanism with pre-determined ideas about children's victimization in conflicts. Aid agencies frame their analyses of child ex-combatants' as

powerless and helpless victims, with serious psychological trauma. The assumption is that 'it is normal to be traumatized by the horrors of war (Pupavac 2001: 5).

This view 'infantilises' youth combatant's complex agency, and leads to inappropriate post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration interventions. By over-emphasising 'psychological trauma treatment' as a solution, the approach neglects to take into account youth's coping abilities and resilience. In addition, this type of DDRR intervention will further stigmatise and isolate youth ex-combatants because they are labelled as 'psychologically dysfunctional', and are unable to make decisions for themselves. Finally, this type of narrow view, by exclusively focusing on psychological treatment, diverts our attention away from focusing on developing alternative livelihood options and other important socio-economic interventions such as education, job opportunities, reconciliation and justice as well as community and cultural connections (Mcintyre 2005: 129; Duncan & Arntson 2004: 17-19; Machel 1996: 15-22; Garbarino 1996:1-20; Gupta 2000).

1.4 The Research Procedure and Techniques

The qualitative research was conducted amongst war-affected young people and communities particularly in the northern regions of Rwanda and in the eastern region of the DRC. The following research procedures were used in order to obtain answers to the stated questions and to verify hypotheses:

- 1) In-depth interviews were conducted with ex-combatants
- 2) observation of daily activities of the ex-combatants at the rehabilitation centre
- 3) focus group discussions
- 4) interviews with community members
- 5) interviews regarding policies related to youth ex-combatants

6) documentary study of literature, reports and memos of UN agencies.

Most of the interviews were conducted with demobilized youth ex-combatants who were undergoing rehabilitation programs at the Ruhengeri Rehabilitation Center, in Rwanda. The study subjects were selected based on the recommendations obtained from Government representatives. Every effort has been made to ensure the representativeness of research samples. Accordingly, youth ex-combatants from all three major armed groups were interviewed. This technique is called purposive sampling; in short, it is based on judgment of the population and the purpose of the study.

To enhance the reliability of the qualitative research, careful examination was conducted to ensure the consistency of both the process and the product of the research. This was achieved through the use of triangulation (combined methods such as observation, interviews and recordings), and the examination of such items as raw data obtained through various techniques. In addition, comparing notes with the other consultant who conducted similar research was achieved with a view to ensuring consistency. Thus, reliability is when a particular technique is applied repeatedly to the same situation and gives the same results each time. The validity of the field research was underlined through the in-depth information and meanings. The research measured what it was supposed to measure, which is the eventual resilience of child soldiers.

Rather than viewing the young people as passive victims, the assumption that guided this research was that they are active participants who are able to cope with the situation of armed conflicts. In order to obtain answers to the stated questions and verify the hypotheses, different qualitative techniques were employed in the study like, observation of the daily activities, focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews. In order

to gain an in-depth understanding of the life of youth ex-combatants and of their impressions of the programs that are in place, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 boys and 9 girl ex-combatants. The interviews were divided among myself and one other consultant colleague who was hired by the organization I worked for. The questionnaire contained 66 questions, and as a result the interviews were conducted over an extended period, sometimes with 3 follow-up interviews per informant. While the 17 boys were at the Ruhengeri Rehabilitation center, the 9 girls were already living in their communities in the Northern provinces of Rwanda. Interviews were also conducted with 5 community members each in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi provinces of Northern Rwanda where most of the youth ex-combatants came from and would be integrated into. In order to understand the attitudes of the community regarding the returning ex-combatants, selected community members including men and women were interviewed to ask for their impressions of the ex-combatants.

All interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda, the local Rwandan language, through an experienced professional translator. An attempt was made to put the children at ease, and to encourage them to speak freely and openly, by keeping the interview style informal. Open-ended questions were used in interviews to allow the children to relate their experiences to armed conflicts, including their daily concerns and coping strategies. In addition, interviews were conducted with 15 staff members from various international and local DDDR actors on both sides of the border (Rwanda & DRC) regarding policies related to child youth-combatants. Although initially contemplated, due to the ongoing conflict and logistical nightmare, it was impossible to have access to interview current youth fighters who are still with the Rwandan Hutu rebels in the DRC.

The confidentiality and consent of the interviewees or respondents were respected at all times. Each research participant was provided with an informed consent form (see Annex). As Bryman (2004:51) suggested:

“Inquiries involving human subjects should be based as far as practicable on the freely given informed consent of subjects. Even if participation is required by law, it should still be as informed as possible. In voluntary inquiries, subjects should not be under the impression that they are required to participate. They should be aware of their entitlement to refuse at any stage for whatever reason and to withdraw data just supplied. Information that would be likely to affect a subject’s willingness to participate should not be deliberately withheld, since this would remove from subjects an important means of protecting their own interests.”

As the issue of DDRR is sensitive for youth in general and particularly for the Rwandan ex-combatants, their confidentiality was maintained and their names will not be displayed. Although audio-recording of interviews is an important aspect of qualitative research, no audio-recording took place for this research as this was not permitted by the managing government authorities of the rehabilitation centre. This is due to the particularly sensitive nature of the involvement of the Rwandan children associated with the instigators of the 1994 genocide who are now fighting in the DRC against the current Rwandan regime. The conflict is ongoing and their return to Rwanda is a highly politically sensitive issue. Audio-recording would generate alarm as the children might think it will be used as recorded proof of their past. Therefore, as an alternative to audio-recording, detailed notes were taken during the interviews and the notes were transcribed the same day.

Academic literature, reports, and internal memos of various UN agencies and NGOs were also consulted as secondary data. This research method of employing a combination of different related techniques is called triangulation, where issues are observed from different viewpoints to substantiate findings which enhance the validity of

the study. In this sense it is an exploratory qualitative study, based on tentative hypotheses still to be researched.

1.5 Conceptualisation

The following concepts are relevant to this study: childhood, child soldiers, disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Childhood: According to the UN's definition, a child is “*every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier*” (United Nations 1989).

Although every society has concepts and practices which identify ‘children’ as distinct from ‘adults’, the ways in which different societies and communities define such distinction varies greatly (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 6). Therefore, the definition of childhood in this research takes a flexible approach to reflect the different socio-cultural realities. I employ the term ‘youth’ or ‘young people’ rather than the term ‘child’.

The UN's universal definition of childhood, endorsed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. This age-based definition of childhood has been ratified by almost all countries of the world¹, and employed by the majority of Western humanitarian agencies that work with youth. Childhood and adulthood is ascribed to individuals when they reach certain biologically predetermined age. In this way, transition from childhood to adulthood is fixed at an age when it is presumed that individuals will be capable of conducting themselves as adults

¹ Only USA, Somalia and Timor Leste, have not ratified the CRC. USA has not ratified it “because of its particular human rights liberal tradition, which treats rights as the legally enforceable obligations of a state towards its citizens”; ‘Somalia’s failure to ratify is due to the absence of a recognized government in that country; and Timor Leste has not ratified as it only achieved its independence in 2002’ (Mcintyre 2005: 27).

(Mcintyre 2005:12). Although article 12 of the CRC mandates that children who are capable of forming their own views shall have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, the article limits the status of young people by emphasising the age of the child (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994:35).

This age-based and biological definition of childhood is in sharp contrast to the concepts employed in this research and by other social scientists who hold that the definition of childhood is widely varying, context-specific, and constantly negotiated within the bounds of a particular society, time and place (Newman 2004: 10-11). As argued by some scholars:

“Needless to say that the notion that someone by some magical wand on the stroke of a pen turns into a fully competent mature, wise and autonomous individual upon attaining a certain arbitrary fixed age has no scientific empirical basis in fact and reality.” (Mcintyre 2005: 11).

In many non-western cultures, the definition of childhood or adulthood is not based on attaining a certain chronological age, but more on physical capacity to perform duties reserved for adults. In another words, the definition of childhood and adulthood is the function of social and cultural constructs (Schafer 2004:87-101; Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994:6-7). In Rwanda, and in many African countries, where it is often impossible to keep exact records, childhood and adulthood is determined by socio-economic events of communities. McIntyre (2005: 12) argues that in the context of many African communities, marriage and the establishment of a new homestead are traditionally the two most important indicators of adult male status. To be categorized as a child means, he/she has not yet achieved the level of economic importance that would allow him/her to find a partner and become an economically independent (Mcintyre 2005: 12).

Communities across most African countries consider their children as adults by virtue of the fact that they often perform responsibilities reserved for adults. This is because of “the particular nature of African economy that often proves important in shortening the duration of childhood. Because many people live at subsistence level and an average life span is short, survival is a struggle. Hence, a long period of dependency as a child is a luxury that most African families can not afford” (Bennett 1998:20). At the same time, however, in African cultural context, it can also be argued that childhood is a never-ending process because childhood is not defined or conceptualised in terms of a biological age. In this sense, an African child is always considered as a child to his/her parents and traditionally expects support in times of need (Mcintyre 2005: 13).

This ‘constructionist’ view of childhood has great bearing upon youth’s lives. It sheds some light on how some activities performed by young people such as domestic and agricultural activities and even soldiering could be viewed as normal by community members because they never consider the youth as ‘children’ but as adults. The approach encourages researchers to relate their study of youth’s lives to local ideas about the roles, capacities, rights and obligations of the young (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 6-7).

Child Soldiers: According to the definition of the UN, a child soldier is: “*Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.*” (United Nations 2003:1). This definition also includes those who are recruited forcibly as well as those who join voluntarily regardless of their function – cooks, porters, messengers and girls used as wives (Verhey 2001:9).

Again, the definition of child soldier is similar to the definition of childhood because they both are age bound. The concept of 'child soldier' as defined above implies that due to their innocence, immaturity and age, young people affected by armed conflicts are generally vulnerable to coercion and brutalisation by armed groups.

For this research, just as the definition of 'childhood', I will employ a flexible definition of a 'child soldier'. Accordingly, I use terms such as 'youth ex-combatants' or 'young people affected by armed conflicts'. This is because in times of conflicts, the distinctions between and the concept of childhood, adolescence and adulthood can easily be manipulated for the purpose of fulfilling political and military goals, with important implications for young people's protection (Newman 2004: 11). For example, in some circumstances, young people may identify themselves as children to avoid recruitment or punishments, while government authorities might define them as adults, hence responsible for their acts (Newman 2004: 11).

Because childhood is a social construction, 'child soldiers' may not be considered as children. For instance in Rwanda, some community members viewed youth ex-combatants not as vulnerable children but as mature adults because of their experience as fighters.

The restrictive age based definition of 'child soldier' tends to ignore other needy adolescents (youth) who are aged over 18, but who do not enjoy the same social power and status as adults (West 2004:106-124). This category of young people, unlike the youth ex-combatants, have the 'in between' status and are neither covered by CRC nor are they on the agenda of peace and international development efforts (Kemper 2005: 8-10). This age bound definition also ignores those who were children at the time when

they joined armed groups, but owing to the longevity of the conflict in Rwanda/DRC, now are over 18.

Disarmament refers to the collection of weapons from combatants and possibly the destruction of those weapons. This is often a symbolic and confidence-building gesture by fighting forces.

Demobilization refers to the process of screening, registering and encampment of the disarmed ex-combatants. Some information dissemination such as HIV/AIDS and psycho-social counselling is also provided at this stage ((Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004: 12-13).

Rehabilitation refers to the process whereby ex-combatants are prepared to adjust to civilian life before they are reintegrated into their communities. Rehabilitation often takes place in canters/camps for a period of 3-6 months where ex-combatants receive psychosocial counselling (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004: 12-13).

Reintegration: one way of defining the concept of reintegration is seeing it as a means of integrating people who were away from their original communities due to war and displacement. In this case reintegration is a way of reforming identities and rebuilding one's life (Krech 2003:167). It can also be seen as a two way process; one that involves the return of people and the other, those who receive the returning ones who fled or committed atrocities to the community.

This way of conceptualising the concept of reintegration in academic terms differs and we often see scholars debating on the dilemmas surrounding the issue. However, for aid agencies, reintegration often means the ways and means of fulfilling the conceptual definition presented above (see details in the reintegration section).

The theory behind reintegration is multifaceted. In most cases reintegration helps:

- a) To downsize army or militia groups by redirecting the human and material resources to post-conflict reconstruction;
- b) To build confidence, to bring stability and security by providing former soldiers with an alternative to war;
- c) To assist combatants in assuming productive roles in civil society and the work force,
- d) in the long-term, to address the root causes of the war and to facilitate sustainable development (Krech 2003: 100-110).

Literature on reintegration generally describes the benefits of demobilization and reintegration and they explain the process, problems faced and finally recommendations on how to successfully support reintegration efforts. While advocacy reports emphasis on the positive side of reintegration, very little has been said about how the individuals to be demobilized feel about it. For instance, for Tigrean girl child ex-combatants in Ethiopia who gained personal and social benefits by being participants in the war with the dictatorial regime in Ethiopia, demobilization had meant a return to an unknown life as females. For these young girls, demobilization brought about the sense of loss of noble cause, common cause and social life. As a result they were very reluctant to be demobilized.²

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The research was limited by the fact that it was conducted as part of my work for an international aid agency that was involved in DDRR programmes. Although there were

² The author's personal observation

some benefits to work through an agency already working in the area, for example, to gain easy and ready access to the child ex-combatants and benefiting from the expertise of local staff who have extensive contact with community members and local government officials, the situation caused problems in conducting the research. As a result of my connection to the aid agency, the youth ex-combatants tended to respond to my interviews by emphasizing their vulnerability and weaknesses, presumably in the hope that I would bring assistance.

Gaining access through local officials is also questioned by scholars such as Boyden (2004:237-256), as access to information is mediated by local government officials who sometimes may use the information gathered for intelligence information. The local government staff member stationed in the youth's rehabilitation centre frequently attempted to answer questions for the 'children' believing that they were too inarticulate to do so themselves. Their presence of the local government official at the center has also intimidated the youth, often leading the youth to answer questions that pleased their 'bosses'. The researcher was allowed to spend a limited amount of time with each research participant, often not for more than an hour with each child at a time. Given the amount of time required for translation, the allocated time was insufficient. Due to this, two and sometimes three interviews had to be conducted for each child – often after a few hours interval.

Another limitation was to gain access to the youth who were still fighting in the DRC. Due to the ongoing conflict in the eastern provinces of the DRC, direct contact with the young people and with their commanders was not possible. This meant that the research had focused, not on current child soldiers but on ex-combatant youth who had escaped or formally demobilized from armed groups.

Lastly, some shortcomings were observed in accessing girl ex-combatants. To avoid stigmatisation by the community, some of the girls have preferred to quietly self-demobilize without going through official DDRR programs. In this case, singling them out for interviews as ex-combatants would mean exposing them for further stigma.

1.7 The Presentation of the Study

Chapter 1 has provided the introduction and orientation of the study, and introduced three research questions as well as the basic tentative hypotheses and theoretical statements. It has also presented the definitions of key concepts including childhood, child soldier, disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration. The chapter has provided the research techniques (triangulation) employed to conduct the research and has outlined some of the limitations encountered during the research.

Chapter 2 presents the tentative hypothesis and theoretical statements that are central to the dissertation. It provides the theoretical perspectives on how and why youth participate in armed conflicts, how they are affected and how the DDRR program attempts to address the needs of the youth ex-combatants. These theoretical developments will be analyzed together with the development of international laws that are currently being used by the international community and NGOs.

Chapter 3 presents the background information on the Rwandan conflict, briefly assessing how the colonial powers succeeded in politicizing the ethnic differences in Rwanda, and how regional ethnic identity crisis in the Great Lakes has created tension among the Rwandan population that led to civil war and genocide.

Chapter 4, based on the field research in Rwanda and eastern DRC, addresses the first two research questions and tentative hypotheses emanating from these questions: 1)

Why and how Rwandan youth became involved in armed conflict, and how do they cope with their situation? 2) What are the effects of armed conflict on child ex-combatants? Are youth ex-combatants always the victims of conflicts? The chapter looks at the pattern of recruitment, the involvement and role of Rwandan youth in the armed conflict, and the impact of the conflict.

Chapter 5 provides the qualitative analyses and interpretation of interviews.

Chapter 6 answers the third research question: “How do the DDDR programs set up by humanitarian agencies seek to identify and address youth ex-combatant’s special social, psychological and physical needs as they relate to reintegration in their home communities?” The chapter provides an overview of the DDDR program in Rwanda and analyzes how this process seeks to identify and addresses youth ex-combatants’ social, psychological and physical needs as they relate to reintegration in their home communities. The chapter will also present the cross-border DDDR programs in the context of the complex socio-economic and political set up in Rwanda and the DRC. After explaining the demobilization and reintegration, in-depth analyses will be provided regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration process of youth ex-combatants. The role of each DDDR actor is also analysed in this chapter.

Chapter 7 presents the final conclusions and recommendations for aid agencies and further research to be conducted.

1.8 The Value of the Study

The sociological relevance and contribution of this study refers to the fact that information was described, analyzed and explained from a functionalist theoretical

perspective. Endeavours to eliminate misconceptions on why, what and how youth got involved in war situations, were made to serve as contributions to aid agencies. In the light of the present and future problems that could emanate from the external environment affecting youth ex-combatants, it is necessary and of value that a sociological investigation be undertaken since it is important and relevant to the Rwandan society to have a stable reintegration process and specifically for the lives and wellbeing of these children.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Youth participation in armed conflicts is an increasingly widespread phenomenon particularly in recent hostilities. Throughout the world, more than 300,000 young children have been recruited by various government and non-government forces to serve as combatants, cooks, spies, 'wives' and messengers. More than 120,000 of these young people are in Africa, mainly in Angola, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, the DRC, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uganda (Taylor 2000:14).

Due to this widespread phenomenon of the use of young people as soldiers, there have been tremendous efforts at analyses and approaches developed by various scholars and aid agencies to understand the nature of the problem. The main overarching theoretical perspective of these different approaches is the functionalist perspective. This is based on the notion that social events, like DDRR programs can best be explained in terms of the functions they perform or the contributions they make to the stability and continuity of society. Society is seen as a complex system with interrelated parts which are integrated on the basis of moral consensus (Giddens 2001: 16).

The research utilized the notions of functionality and dysfunctionality in functionalist theory. These elements include Merton's (in Wallace and Wolf 1995: 61) viewpoint on manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are expected, observed and intended consequences that happen in DDRR programs. In this case, the integration of parts relates to the integration of the different parts of the DDRR programs which will eventually bring stability and continuity to both the Rwandan and the DRC societies. This

is the intended (manifest) aspect of the DDR programme in which ex-combatants are reintegrated into the Rwandan society and will make a contribution to the continuation and function of their communities.

Merton is also of the opinion that all social events and institutions are not inherently good or functional for society. Social events, like the DDRR programs, may have unintended (latent) consequences that are generally dysfunctional. The DDRR may have a latent or unintended consequence which may, for example, negatively affect the adaptation of Rwandan youth ex-combatants when returning to their new environment. Certain youth ex-combatants were not interested in the DDRR programs, and some have even returned to armed groups after being reintegrated with their families. This is the latent or unintended consequence of the DDRR programs. It also refers to the dysfunctionality for the youth ex-combatants when returning to Rwanda and face the rejection by their family and community members. This would mean that the programs may be functional for the aid agencies, but dysfunctional for the ex-combatants.

This chapter will discuss some of the approaches of aid agencies and provide answers to the three specific research questions formulated, namely:

- (a) Why and how Rwandan became involved in armed conflict, and how do they cope with their situation?
- (b) What are the effects of armed conflict on child ex-combatants? Are they always the victims of conflicts?
- (c) How do the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programs set up by aid agencies seek to identify and address youth ex-combatants' needs as they relate to reintegration in their home communities?

2.2. Why and how do Youth Participate in Armed Conflicts?

With the establishment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN study on the impact of armed conflicts on young children led by Graça Machel in the 1990s, an abundant literature on the global problem of the use of young people as soldiers has been developed (Gupta 2000, Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994:93-98).

The widely held assumption by most of the literature and scholars as well as aid agencies has been that youth participate in armed conflicts because they are forced or coerced by government and militia groups. According to this theory, youth are passive victims and recipients of the violence of adults. They are generally perceived as those who can only play a small role in decision-making that affect their own social lives (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 9). Some authors such as Cohn and Goodwin-Gill (1994: 35-36) questioned the evaluative capacity of children to recognize the consequences of joining armed groups. According to them, children join armed groups, not out of conscious and deliberate decision, but due to socialization (through family, media and community members) or indoctrination which “negates any presumption of voluntary participation”. It is, therefore, believed that although some children do actively participate in political ideology and conflicts, this is not because they have the capacity to make fully informed choices among those competing ideologies (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994: 35, Easton & Dennis 1969: 36-47).

The majority of literature documented how state and non-state armed groups abduct youth from homes, villages, schools, markets and even from refugee camps. Those who live in conflict zones are considered to be particularly vulnerable because they can easily be lured to join fighting groups who offer them food and clothing. Armed leaders also

believe that youth have certain valuable qualities to be soldiers - youth are often believed to be easily manipulated to undertake adventurous duties such as advancing into landmines, they are not a threat of competition for leadership, and they pose moral challenges for enemies to shoot at them, or not (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 2002:24-29).

These kinds of generalized assumptions have led to the belief that the participation of youth in political and military action is only because of coercion, brainwashing or innocence. Only a few scholars and aid agencies in recent times have admitted that, in some cases, young people may be involved in political struggle as a reasoned strategy and justifiable option given the particular situation they find themselves in (Boyden & de Berry 2004, Hart & Tyrer 2006).

In recent times, social scientists have refocused their attention on the perspective that young people may resort to a variety of survival strategies, including joining armed forces as fighters, in order to cope with severe situations they find themselves in (Boyden & de Berry 2004). Joining armed groups may become the only viable option for some young people whose choices have run out, and "given situations of extreme danger and deprivation, children's choice to participate in war often constitutes a sensible adaptive strategy" (West 2004:120, McIntyre 2005:4). These views stress the need to learn more about the strategies youth employ to deal with the situation they find themselves in, and ensure that they are strengthened rather than replaced (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 10).

This contemporary research based view of youth as active participants disagree with the generalized and romanticized concept of childhood, innocence, and forced participation in conflicts which ignore the fact that many young people indeed join armed groups voluntarily, some times with advantageous outcome. Authors such as Carins (1996:108-

109) cautions not to see all war affected children as passive victims of hostilities but as 'an active part in the on-going political struggles in their society. The youth are familiar with current political arguments and have a political affiliation with a particular ideology.' Complementing this argument, De Waal and Argenti (2002:22) wrote: "significant numbers of middle teenage soldiers are not only well-informed volunteers, but that they have gained many advantages from serving as soldiers." According to the authors, youth could gain certain advantages such as personal emancipation by becoming active soldiers, and their withdrawal from war might even put them back to illiteracy, early marriage or domestic servant status. Therefore, 'to treat [every child] as merely deceived would be to depoliticise their objectives,' and 'to allege them as innocent removes them from the conditions and ideologies that generate violence' (De Waal & Argenti 2002: 22, Kemper 2005: 37).

Indeed, these arguments that acknowledge youths' active participation in armed conflicts could be traced back to previous centuries. For instance, in the Medieval Europe, in Germany, and Italy, it was two 12-year-old boys who initiated and led resistance and uprisings by ushering a crowd of between 20,000 – 30,000 people (Mcintyre 2005: 14). In the mid 20th century in Britain, many children took part in various strikes demanding payments for attending school and the lowering of school leaving age (Mcintyre 2005: 14).

More recently, the case of young South Africans and their active role in the struggle against *apartheid* (separateness or segregation) is cited as a celebrated example of youth as active political actors. In 1976 it was the South African black youth who initiated the protest against the Apartheid education system in Soweto, marking the beginning of anti-Apartheid opposition (Das & Reynolds 2003:8-9). During that period, thousands of

children and youth were imprisoned for their roles in initiating resistance. As Das and Reynolds (2003:8-9) summarizes it:

“The children, now youth ... completely reject their characterization as victims, and instead define themselves as a revolutionary force that was engaged in a political project.For these young people, what is at stake is their place in history. ... they seek recognition of their contribution to the evolution of a new polity.”

Similarly, in the USA in the 1960s, Martin Luther King (Carson 1998:205-208) had acknowledged young people's active involvement in civil rights movements and the struggle against racism. Teenagers as young as sixteen 'understood the stakes they were fighting for' and joined the non-violence anti-racism marches. Many of these young people were imprisoned (Carson 1998:205-208).

Boyden (2004:250) also reminds us not to underestimate the fact that some children are politically and socially more aware and active than adults often assume. For example, in the Occupied Territories, some young Palestinians have developed a political consciousness from an early age. Initially their involvement in the anti-Israel movement was thought to be due to manipulation and brainwashing by adult extremists. Later, however, it was acknowledged that the youth were indeed motivated in the struggle as a result of a strong feeling of socio-economic injustice and political marginalisation (Boyden 2004: 250). Their participation in the political struggle, even as 'stone throwers' has helped them to develop some kind of self-respect and pride, rather than just being passive victims. A study, sampling over 700 Palestinian youth who actively participated in the conflict, "exhibited elevated self-esteem despite the high percentage of reported depression symptoms" (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994: 111).

In some cases children are motivated to join armed groups for more personal and self-serving reasons. This was the case when some Tigrean young girls in Ethiopia joined

the rebel group in the 1990s in order to escape early, unwanted marriages (Mcintyre 2005: 112).

Machel (1996:15-22) in her groundbreaking report on the impact of conflict on children, which researched young soldiers all over the world, pointed out that some children voluntarily become soldiers for their protection, including to escape human right violations such as mass killings and rape by armed groups. Some take up arms to gain power or to get their voices heard, a motivation thus similar to adults. This was the case in the mid 1980s when thousands of children joined the Ugandan National Resistance Army (NRA) to escape from the brutal Obote's government troops rampaging families and communities. Once the youth joined NRA, they 'found a home, stability... and the prospect of promotion' (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994: 97).

2.3. What are the Effects of Armed Conflicts on Youth Ex-combatants?

Within contemporary social sciences, the view of youth and young people as having the capacity to play an important role in the development of their own lives, even in situations of armed conflicts, has become increasingly popular. While this view portrays children as resilient in times of conflict, it does not imply that all children are somehow immune to extreme sufferings (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 10). Rather, it questions the simplistic assumption of suffering as an inevitable phenomenon, and the need to acknowledge youth's coping strategies. In this way, "the approach holds great promises on the youth's ability in post-conflict reintegration and reconstruction because it envisions them as active agents rather than limiting them to their role as victims defined by their age" (Kemper 2005: 39).

However, this view is not often reflected in the DDDR programs implemented by many aid agencies and policy makers (Hart & Tyrer 2006: 9-10). The vast majority of research with young people affected by armed conflicts has been conducted by Western psychologists and psychiatrists who disproportionately put emphasis on the negative emotional impact and the devastating effects of conflicts (Newman 2004: 8). Because childhood is viewed as a joyful time characterized by innocence, leisure and learning, the appropriate places for young people are considered to be the home and the school, but not workplace or battlefields. In such a way, policies and interventions to help youth affected by conflicts have been shaped by Western medical research focusing on the devastating impacts of war on youth's psychological development and mental health. The youth are portrayed as victims of 'psychological dysfunctionality', and dependants on adult protection (Carlson, Mackeson & Allen 2000: 58-59; McIntyre 2005:131; Pupavac 2001: 9).

According to this view, because of youth's particular vulnerability to the horrific and catastrophic physical and psycho-social effect of war, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its disastrous consequences are inevitable and universal (Gupta 2000; Garbarino et al 1991:26; Machel 1996; Apfel & Simon 1996). PTSD became the basic strand of the victim theory with a discourse rooted to the findings in the aftermath of the Second World War and recently as a result of the defeated and demoralized US veterans in the Vietnam War. After being accepted as a disorder, PTSD discourse has become the 'disorder *du jour*', its meaning stretched to encompass not only major global catastrophes, but also to relatively minor incidents such as car accidents (Newman 2004: Boyden & de Berry 2005: xiii; Pupavac 2001: 5).

Central to this approach is that because children witness a series of traumatic incidents that are outside the realm of 'normal human experience', they are essentially

traumatized and have become helplessly dysfunctional (Newman 2004: 9). It is believed that the effect of PTSD among war-affected children is manifested through nightmares, night terrors and lack of sleep (Apfel & Simon 1996:1-18). Youth who have been psychologically socially traumatized due to their involvement in conflict may not be able to restart fruitful lives unless they receive psychological and emotional treatment (Apfel & Simon 1996:9-11).

Trauma counselling has now become an integral part of humanitarian interventions. Various humanitarian agencies such as UNICEF, Save the Children and the World Health Organization (WHO) have spent millions of dollars to address PTSD in war zones around the globe. These aid agencies believe that a given community that experienced armed conflict is bound to suffer from PTSD and hence will be in need of psychological assistance. This way, the whole population is labelled as traumatized (Pupavac 2001:4).

Indeed, there is some compelling evidence to show the horrors, the atrocities, the physical and psychological effects of war on children. But humanitarian aid agencies, partly in order to easily attract global attention and funding for their programs, do put disproportionate emphases on the devastating consequences of conflicts on children. Because aid agencies believe that “time does not heal trauma”, the preferred mode of intervention, in this case, has been psychological and emotional treatment to war affected youth through individualized counselling and re-education (Gupta 2000: relief web 2003). For instance, a survey conducted by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), in Sierra Leone, concluded that 99 per cent of young people who witnessed armed violence had high levels of disturbances that were believed to be indicative of severe PTSD. However, the survey ignored the normal adoptive distress symptoms with clinical conditions. The survey indicated such symptoms as ‘avoidance of situations, locations, conversations, or people’ by some young people as some of the aspects of the

psychological impact of the civil war. But the survey ignored the fact that a certain degree of unusual symptoms such as avoidance of people amidst brutal conflicts could be a sensible course of action, and should hardly be regarded as psychological disturbance or pathological response (Pupavac 2001:6). By considering these symptoms as causing dysfunctionality rather than mere reactions to the ordeals without significantly affecting individuals functions, the PTSD analysis 'generates large overestimates of the numbers needing treatment' for psychological trauma (Summerfield 2000: 1454).

According to Summerfield (2000:232), 'features of post-traumatic stress disorder are often epiphenomenal and not what survivors are attending to or consider important: most of them remain active and effective in the face of continuing hardship and threat'. The psychological approach builds a mechanistic relationship between the youth who are affected by conflict and the resulting traumatic impact, leading to the assumption and stigmatisation of the youth as inferior humans with psychological problems. This view is criticized as 'a theory of reductionism: diminution of child to victims' that ignores the important mediating factors such as personal, and socio-political contexts that greatly influences the impact of conflict on youth (Mcintyre 2005:12, Apfel & Simon 1996:12-13). Esprit de corps, comradeship, political engagement and the sense of aim in the war greatly mitigate psychological breakdown in times of armed conflicts. Cultural norms also play a role. For instance, in Uganda, Liberia and Angola, a sense of forgiveness through a religious cleansing ceremony for war affected youth provided a sense of normality and post-recovery, and acceptance by the community (Verhey 2001:17-18). Under apartheid South Africa, many conscripts were young people (between 17-20 years old). Later, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) established in 1995, allocated hearings dedicated to conscription entitled "Conscripts: Neither Victims nor

Perpetrators.” Here the attempt was to make a public intervention based on the religious (Christian) norms and values of the TRC process.

Without denying the existence of trauma and sufferings among the youth in situations of armed conflicts, I argue, in support of the findings of current social scientists, that youth are not inherently vulnerable and that there is a need for learning more about the coping strategies employed in order to deal with the adverse situation. Instead of solely focusing on the psychological consequences of conflict, there is also a need for focusing on the wider social, political and economic factors that greatly mediate the impact (Boyden & Berry 2004: xvi). These research findings show that there is no sound empirical basis for a generalization that risks stigmatising of all young people affected by war as sick, permanently damaged and universally vulnerable to psychological and social dysfunctionality. This approach promotes the belief that ‘the next two generations’ of young people may not recover but will ever be vulnerable to relapse. However, ‘a history of violence should not be equated with a history of psychological trauma or greater susceptibility’ (Pupavac 2001: 6). According to the author:

“If there is any correlation it may be the reverse of that assumed by international policy-makers, that is, the background of communities used to hardship means that they are likely to be remarkably resilient in the face of adversity. This factor helps explain why international aid workers, including trauma counsellors, appear to be more susceptible to secondary or vicarious trauma, than the recipient populations who have experienced primary trauma.”

2.4 How Do the DDDR Programs Respond to the Needs of Youth Ex-combatants?

Efforts to protect young people in times of armed conflicts have traditionally been framed in terms of international humanitarian and human rights law, the earliest being the League of Nations’ 1924 adoption of the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child

(Newman 2004: 5). Within this framework, the use of children as soldiers in armed conflicts has been viewed as a global problem that requires a global response.

There are at least four types of international legal standards in relation to youth affected by armed conflicts: international human rights law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law and international labour law (Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org).

In the late 1940s, following World War II, the International Humanitarian Law (the Geneva Convention) and the International Human Rights Law became the two most important legal protection standards of children and other civilians during armed conflicts (Harvey 2000: 6-7).

In the 1970s more declarations took place including the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict. Later on, Additional Protocol I and II were adapted to the Geneva Conventions. Additional Protocol I set out and raised, for the first time, the minimum age requirement for recruitment in armed conflicts from 15 to 18 years old. Additional Protocol II addressed non-international conflicts, i.e. civil wars within states, and recognized that children needed protection from being recruited by fighting groups (Machel 1996, Harvey 2000: 6-7). The International Labour Organization (ILO), in its campaign against forced labour, labelled child soldiering as the 'Worst Forms of Child Labour', making it the most widely ratified labour convention. (Kemper 2005: 15).

However, the first and explicit legal convention regarding children in the context of armed conflict came in 1989 with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Among others, CRC saw the issue of child soldiering from a human rights perspective and urged 'States' to provide care for children in armed conflict situations by

way of psycho-social and physical recovery and social reintegration within their families and communities (Machel 1996:15-22).

The last decade has also seen the growing attention and interest by the international community on war-affected children. In 1993, Graça Machel³ was appointed by the UN Secretary-General to write a report on the Impact of Conflict on Children. The report, which attracted worldwide attention, presented detailed human right assessment of youth in difficult circumstances by using the CRC as the framework of analysis. It focused not only on the impact of conflict on children, but also on the impact on refugee and internally displaced children, child victims of landmines and sanctions (Machel 1996: 80-81). One year later, the outcome of the report led to the establishment of the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General at the United Nations Head Quarters in New York for children in armed conflict. In 1998, a new policy came out from the UN Secretary-General that would require that civilian as well as military observers in any United Nations peacekeeping mission should be over 25 years old.

In 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was adopted prohibiting compulsory and voluntary recruitment of youth by state and non-state armed forces. One hundred and ten countries signed this convention while 42 countries ratified it. In recent times, there were more international legal instruments including The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which was the first regional treaty established to protect children from recruitment.

³ Graça Machel was the former Minister of Education as well as the wife of the late Samora Machel who was the freedom fighter and president of Mozambique. She is now married to Nelson Mandela, ex-president of South Africa (1994-1999).

Indeed, the creation, adoption and development of various international laws show the growing global commitments to tackle the problem of child soldiering. The number of countries that have ratified various conventions (such as CRC) to protect children from armed conflict is quite impressive and there has generally been a consensus that the UN as well as the international community should intervene to stop the use of children as soldiers. Despite the keen efforts, however, the portrayal of young people as the victims of war and in need of adult protection has contributed very little to neither to understanding of their specific needs, nor to eliminate the recruitment by state and non-state armed forces (Mcintyre 2005: 77).

In responding to the needs of youth in situations of armed conflicts, international aid agencies, backed by the CRC, have assumed a consensus on the prevalence of severe psychological and emotional trauma among youth ex-combatants. Treating youth's psychological trauma has been the primary focus of DDDR activities by aid agencies. For example, a UNICEF document reported that 'the world has only just begun to realise that if left untreated, the psychological wounds of war can be most damaging, as children grow up unable to function normally, often driven to perpetuate the violence they have experienced' (UNICEF 1994, UNICEF 1996). In supporting this view, Article 39 of the CRC requires 'member states to take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim.'

In recent times, social scientists have increasingly become critical of the limited scope of the international laws and treaties including CRC in achieving their objectives to protect children in armed conflicts and halting the underage recruitment. Despite the adoption of CRC and other international instruments, the number of youth combatants has increased, reaching the current number of over 300,000 in 60 countries. Africa has over 120,000 youth soldiers or persons active in warrior roles for various reasons.

Part of the problem is that the concept and understanding of childhood in those international instruments has little relevance to African contexts. As argued earlier, the definition of childhood and the cut-off age for childhood as 18 “reflects more the Euro Atlantic historical criterion for military conscription than the socio-economic basis of childhood in Africa” (Mcintyre 2005: 135). The highly acclaimed CRC and its definition of a child soldier do not take into account some of the personal incentives for children to participate in conflicts. Its fixation on a biological age category has caused “a major flow of DDDR programs” because a significant number of youth combatants become ineligible for assistance just because they reach the age of 18 years (Kemper 2005: 23).

There is also an inherent shortcoming in the international declarations. When it comes to enforcement of the treaties, the mechanism has been one of just reporting and inquiries. According to the CRC and other conventions, state parties must submit regular reports to an international committee on steps taken to fulfil their treaty obligations to stop the use of children as soldiers. Unfortunately, these committees have no authority to receive critical reports from other states, NGOs or individuals. The committees do not have any power to intervene and penalize the defenders. The best the committees can do is to write recommendations for improvement.

According to Cohn and Goodwin-Gill (1994:56-70), the impotency of international laws in stopping the use of young people as soldiers is because conflicts have changed their nature while the international law remained the same. Contemporary armed conflicts are predominantly characterized by ethnic conflicts and insurgencies that are beyond the scope of existing international humanitarian law. Guerrilla-like armed groups are not bound by and do not ratify the humanitarian laws, or they have very little respect for

international declarations. Even when states violate international law such as CRC which they ratified, the international community can do little to enforce compliance.

The application of international law in the context of Rwandan youth fighters who are associated with armed forces in the DRC is unique: the fact that the fighting is between the Rwandan government (state party) and the Rwandan rebels (non-state party), and that the latter is based in another state (the DRC)⁴, blurs the issue of responsibility and the scope of legal protection.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the functionalist theoretical perspective as the overarching framework of the three related approaches, assumptions and answers to research questions. Accordingly, in answering the first research question, the chapter highlighted that youth ex-combatants should not be considered as immature children who are always forced by adults to join armed groups. Various writings, particularly those that advocate the functionalist perspective show that in addition to external coercion and forced recruitment, some youth and young people become involved in armed conflicts voluntarily for different and sometimes justifiable reasons in order to survive. In this way, the chapter highlights the need to understand some of the socio-cultural practices and meanings surrounding the youth that make the participation in conflict somehow justifiable.

The chapter presented the second research question and related assumptions. In analysing how armed conflicts affect the youth, the chapter presents that not all conflicts cause mass psychological trauma and social dysfunctionality. Some youth come out of

⁴ see Chapter 3 for background information on the conflict

armed conflicts with certain resilience and advantages including pride, maturity and respect from their families and communities.

The theoretical assumptions, research questions and related assumptions are discussed in this chapter. Accordingly, the chapter argues that the DDDR programs of international aid agencies often rely on the assumption that the majority of youth are abducted or forced by armed groups to join to fight, and that they are all victims of mass trauma as a result of conflicts. As a result of this assumption, aid agencies frame their analyses of child ex-combatants' as powerless and helpless victims, with serious psychological and social trauma. This approach leads to inappropriate post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration interventions because it over-emphasises 'psychological trauma treatment' as a solution while it ignores the complex socio-economic and cultural dynamics that could highly mitigate and influence on how armed conflicts affect the youth.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE RWANDAN CONFLICT

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the historical background to the Rwandan conflict covering the period of colonialism to the 1994 genocide. It outlines how a long history of oppression and inequality between the Hutu and Tutsi population has been systematically politicized by colonialists and how this has been developed, consolidated and transformed into contemporary ideology of racism and ethnic hatred among the Rwandan refugees.

This chapter will discuss some of the key socio-political and economic events in post-colonial Rwanda, which led to the gradual polarization of ethnic division between the Hutu and Tutsi. The chapter will show how the regional political and social dynamics in Uganda, Burundi and the DRC have helped both Hutu and Tutsi refugees to construct a collective identity defined by the notion of re-claim to their homeland.

Finally, the chapter will demonstrate the interrelationship between how and why the international community failed to stop the genocide (dysfunctionality) and how that inaction led to the presence of the current significant number of Hutu rebels including youth combatants in the region.

3.2 From Colonialism to Ethnic Hatred and Genocide

Before colonialism, ethnic differences in Rwanda were very fluid and arbitrary to the extent that social mobility of Hutu and Tutsi was possible in the society (Gourevitch

1998:47-50). However, Belgium and German colonial powers managed to invent and institutionalize racial differences in Rwanda and consolidated the political control in the hands of the minority Tutsi⁵ who were said to be more civilized than their Hutu counterparts (Gourevitch 1998:49).

Colonial powers characterized the Tutsi as perfectly constituted, “a European under a black skin” and “superb human”, therefore civilized (Mamdani 2001:103). According to the colonial administration, ‘the secret of Tutsi domination lay in their innate superiority of intelligence and smartness’ (Malkki 1995:25). The Hutu, on the other hand, were considered as natives of Rwanda, “passive obedient”, “less beautiful”, and “ignorant” (Malkki 1995:302). The social institutions such as schools and churches that were run by missionaries of the colonial powers echoed the ethnic differences and excluded the Hutu from having access to them (Mamdani 2001:112).

The Hutu were made to believe that the Tutsi are non-indigenous who have emigrated from East Africa to rule them (Malkki 1995:26-28; Prunier 1995:5-13). In 1930, the Belgium authorities conducted a population census and identity cards were issued to each Rwandan citizen stating who is a Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, based on physical appearance and ownership of herds. Both Tutsi and Hutu continued to embrace this ideology with the former pleased with their superiority and the latter angry with their fate as a low caste.

In the 1950s, decolonisation was unfolding throughout Africa. Rwanda underwent a similar social revolution that resulted in the ousting of not only the Belgians but also the minority Tutsi elites, in what the Hutus claimed to be ‘double liberation’ (Mamdani

⁵ Although there are three ethnic groups in Rwandan (Hutu, Tutsi and Twa), in most cases only the Hutus and Tutsis are mentioned due to the fact that the Twa population constitutes only 1% of the population and were not at the center of the political turmoil in Rwanda.

2001:103). This 'double liberation' disintegrated Tutsi power in Rwanda. Various senior government and local authority positions in churches, schools and courts previously held by Tutsi elites, were now transferred to Hutu chiefs, forcing a significant number of the former to go in exile in neighbouring countries, notably Uganda.

Following the 1959 Revolution, Grégoire Kayibanda, the Hutu leader, began to advocate a radical racist policy of segregation. The Tutsi became completely excluded from the political and social arena in the country. In response, some Tutsi guerrillas in exile launched offensive attacks against the new administration, but this only led the Kayibanda regime to conduct reprisal killings against the local Tutsi population as they became the prime suspect for supporting the guerrillas.

3.3 The 1973 Revolution – Road Map to Reconciliation?

In 1973, Major General Juvénal Habyarimana led a bloodless coup that overthrew Kayibanda, and became the president of Rwanda. He immediately declared equal socio-economic and political access for all Rwandans – Hutu and Tutsi alike.

For the next few years under Habyarimana, Rwanda saw less ethnic violence and its economy prospered. The good time did not last long, however. In the 1980s and 1990s, the international coffee price plummeted unexpectedly by 50 percent, taking its economic toll on many coffee-exporting countries. In Rwanda, 'income from coffee exports fell from US \$144 million in 1985 to US \$30 million in 1993' (Mamdani 2001:147). The Structural Adjustment Program as well as a high military spending to quell the Tutsi rebels had also a negative impact on the economic performance of the country. Notwithstanding, President Habyarimana still seemed dedicated to his policy of reconciliation and equality between the Hutu and Tutsi. In fact, he initiated a negotiation

process with the Ugandan authorities to facilitate the voluntary return of Tutsi refugees to Rwanda.

According to some scholars and aid agencies, it was at this time of reformation and not repression that the Tutsi rebels in Uganda, known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), launched an offensive attack against the Rwandan government (Mamdani 2001:160). This invasion was seen by some critics as a step backward as it threatened the positive development that was taking place. Some also accused RPF leaders of being power hungry. For some RPF members however, the critics lacked full understanding and appreciation of the plight and suffering of Tutsi refugees in Uganda that instigated the invasion.⁶

3.4 Identity Crisis in Uganda and the Birth of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPT)

The birth of RPF should be seen from a regional context, particularly in relation to the socio-political and citizenship crisis in Uganda that threatened the status of Tutsi refugees there (Mamdani 2001:159-184)

An estimated half a million Banyarwanda (Tutsi) living in Uganda in the 1960s were subject to prejudices and discriminations both by local communities and Obote's government. In order to protect their rights and possibly facilitate the return of refugees to Rwanda, some educated Tutsi in exile formed a political organization known as the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU) in 1989.

The coming to power of Idi Amin in Uganda was favourable for the Rwandan Tutsi refugees as he was more accommodative and sympathetic to the Tutsi cause. However,

⁶ Personal interviews with ex- RPF member, Ruhengeri, Rwanda, 2004

due to a poor human rights record under Idi Amin, the Tutsi joined the anti-Amin guerrilla force, namely the Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA) led by Yoweri Museveni. Disappointed with the Tutsi's decision, Amin launched an aggressive and systematic attack against the Tutsis in Uganda, killing thousands of refugees. Their property was confiscated, their land appropriated and some of them were forced to flee to Rwanda, only to be refused entry by the Rwandan government.

In 1986, UNLA ousted Amin's regime with extensive support from the Rwandan Tutsi rebels. In recognition to their contribution, Fred Rwigyema and Paul Kagame⁷ both Rwandan Tutsi, became top military officers within the Ugandan army. The Ugandan President, Museveni decreed freedom to all Rwandan nationals in his country and gave citizenship to those who wish to remain in Uganda.

The favourable treatment of Rwandans by the Museveni's regime did not last long, however. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, anti-Rwanda sentiment quickly grew accusing them of taking over the local population's land. Initially Museveni attempted to defend the Rwandans, but later, mainly for fear of losing popular support, he took side against Rwandans. Since then Rwandans were treated as second-class citizens (or mere refugees) who do not deserve equal citizenship entitlement and ownership of land as the local Ugandans. Some Rwandan army officials in UNLA began to be accused of conspiring with Rwandan refugees to acquire land from Ugandans. Soon, Museveni removed Fred Rwigyema, who was the most senior Rwandan army officer within the UNLA. These new dynamics clearly showed the Rwandans in exile (RPF) that it was time to go home whatever the price would be. In 1990 RPF 'invaded' Rwanda.

⁷ Now the President of Rwanda

3.5 The Beginning of the Rwandan Civil War and Genocide

The first RPF attack against the Rwandan Hutu government occurred on 1 October 1990. Initially, RPF seemed disorganized and many of its members were killed during combat. But by mid and end of 1991, RPF, under the command of Paul Kagame, gained momentum and controlled a significant part of the Rwandan-Ugandan border. It advanced well in to the Rwandan territories causing a large number of Hutu local population to flee their villages for fear of being killed by the Tutsi 'invaders'. The government launched a relentless radio propaganda advising the local population to defend themselves against the Tutsi invaders. Panic surfaced as the Tutsi's return was portrayed as a definite return of the pre-revolutionary operation of the Hutu (Prunier 1995:167-168).

A few Hutu extremists within the Rwandan government disseminated the ideology of the need to preserve power among the Hutus only, what came to be known as 'Hutu Power'. The ideology preached that the Hutus must keep political power because they are indigenous as well as the majority in Rwanda. The Tutsi were considered as non-indigenous, immigrants from the north, and they should be sent back to their origins. The infamous (but popular at that time) "hate radio" known as Radio et Télévision Libres des Mille Collines (RTLM), became the primary media tool to preach the 'Hutu Power', and convinced the majority of local Hutu that the total elimination of the Tutsi 'cockroach' is the pre-requisite for the survival of the Hutu (Gourevitch 1998: 49).

On April 7, 1994, Rwanda's president, Juvenal Habyarimana, was killed when his plane was shot down in Kigali. The ruling government party quickly organized youth militia groups known as *Interahamwe* (translated as "those who attack together"). These young children were comprised of unemployed and displaced youth who lacked socio-

economic opportunities to live a normal life. When the government incorporated them in its militia, they felt included and were enthusiastic to do whatever they were told to do. The *Interahamwe* was quickly transformed into a death squad whose young members led the house-to-house search and exterminating every single Tutsi and moderate Hutu they could find.

As RPF advanced, RTLM reinforced its incitement of local authorities and ordinary farmers, advising them to identify and kill all the Tutsi found in the hills of Rwanda. The people were advised to take this 'job' seriously just as other communal work such as bush clearing, using machetes, clubs, etc. By the end of the genocide, close to 1 million people were killed in a matter of 100 days.

A number of authors have documented detailed individual accounts of the gruesome genocide (Gourevitch 1998; Peterson 2000: 247-300). This study will not attempt to go into further details on how the genocide unfolded. However, the question of why a massive number of Hutu – adult men, women and children - allowed themselves to participate in the killings, is worth mentioning here.

There have been various explanations and theories in answering why so many people decided to kill so many of their fellow citizens, neighbours and even family members. Some scholars thought that it was because the Hutu were racists who considered the Tutsi as evil and exploitative (Uvin 1998:138-139). Others thought "the broad participation of tens of thousands of ordinary Hutus undoubtedly was a function of Rwanda's by-now notorious culture of obedience" (Berkeley 2002:105). Many individual observers, particularly expatriate aid workers in Rwanda, also share this view.⁸ The theory, although it might serve as one explanation to the question, echoes the mythical

⁸ Personal interviews and informal discussions.

imagery portrayed by the colonial Belgium. It assumes the Hutu killed because they were docile and obedient (Mamdani 2001:200).

Other scholars on Rwanda such as Prunier (1995:353) thought economics was one of the reasons why the Hutu killed their neighbours. He believed that to survive the precarious economic situation of Rwanda and to grab land as well as property of the Tutsi, the Hutu were eager to commit murder, even their own family members. However, one might question this generalization as there are many very poor countries in the world which did not go into genocide when clashes over scarce resources break out, such as Ethiopia, Senegal, Burkina-Faso and others.

The Catholic Church had played a major and direct role in the genocide (Prunier 1995:244). This was evident from the fact that most of the major killings of the genocide took place in churches, where the victims thought they would find sanctuaries.⁹ It is a paradox that while about 80% of Rwandans are Christians, many church leaders and members participated in the killings of their own followers. Part of the explanation for this could go back to the time of European colonialists when initially the Tutsi were privileged to dominate major social institutions including the church. The Belgian colonialists had systematically introduced and manipulated racist ideology that polarized the Hutu as subjects and the Tutsi who are 'white men with black skin' as intellectually superiors. After the Hutu came to power in the 1959 revolution, the ideology of hate against the Tutsi has been propagated by Hutu church leaders (Karangwa 2004: 49). Therefore, it was not a surprise that during the genocide, Hutu extremists who were church leaders at the time became active participants in planning and perpetrating the slaughter of their fellow Tutsi believers (Tom 2005: 1). The Roman Catholic Church in Rwanda, very close

⁹ Personal visits of the genocide sites in Rwanda.

to the genocidal government, did not denounce the killings, and has not apologized for its role to date (Caplan 2004:35-36).

I would also argue that in addition to the above explanations, the precedence of neighbouring Burundi sheds light on why the mass of Hutu people decided to kill Tutsi.

Burundi had a strikingly similar socio-political setting, although initially the victims were mainly the Hutus. In 1972, an estimated 80,000 to 200,000 Burundian Hutu were killed by the ruling Tutsi. The killing was characterized as 'genocide' (Malkki 1995: 33). In 1993, the democratically elected Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye was assassinated in a military coup by extremist Tutsi. Following this events, tens of thousands of Hutu civilians were slaughtered while many were forced to flee to Rwanda (Malkki 1995:285-286). The Rwandan Hutu observed this tragedy cautiously and concluded that it was a clear proof of the evil nature of the Tutsi. Their chilling conclusion was to exterminate the Tutsi before the fate of Burundi repeats itself in Rwanda.

The Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR), Lt. General Roméo Dallaire, warned the international community that genocide was about to happen. However, the UN Security Council decided that since there was no peace to keep as the ceasefire was not respected by the fighting parties, the UN mission should pull out of Rwanda. This decision was reverted later and instead it was decided that a very small number of 'token' peacekeepers should remain with the main objective of protecting foreign expatriates and UN personnel. By the time the genocide was in full swing, UNAMIR was only able to protect and evacuate Western expatriates, leaving the local Rwandans to be murdered - often in front of armed UN peacekeepers (Barnett 2002:112-152). As the slaughter of Rwandan Tutsi was unfolding, 'an electronic mail debate has been going on about the possibility of an "emergency airlift"... for the

mountain gorillas, to save them from the violence and possible extinction' (Malkki 1995:295)

The genocide came to an end when RPF won the war over the Rwandan regime. It was at this time that the French government announced it would launch 'Opération Turquoise' to assist in the 'humanitarian intervention'. This humanitarian operation protected and provided assistance to more than 2 million fleeing Hutu refugees, among them prominent perpetrators and participants of the genocide. The victims and survivors of the genocide were not the concern of 'Opération Turquoise'. The callous act of the international community, particularly France was well summarized by Mamdani (2001:254-255). He wrote:

"The French had deliberately and effectively used humanitarianism as a cloak for the defence of narrow state interests. Through Opération Turquoise, France had gone out of its way to create a protective corridor to save those politically responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. The UN had watched the unfolding of the genocide in Rwanda without so much as lifting a finger. In similar fashion, they watched with complacency as refugee camps were established in the vicinity of international borders, and then as they were turned into camps to arm and train refugees."

Prunier (1995: 167-168) argues that the main reason France provided military and personnel to the genocidal regime was because it was paranoid that the 'Anglo-Saxon' Tutsi will overthrow the French speaking Rwandan regime, and will undermine the French presence and influence in Africa.

To date, the remnants of the *génocidaires* who were protected and sheltered by international aid agencies are in large numbers found in the jungles of the eastern DRC. They are currently fighting the Rwandan government and their soldiers include many boys and girls recruited from the refugee camps, villages and markets. For these

children and youth, combat appeared to be a viable survival strategy in a country where the socio-economic base had totally collapsed.

3.6 Conclusion

The Rwandan genocide is directly linked to the 19th century colonial power (Belgium) that institutionalised racism and hatred among the two dominant groups of people, the Hutu and Tutsi.

However, the full context of the Rwandan civil war and its devastating results should also be seen from a regional perspective. The chapter has highlighted that the main reason why RPF invaded Rwanda was due to the citizenship and identity crisis it faced in Uganda. The invasion had also led to the creation of Hutu extremists who believed that the elimination of Tutsi was the prerequisite for the survival of Hutu. The 'Hutu Power' was rooted in the ideology that the Tutsi are of different race, and not indigenous to Rwanda, as initially thought by Belgian colonialists.

The chapter has outlined the cultural, socio-economical and political theories argued by various scholars to answer why the genocide occurred. The chapter has also highlighted the response of the international community and how the combination of indifference, complacency and ignorance has directly resulted in the continuation of the war in the Great Lakes region. Currently, many génocidaires have found refuge in eastern DRC from where they are recruiting children for their offensive attack against Rwanda.

CHAPTER 4

RWANDAN YOUTH IN THE CURRENT CONFLICT

4.1 Introduction

Based on the field research in Rwanda and eastern DRC, this chapter will address the first two research questions and tentative hypotheses:

- 1) How and why the Rwandan children became involved in the armed conflict?
- 2) What are the impacts of the conflict on the youth?

As stated in the previous chapter, the victory of Tutsi RPF in 1994 over the genocidal Hutu regime triggered waves of Hutu refugees into neighbouring countries, mainly the DRC. Among the refugees seeking sanctuary were many Hutu extremists who perpetrated and carried out the genocide. The refugee camps were soon taken over by the *génocidaires* who became in-charge of aid distribution provided by the international community. Soon, the Hutu extremists launched active recruitment and military trainings in the refugee camps in order to attack the new Rwandan regime. Young children were recruited from the camps, homes and schools and became soldiers. While some were abducted, others joined voluntarily for various reasons including: to escape extreme poverty, anger as a result of the destruction of their camps by the Rwandan army, a sense of belonging to their ethnic group and a sense of personal security provided by the armed groups.

4.2 The Pattern of Youth Recruitment

The Kivu provinces of the DRC are the epicentres where ethnic violence and regional war exploded in the 1990s involving many countries including Rwanda. The influx of over 2 million Rwandan refugees into the Kivu province exacerbated the fragile ethnic turmoil there. To date, the question of nationality and the legal status of *Rwandohones* (Rwandans) in the Kivus of DRC remains one of the most pressing political problems that threatens regional peace in the Great Lakes (International Crisis Group 2003 (a):4-22).

Following the influx of the Hutu refugees to eastern DRC, the international community, under the coordination of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), rushed to assist the refugees with food and supplies. Intermingled with genuine refugee population were many Hutu extremists who planned and perpetrated the genocide. By now, they have become community leaders in camps, in charge of managing the distribution of UN supplies. Living off international aid, and supported by the DRC army, they reorganized themselves under the name of Rassemblement Démocratique pour la Rwanda (RDR). They began to attack Tutsi survivors in north western Rwanda (Caplan 2004:36).

In 1995, RDR intensified its infiltration into the Rwandan border towns of Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Cyangugu. It also recruited children from the refugee camps and Congolese villages. Indeed, child recruitment in the DRC had already been taking place by President Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Alliance des Forces Démocratique pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire (AFDL). The recruited children were known as *Kadogos*. (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004:11-12)

In 1996, RDR attacked the Banyamulenge of Tutsi origins who have now taken Congolese identity. In retaliation, this triggered a major RPF attack on Hutu refugee camps in the DRC. Although the attack was partially successful in that it undermined the capability of RDR, it did not eradicate it; the remaining RDR members fled into the vast jungles of the Kivus of DRC and other neighbouring countries. In 1997, the rebel groups have regrouped themselves under a new banner called *Peuple en Armes pour la Libération du Rwanda* (ALiR), and launched a new offensive attack in the north-western border of the Rwandan towns of Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Kibuye, selectively slaughtering Tutsi civilians including children. ALiR also established a strong alliance with the DRC army and *Forces de défense de la démocratie* (FDD) of Burundian Hutu rebels in DRC (International Crisis Group 2001:2-8).

In 2000, a division of ALiR attempted to infiltrate yet again the northern provinces of Rwanda (Gisenyi and Ruhengeri) but was defeated by the Rwandan army. Among the captured were, many ‘very young men, 12 to 16 years old, with little, if any, combat experience’ (International Crisis Group 2001:8). The remaining rebel members, who survived the defeat, fled to the jungles of eastern DRC.

From then on, ALiR renamed itself as Forces Démocratique de libération du Rwanda (FDLR).¹⁰ FDLR intensified its recruitment of members from the Rwandan refugee camps in eastern DRC and Tanzania; it also changed its strategy labelling itself as a legitimate Rwandan political opposition party. FDLR claimed that it will disarm its members only under the condition that there will be an inter-Rwandan dialogue that

¹⁰ Although this study mainly focuses on the Rwandan Hutu rebels, it is worthwhile to mention about two local Congolese rebel groups that recruit Rwandan children. These are 1) Goma-based and Rwandan backed *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD) and 2) *Mai Mai*, a local militia group for Congolese defense that sometimes aligns itself with FDLR. Both of these groups are known to have recruited Rwandan children

guarantees amnesty to all Hutu rebels (www.fdlr.org –Statement of FDLR on the Implementation of the Rome Declaration: 2005:1-2).¹¹The Rwandan government, on the other hand, flatly refused this because giving amnesty to all Hutu means giving amnesty to *génocidaires*.

The existence of FDLR elements in the Kivus of the DRC became Rwanda's genuine security concern and this has received wide recognition by the international communities (International Crisis Group 2001:3). This gave Rwanda the justification to maintain its troops in the Kivus, claiming that it has the right to seek and disarm the Hutu rebels from the DRC's soil because the UN Peacekeeping Mission is unable to do so. In recent times, the international community is not as sympathetic any more to Rwanda as it was during and in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. In 2000, the UN Panel of Experts (United Nations 2002) concluded that the objective of Rwanda's presence in the Kivus of the DRC is not only to attend its security concerns, but also to exploit the DRC's rich natural resources. In 2002, following pressure from the international community, a peace agreement was signed between Rwanda and the DRC that laid down the framework for the DRC to disarm the FDLR elements from its soil while Rwanda withdraws its forces from the DRC.

For some time, the government of the DRC seemed to cut its official alliance with FDLR, but soon FDLR continued to strengthen itself and never left the DRC altogether. By 2003, there were credible resources documenting that the DRC had restarted supplying arms to FDLR (International Crisis Group 2003 (b):3-9). Since then, FDLR has been at large in the Kivus of the DRC in the midst of the political turmoil in the Kivus, and "awaiting either a chance to negotiate, or for domestic conditions in Rwanda to be ripe

¹¹ FDLR argues that the Rwandan genocide was never pre-planned by the then government to kill civilians; instead it was a popular response to RPF's invasion from Uganda.

for an uprising. It is currently carrying out mobilization operations inside Rwanda.” (International Crisis Group 2003 (b):11). However, it is important to note at this juncture that although the bulk of Rwandan youth involved in the conflict come from FDLR, other state and non-state armed groups have also recruited children, including Mai Mai (Sewonet & Taouti-Cherif 2004). Although evidence is scratchy, there are also reports that the Rwandan government itself recruits children into its Local Defence Force, and its armed wing in the DRC known as *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma* (RCD-Goma) (Human Rights Watch 2004:www.hrw.org).

According to Save the Children Alliance, children who were separated from their families, had little or no education and those who found themselves in conflict zones were among the most vulnerable groups for recruitment (International Save the Children Alliance 1999:46-47). Most Rwandan children fell under this category. Following the genocide, there were over 100,000 unaccompanied Rwandan children because either they were orphans or were abandoned by their families for lack of means to provide care.

Some rebel groups targeted, or even preferred children to adults for recruitment because they believe that they are easily manipulated, less fearful. It is believed that having child soldiers cost less as they are not paid at all, or paid very little; they do not compete for status or promotion and are cheap. In addition, young soldiers may pose moral challenges to enemies. This was witnessed in Liberia when the rebels deliberately sent the children to the frontline to attack the West African Peace Keeping Mission (ECOMOG), in the belief that international peacekeepers would not fire at children (ChimaNikire 2001:7).

4.3 The Involvement and Role of Rwandan Children in the Armed Conflict

There is no accurate figure on the number of Rwandan youth involved in fighting or associated with the Hutu FDLR as well as other armed groups in the DRC. In fact, there is no authoritative number indicating the extent of youth involvement in general in the DRC because recruiters have shifted their activities further from towns to escape observation by outsiders. Access to the armed groups is very minimal or nonexistent. Nevertheless, the Rwandan government officials and the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), estimate that there are approximately 2,500 Rwandan youth involved in the conflict in the DRC (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004).

Three principal recruiters, FDLR, RCD-Goma and Mai Mai militias recruited children from the camps, streets, schools, markets and some times from homes. Out of the 17 boy ex-combatants interviewed, ten of them said they were forcefully recruited by RCD-Goma, while the remainder said they joined FDLR and Mai Mai groups voluntarily. Further inquiry on how 'voluntary' was the voluntary involvement, revealed that it was mainly due to lack of any other survival option, for protection or because some members of their families are already in one of the armed groups. As indicated previously, the attack by the Rwandan government against the Hutu refugee camps in the DRC destroyed the refugee camps and as a result a large number of children were separated from their families and relatives. They found themselves in the middle of fierce conflicts. Most of these children had no access to health care, education, shelter, food and water and had little alternatives but to join an armed group.

One interviewed boy who was recently demobilized and has been undergoing rehabilitation at Ruhengeri rehabilitation center, said:

“The war broke out between DRC government and Mai Mai. The Mai Mai used to come to people’s houses and recruit young children. They found me while I was at home and told me to join them. My friends who were with me were also taken. I tried to refuse but finally gave up and was taken for training for two months at the age of 14.” - 16 year old respondent.

Following Hutu FDLR’s infiltration to the Rwandan Northern provinces, Tutsi RPF attacked and destroyed most of the refugee camps in the DRC where the infiltrators were reorganizing themselves. Many Hutu children were killed and a significant number of them lost their parents and families. Although some of these children were taken care of by local Congolese families, many children felt unsafe and unprotected and decided to join armed groups, possibly in search of a substitute family.

The ethnic conflict in Rwanda and the DRC has resulted in the total elimination of trust at the community level. The lack of trust has seriously undermined the will of many children to go back to their communities, so they preferred to find protection from the roaming militias. A 17 year old demobilised boy who joined an armed group when he was 12, said:

“When we were in Shabunda, a Rwandan came and told us my father died in the camp. Some time after that there was fighting in Shabunda and I lost my mother, brother and sister. I was on my own and I was very scared. There were Mai Mai (Congolese armed group) soldiers in the forest. So I went to ask them if I could be with them. They accepted.”

The promise for food, shelter and other essentials for life were appealing to some children. A 20-year-old girl who self-demobilized and now lives in one of the Rwandan communes said:

“...I was living in Kinyanzovu (a village in Rwanda), and then infiltrators (FDLR) came from Congo (DRC) and I went with them so that they would feed me.”

Once recruited, most of the youth underwent a brief military and 'ideological' training. The ideological training included teaching the youth as to why FDLR was formed and what it is fighting for. Following the training, most of these young recruits were given Kalashnikovs and sent to fight in the frontline, while others served as personal guards for commanders. Still others provided supportive roles such as fetching or looting water and food from villages, cooking, cleaning and guarding anti-bullet medicines.¹² Should there be a shortage of manpower in the frontline, the latter group were also summoned to fight.

Some youth joined armed groups willingly, including for political and social reasons, the latter being a sense of belonging to their ethnic group (Hutu). Both reasons are not surprising, as Rwandan children are known for creating alliances to their ethnic groups and actively participation in political riots in the past (Berkeley 2002: 111-113). This was evident during the genocide regime when thousands of young children and youth who were frustrated as a result of widespread unemployment and displacement, voluntarily joined the government-sponsored youth militia group known as *Interahamwe* (this youth group was the primary killing machine in the slaughtering of thousands of Tutsis in 1994).

Most of the interviewed demobilized young ex-combatants were extraordinarily aware of the events that took place in Rwanda in 1994. Rather than being too traumatized to speak about their experiences, they were willing to tell their stories as to why and how they came to be refugees in the DRC and how they became involved in the conflict. They were very well aware of FDLR and why it was fighting. An interview with a 17-year-old boy who was captured and demobilized revealed that the youth do understand the

¹² Anti-bullet medicines are used by commanders to lure the children into the frontline by claiming that the medicine will protect them from bullets. This belief was particularly shared among Mai Mai groups.

complex political and social dynamics of the Rwandan society to which he is going to be reintegrated. He said:

“We wanted to win back our Rwanda from Tutsi. “The Hutu in DRC cannot go back to Rwanda because people think that they participated in the genocide in 1994, even though not everyone participated in the killing.”

Socialization could have played an important role in the political consciousnesses of the Rwandan youth. While in the DRC, the strong sense of Rwandan Hutuness and how they were oppressed and humiliated by the Tutsi during the Belgium colonization has been passed on to children through myth and history-telling (Malkki 1995:52-105). When Hutu refugee camps in the DRC were attacked and destroyed by Tutsi RPF after the genocide in 1994, many Hutu believed that this was another confirmation of the brutality of Tutsi and its interest to ‘kill’ the Hutu. RPF’s attack on the Hutu refugee camps destroyed important socio-economic infrastructure, and caused immense frustration among the Rwandan Hutu refugees. This led to many young people to evaluate the situation, and made a conscious decision to join FDLR. But they did not become just passive victims. For example, one boy escaped FDLR because of maltreatment and joined another group, the Mai Mai militia. For some, the armed groups provided a collective consciousness through a sense of family and personal security at the time. This was the case with those children who lost their parents when the refugee camps in DRC were destroyed. During the rehabilitation process it was observed that these children requested to undergo the rehabilitation programme together with their adult commanders. Aid agencies and the government refused the request as it violates one of the principles of rehabilitation that child combatants should be separated from adults during rehabilitation to break the command structure and prevent further abuse.

4.4 The Impact of Armed Conflict on the Youth: Vulnerability vs Resilience

One of the tentative hypotheses of this study was that young people are not inherently vulnerable and not necessarily affected negatively by armed conflicts. This is not to say that the youth did not suffer. There is no question that the war had terrible consequences on the youth. Almost all interviewed youth have gone through unimaginable psychological, social and physical difficulties as a result of their participation in the war. Some were beaten when they refused to obey orders or when they were too tired to perform certain duties such as shooting at a target. Some have been punished when they attempted to escape from the armed groups. In many cases, the young ones had suffered from physical fatigue from carrying heavy guns for long distances without food and water. One boy has been hospitalised due to a broken spine from carrying a heavy gun, and two boys had sustained bullet wounds, still awaiting treatment at the rehabilitation center. The war has disrupted their family and community lives as a result of displacement and loss. Many of them were forced to live in jungles and were denied any educational and economic opportunities. Some of them have seen the death of their families, relatives and friends when the refugee camps in the DRC were destroyed by RPF army, causing nightmares and lack of sleep. A few of them said they fear they may not have a normal social life when they integrate with their families and communities. Some of them mentioned the lost school time as a result of their long stay with armed groups. When asked about what his first priority would be after being reintegrated, a young boy said, "...the first thing I want to do now is to go to my school."

However, the effects of armed conflict on the youth are not always negative and universal. Neither are all youth ex-combatants passive victims. Some of the interviewed ex-combatants talked nostalgically about how they missed the collective nature of

military and social life. These young people found the demobilization and reintegration program particularly difficult due to a sense of loss of family and loneliness. One boy who is integrated and now living with his mother said: "In the military, we used to eat and drink together with my 'brothers' and 'sisters'. There is no such a thing now."

The ex-combatants have proved to be remarkably resilient and resourceful in situations of grave dangers. Rather than depending on adults in times of despair, they adopted effective coping mechanisms while they were in the armed groups. Almost all interviewed Rwandan demobilized children in Ruhengeri have said that they had to take major responsibilities because either they were separated from their loved ones, or lost their families in the DRC. The responsibilities included looking after their younger siblings. This required overcoming their own anxieties and fears amidst the brutal conflict. In order to augment whatever income they can have, some of them worked on the land of richer Congolese in exchange for food and income. As one boy said:

"When we were soldiers we had to fend for ourselves. We had to go out to villages and look for food, clothes and every thing. You had to know how to stay alive."

Because the youth were actively involved in these types of important social and economic processes to survive, some adult community members viewed them as competent and resilient individuals, not just as innocent and vulnerable. During a community interview on what their views are regarding the returning youth who were fighters in Gisenyi province in Rwanda, an elderly man said:

"They [youth fighters] are mature and they have seen a lot in life when they were soldiers. Even we adults learn from them."

Although humanitarian aid agencies assumed that the war could have a devastating psychological and emotional impact on the youth that would endanger their reintegration,

the interviews with the ex-combatants revealed that there was no evidence that showed a direct cause and effect relationship between involvements in the conflict and a *lasting* trauma. Some of them displayed distress due to their experience, but current social life and future aspiration are not significantly impacted. Contrary to the beliefs of aid agencies the distress did not result in 'loss of optimistic viewpoints towards their lives' and 'lack of interest in activities.' The youth continued with their daily routine, apparently not traumatized by the war. They fully participated in social events such as traditional dancing and football games. They were more concerned and worried about the current and future practical issues such as whether they would be able to earn income or go to school. The majority of interviewed youth said their priority need at the moment is going back to school. What preoccupied their mind was the urge to go to school and rebuild their lives. One boy said:

“We were fighting a war that was not ours. I was always thinking that I am wasting my time in the jungle, while my friends in Rwanda were attending schools”.

Those who felt they were too old to go back to school said their aspiration is to start some sort of income generating business activities.

“Because I am old now, I can't go to school with other young boys. I would like to start carpentry business so that I get money to help my family” – 20 year old

Some of them expressed their concerns about their families and communities' acceptance and are worried about retribution due to their prior association with Hutu “*génocidaires*.”

It was also interesting to note that the interviewed youth were not too traumatized to express their war experiences, contrary to what aid agencies and the government

expected. Rather, all interviewed children were very eager to express, often eloquently, to share their feelings and emotions with the researcher: One ex-combatant reported:

“I am 20 years old now. I left Rwanda for Mugunga in DRC in 1994 when my parents were killed. In Mugunga, there were Rwandan Ex-FAR and they would tell us that they could take us back to Rwanda. But first they asked the strong ones to take military training and handed out guns. In the refugee camp there were chiefs for each neighbourhood. The chief asks young boys and girls to join in the fighting and they put my name in the fighter list. Although I did not want to be a fighter, I spent three months in military training. I was 14 or 15 years old then. Then one day the camp was destroyed by the Rwandan Tutsi RPF and I came back to Rwanda with my brother and sister. But some people went to Massisi with the Interahamwe rebels. I started living in Kinyanzovu in Rwanda. Then infiltrators came from DRC and I went with them.”

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter, based on the qualitative field research in Rwanda and the DRC, dealt with the two research questions: 1) How and why the Rwandan children became involved in the armed conflict? and 2) The impacts of the conflicts on the youth.

In answering the first research question, the interviews showed that while some youth were forced to join armed groups, some joined voluntarily. Therefore, the assumption held by aid agencies that all youth were coerced to join, has been refuted in this chapter.

Secondly, the impact of the conflict has not been universally negative or devastating. While the war has caused sufferings for the youth, some youth ex-combatants did not show any lasting trauma or dysfunctionality. Instead, they emerged empowered out of the conflict, willing to go back to school and interested in starting small income-generating small businesses. Girl ex-combatants began to challenge some of the traditional role expectations by their families and communities.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSES

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the analyses of the qualitative interviews conducted with Rwandan youth ex-combatants. I have compiled six tables with important information and background on all respondents. Different aspects have been categorized and put into tables to allow easy access to the data. This is necessary in order to assist in answering the research questions of the study, especially the third question which will be addressed in chapter 6.

Table 1: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF ALL EX-COMBATANTS INTERVIEWED

Variables	Male	Female	Total	%
Number of interviewed combatants	17	9	26	100
Originate from rural area	13	9	22	84
Originate from urban area	4	-	4	15
Employed	-	-	-	0
Unemployed	17	5	22	84
Parents alive	9	4	13	50
Parents deceased	8	5	13	50
Family involved in armed groups	15	6	21	80
Primary education	16	6	22	84
Secondary education	-	-	-	0

The table shows that certain categories of the youth were targeted for recruitment by armed groups. The majority of the recruits (84%) are originally from rural areas; unemployed (84%); or with little education (84%) and whose families have deceased (50%). This category fits with what Save the Children considers them as the most vulnerable for recruitment.

Table 2: BECOMING A YOUTH COMBATANT

Number of case	Age	Gender	Pattern of Recruitment
1	18	Male	Voluntary
2	18	Male	Voluntary
3	18	Male	Voluntary
4	18	Male	Voluntary
5	18	Male	Voluntary
6	18	Male	Voluntary
7	18	Male	Voluntary
8	18	Male	Voluntary
9	18	Male	Voluntary
10	17	Male	Voluntary
11	17	Male	Forcible
12	17	Male	Forcible
13	17	Male	Forcible
14	16	Male	Forcible
15	16	Male	Forcible
16	13	Male	Forcible
17	11	Male	Forcible
18	18	Female	Voluntary
19	18	Female	Voluntary
20	18	Female	Voluntary
21	18	Female	Voluntary
22	18	Female	Voluntary
23	18	Female	Forcible
24	18	Female	Forcible
25	18	Female	Forcible
26	18	Female	Forcible

Out of the interviewed 26 youth, 7 boys (27%) and 4 girls (15%) were forcibly recruited. The major recruiters include FDLR, RCD-Goma and Mai Mai militias. The remainder, that is 10 boys (38%) and 5 girls (19%) joined FDLR and Mai Mai groups voluntarily. For those who joined voluntarily, engaging with the military groups was a reasoned strategy, or a functional decision and the most desirable option given their situations. Some of them joined because they did not have any survival option, while others joined for protection or because members of their families are already in one of the armed groups. Some of them also enrolled for social and political reasons. For instance, the destruction

of the refugee camp in the DRC by the Rwandan government has been cited as one of the main reasons for voluntarily signing up with the Hutu rebel groups. The attack on the camp caused severe destruction of infrastructure and separation of families. Some youth found themselves alone without any protection, feeling a sense of revenge against the Rwandan government. Socialization has also played an important role in the political consciousnesses of the Rwandan youth. While in the DRC, the strong sense of Rwandan Hutuness and how they were oppressed and humiliated by the Tutsi during the Belgium colonization, has been passed on to children through myth and history-telling. When Hutu refugee camps in the DRC were attacked and destroyed by Tutsi RPF after the genocide in 1994, many Hutu believed that this was another confirmation of the brutality of Tutsi and its interest to dominate the Hutu.

Table 3: ROLES FULFILLED

Gender	Name of armed group	Combat roles	Messenger	Cooks	Camp guards	Time period deployed
Male	FDLR	Combat	-	-	-	3 years
Male	FDLR	Combat	-	-	-	3 years
Male	FDLR	Combat	-	-	-	2 years
Male	FDLR	-	-	-	Guard	5 years
Male	FDLR	-	-	-	Guard	3 years
Male	FDLR	-	-	-	Guard	3 years
Male	FDLR	-	Messenger	-	-	3 years
Male	Mai Mai	Combat	-	-	-	4 years
Male	Mai Mai	Combat	-	-	-	4 years
Male	Mai Mai	Combat	-	-	-	3 years
Male	Mai Mai	Combat	-	-	-	3 years
Male	Mai Mai	-	-	-	Guard	2 years
Male	Mai Mai	-	-	-	Guard	2 years
Male	RCD Goma	Combat	-	-	-	4 years
Male	RCD Goma	Combat	-	-	-	4 Years
Male	RCD Goma	Combat	-	-	-	1 Year
Male	RCD Goma	Combat	-	-	-	1 Year
Female	FDLR	Combat				5 years
Female	FDLR	Combat				4 years
Female	FDLR	Combat				4 years
Female	FDLR	Combat				4 years
Female	FDLR	-	-	Cook		2 years
Female	FDLR	-	-	Cook	-	Do not know
Female	FDLR	-	-	Cook	-	½ week
Female	FDLR	-	-	Cook	-	2 weeks
Female	FDLR	-	-	Cook	-	2 weeks

Most of the youth ex-combatants, particularly the boys (11 out of 17, which is 65%) served as active combatants while the rest were either personal guards to commanders, or a messenger. 4 out of 9 girls (44%) served as active combatants while the rest were cooks.

Table 4. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND OUTSIDE CONTACT TO ALL

Variables	Total	%
Access to outside communication	15	58
Freedom to leave the camp	3	11
Received visitors	2	8
Awareness of HIV/AIDS and other STD's	6	23
TOTAL	26	100

While in the armed groups, access to information particularly about DDDR programs and on what awaits the ex-combatants back was generally very restricted. While some youth had access to radios, many of them depended on fellow combatants who had radios. Listening to a radio was not permitted, particularly by FDLR leaders.

While freedom to leave the camp is restricted, some youth combatants, particularly those who were in-charge of fetching water and collecting firewood, were able to leave the camp. Some were even able to visit their friends and relatives in town.

Very few of them had visitors. Often, the visitors that are allowed to see the youth were members of the armed groups. In rare cases, families and relatives were allowed to visit the ex-combatants.

Because outside communication restricted, awareness of HIV/AIDS and other STD's is generally limited. However, some were very well aware of the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

Table 5: LEAVING THE ARMED GROUPS

Case	Escaped	Captured	Demobilised	Integrated by means of NGO's	Possibility of rerecruitment
1	Escaped			Integrated by means of NGOs	-
2	Escaped			"	-
3	Escaped			"	-
4	Escaped			"	-
5	Escaped			"	-
6			Demobilized	"	-
7			Demobilized	"	-
8			Demobilized	"	-
9			Demobilized	"	-
10			Demobilized	"	-
11			Demobilized	"	-
12			Demobilized	"	-
13			Demobilized	"	-
14			Demobilized	"	-
15			Demobilized	"	-
16			Demobilized	"	-
17			Demobilized	"	-
18				Self-demobilization and reintegration	-
19				"	-
20				"	-
21				"	-
22				"	-
23				"	-
24				"	-
25		Captured		Integrated by means of NGO	Re-joined an armed group
26		Captured		"	Rejoined an armed group
Total	14	2	10	26	-

The majority of the boys (12 out of 17, which is 71%) were demobilized and reintegrated by Save the Children UK and RDRRC. 5 (29%) boys said they had to take risks and escape from the armed groups because no NGO or the UN was near their stations. Two (22%) of the girls were captured by RPF and they were integrated with their families by SC UK. However, both of them have left their families and no one knows where they

were. Some community members said they might have re-joined armed groups in DRC because they had difficulty adjusting with civilian life style.

However, the majority of girl ex-combatants (7 out of 9, which is 78%) were known as ‘self-demobilized’. They did not go through any official DDRR program. According to interviews, because they did not want to be identified as combatants, they chose to quietly leave the armed groups and integrate with their families and communities.

Table 6: RELATIONS AND ABUSE OF ALL GIRL-EX-COMBATANTS

Variables	Yes	%	No	%
Sexual abuse	5	56	4	44
Physical Violence	6	67	3	33
Pregnancy	3	33	6	66
Comfort Wife to someone	8	89	1	11
Emotional stress	3	33	6	66
Having long-term effects, like nightmares	2	22	7	78

Globally, the presence of girls in armed forces has generally been kept secret or ignored by state and non-state parties until the issue was brought to the forefront of post-conflict debate in the late 1990s. This is partly due to the inherent weakness in the very definition of ‘girl soldiers’, which tends to focus on fighting and ignores girls’ other roles in armed groups such as servants, cooks, porters, spies, bush wives or sex slaves (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004:21-28). Therefore, when the surrender of weapons was a criterion for DDRR eligibility, girls who were involved in ancillary functions, but not as fighters, were excluded from any benefits that come with DDRR programs (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004:21-28). This is a typical oversight in understanding the differential experience of girls and boys during armed conflicts and points to the dysfunctionality of the DDRR programs not to include all combatants.

Here is one of the stories of an ex-combatant named Angelina¹³, who is 20 at the time of the study. Her story highlights the nature of the participation of young women in armed groups, specifically with FDLR rebel group in the DRC:

“I left Rwanda for Mugunga in the DRC in 1994 when my parents were killed. In Mugunga, there were Rwandan Ex-FAR [FDLR] and they would tell us that they could take us back to Rwanda. But first they asked the strong ones to take military training and handed out guns. In the refugee camp there were chiefs for each neighbourhood. The chiefs were forcing young boys and girls to join in the fighting and they put my name in the fighters’ list. I did not want to be on that list. I spent three months on military training. I was 14 or 15 years old then.

Then one day the camp was destroyed by RPF and I came back to Rwanda with my brothers and sisters. But some people went to Massisi with the Interahamwe. I started living in Kinyanzovu then infiltrators came from the DRC and I went with them so that they would feed us. In Cyanzargwe, I joined the infiltrators in 1997-1998 and fought against the RPF. Then I moved to Gatoye to join another Interahamwe group. The name of the battalion was YANKEE and Major Haguma commanded it. My role in the army was to find food and bring it to the military camp. But I was always carrying my Kalashnikovs. Life was tough. We were living in fear of attacks by RPF so we did not sleep. We did not have soap and sanitary napkins.

There were many girls with the Interahamwe and they were also fighting in 1997 and 1998 in Cyanzargwe. The military would take and force them to have sex. You could be killed if you refused. If a girl returns to her community with a child, people would say that she has a ‘bastard’ and I had a child in the camp.

I knew in my heart that I would escape. I discussed this with people in the market but I did not tell anyone about this in the camp. If they found out, they would kill me. So I went to Bahunde Market with my two children. There I met a Rwandan and she offered to pay for my transport. She took me to UNHCR in Karuba and then I was taken to Goma in the UNHCR car. From there I was taken to Nkamira camp and stayed for two days. Then I came to Cyanzargwe.

I was married recently but my in-laws told my husband he should not marry someone who already has children. So he married

¹³ The name of the interviewee has been changed for the sake of anonymity

another woman and he left me. I am renting my own house but now I do not have money to pay for the rent.

I still have nightmares about people who kill each other, about myself carrying very heavy loads and fleeing in the forest. The only way I deal with all this is by praying to God.”

This and more interviews with girl ex-combatants in Gisenyi and Ruhengeri provinces reveal that some of them have suffered gravely. Their socio-economic base has been devastated, and they were physically, socially and psychologically brutalized. Some of them have been raped by their own comrades and were vulnerable to deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS. In addition, they were subject to severe stigmatisation by their families and communities for being female soldiers and having a child of an unknown father.

However, contrary to the popular view that highlights the inevitable vulnerability of girl soldiers, further interviews with Rwandan ex-combatants reflected their ability to be resilient and to adopt continuous and practical survival strategies in times of civil strife. For instance, in order to escape social stigmatisation, some Rwandan young girls were quick to make conscious decisions and made arrangements to come back to Rwanda as civilians mostly via UNHCR, without going through the official DDRR programs. This is known as self-demobilization. Of course there was a risk that these girls might easily be spotted in the communities as ex-combatants, but the girls were very well aware that the DRC and Rwandan borders are so indistinct that local communities do not have a strict idea of who was doing what on the other side of the border. If someone crosses the border, it is generally assumed that he/she is simply visiting family members who had settled there centuries ago.

In another instance, some girls decided to become active members of a particular fighting group until they found themselves a 'safe heaven'. Angelina, for example, kept changing her alliances from one armed group to another until her role became a "better" one. She escaped from FDLR where she was a front line fighter, and joined Mai Mai where she became responsible for finding and fetching food to the army. Later, she arranged her escape and returned to her community using a civilian friend and UNHCR. After her return to the community, she tried to make things better for herself; became a wife, then when this did not bring success, she tried to fend for herself and rebuild her life in whatever way possible.

For some girls, participation in the political conflict as fighters became central to the formation of their identities and they viewed the civilian life through this lens. Evidence from interviews with some of the demobilized/self-demobilized Rwandan girls showed that their participation in the conflict helped them to challenge some of the traditional roles and responsibilities in their communities and families that were often oppressive of women. In Gisenyi province, a mother of one of the demobilized girls said that since the girl came back from the 'war front', she has been 'difficult' – she refused to perform duties her parents told her to perform, and eventually she left her family to rejoin the armed group in the DRC. This was because her years of experience as a fighter and socialization in the armed group have put her at odds with the traditional norms and values in her community. Another demobilized girl, who expressed frustration with her life style in the family told SC UK's Social Workers:

"I was a military person but now they (family and community) expect me to till the land 24 hours, I cannot do that. I do not know how to till land."

Another girl, refusing to compromise her military identity to being a traditional wife, fled and rejoined an armed group after she was reintegrated with her family. Her parents

admitted that life was difficult for her in the family because she knew nothing about being just a wife and work in the house. She was socialised differently and reintegration into the traditional society caused personal problems. It also caused dysfunctions in her immediate family system. This demonstrates the social problematique of reintegration that focus at universal approaches rather than individual cases with their unique context.

The evidence shows some of the fundamental difficulties ex-combatants faced during their rehabilitation and reintegration with their communities as a result of their wartime experience. While in the army, they had assumed the role of household heads, income earners and fighters – all of which have altered their social status, so the post-conflict demobilization and reintegration often puts them in an awkward position with their parents and communities who expected them to be the same girls they were before.

The interviews also revealed that girls' prior involvement in armed conflict has helped them to be more resilient and ambitious. This was evident from the self-demobilized girls who have started up their own small businesses and other income generation activities in the villages in Rwanda. Interviews with the community and the girls themselves showed that some of them are now in fact in a better economic situation than other non ex-combatant girls.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The results of the interviews, which are reflected in Tables 1-6 gave the background to the child ex-combatants who participated in this research. Some examples of the interviews conducted with child ex-combatants in this chapter displayed that while Rwandan youth were coerced to join armed groups, some joined voluntarily. Interviews proved that while the war has caused sufferings to the young people, the impact of the

conflict has resulted in lasting trauma and social dysfunctionality. However, some youth ex-combatants emerged out of the conflict strong, willing to go back to normal civilian life. Therefore, the general assumption that all ex-combatants should be treated the same, or as victims, is challenged.

The analyses of interviews were specifically done before the third research question was addressed, because it would have been impossible to find answers to the specific question, if the background of the interviews was not given by verbatim stories of ex-combatant's lives, as well as displaying the data in the qualitative tables in order to explain the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS (DDRR)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the third research question: How do the DDRR programs set up by humanitarian agencies seek to identify and address youth ex-combatant's special social, psychological and physical needs as they relate to reintegration in home communities? The focus is also on how these programs, or social events, contribute to the well-being of ex-combatants, in accordance with the functionalist perspective which propagates order in society.

The chapter investigates the DDRR programs that generally assume the young peoples as passive and innocent victims of violence. In this way, the DDRR program tends to focus on healing the trauma of the youth through individualized interventions, ignoring important socio-cultural realities that influence the impact of conflict. This chapter provides some highlights on the wider socio-cultural dynamics in Rwanda as it relates to the ex-combatants reintegration with their communities.

6.2 Overview of DDRR Programs in Rwanda

DDRR programs seek to restore the security and stability of a country by reducing the mistrust between the fighting groups. In this way, the approach is in accordance with the functionalist perspective which propagates the need for order in society. In the long-term, it is believed that DDRR will benefit to promote sustainable social and economic reintegration of the ex-combatants into Rwandan society. However, DDRR by itself will

not bring meaningful development unless it is supported by post-conflict reconstruction efforts such as fixing the damage caused by war, designing a post-war economic and social policy as well as efforts to bring equity to the general public (Maiese 2003).

The DDRR programs in Rwanda are part of a larger Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) with a multi-agency effort to support the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa. Financed by the World Bank and 11 donors¹⁴ with US\$ 200 million, MDRP is the largest program of its kind in the world. An estimated 450,000 ex-combatants in seven countries benefit from the program, including: Rwanda, the DRC, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo and Uganda (www.mdrp.org).

In 1999 the idea of disarming Rwandan Hutu rebels from the DRC began with the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement between Rwanda, the DRC, as well as other countries including Angola, Namibia, Uganda, Zimbabwe and two Congolese oppositional groups. It was this ceasefire agreement (known as the Inter-Congolese Dialogue) that led to the commitments by all parties to dismantle and withdraw foreign troops from the DRC (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004:13-15). The same year, the UN Security Council Resolution 1279 authorized the deployment of a United Nations Peacekeeping Mission for Congo (MONUC), with the mandate to launch the DDRR programs for foreign troops, including the Rwandan Hutu rebels.

One of the priority areas of MDRP was setting up DDRR programs specifically for youth ex-combatants. According to the plan, all fighting groups in DRC would agree to uphold the principles outlined in the Cape Town Annotated Principles and Best Practices, which was developed on April 30, 1997 by UNICEF. The Cape Town Principles were

¹⁴ The donors include Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the European Commission.

strategies, first and foremost, to prevent the recruitment of children as soldiers, and to establish 18 years as the minimum age of recruitment. The Principles also provided specific guidelines on how to design and implement DDRR programs for youth ex-combatants (UNICEF 1997: 1-7). However, unlike the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Cape Town Principles do not have convention status. In addition, unlike the CRC, the Principles do not have a monitoring body to assess whether and how DDRR programs and agencies are complying with the principles.

The DDRR programs in Rwanda and DRC faced challenges from the outset. The program was essentially 'voluntary', leaving the decision to the fighting parties to disarm out of their own good will. MONUC was in no way to enforce the DDRR unless the militias asked for it (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004). It was not in the interest of Rwandan Hutu rebel leaders, who were suspected of participating in the 1994 genocide, to lay down their arms voluntarily and go back to Rwanda. It was unlikely that the leaders of FDLR will surrender voluntarily, only to be handed over to the UN Tribunal in Arusha on genocide trial (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004: 17). While few leaders and members voluntarily came forward for official DDRR, many fighters, particularly the youth had to take a risk and escape by themselves.

6.3. DDRR Actors in Rwanda at a Glance

There was high expectation on what the DDRR program could achieve for youth ex-combatants. UNICEF, one of the major implementing actors of the DDRR program argued that '...if left untreated, the psychological wounds can be most damaging, as children grow up unable to function normally, often driven to perpetuate the violence they have experienced' (UNICEF 1994). To varying degrees, most of the aid agencies

felt that even if the war stops, the impact of trauma on youth could last at least for the next two generations (Agger 1995: 14). As a result, there was a disproportionate emphasis on the need for psychosocial counselling (Black 1996: 272).

6.3.1 The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC)

MONUC, as the UN military organ in the DRC, is the first point of contact for the youth who voluntarily disarm or escape from armed groups. As mentioned above, MONUC does not have the mandate to use force to disarm combatants. A UNHCR and MONUC memorandum of understanding states that “MONUC will in no way attempt to forcibly disarm combatants” (UNHCR & MONUC 2003:1-5).

MONUC has two sections that deal with youth combatants: the Disarmament, Demobilization and Repatriation section (DDR) and the Child Protection section (CP). Once combatants (children and adults) are assembled, the DDRR section undertakes practical military skills test in order to prove that the individuals were actually combatants and not civilians who sneak in to benefit from the DDRR program. If qualified, they will be sent to an assembly point for repatriation to Rwanda.

Through its popular radio channel known as OKAPI, MONUC sensitises members of armed groups to disarm and demobilize. However, whether children have access to radios is highly questionable. Most children said they did not have radios, and those who have access to radios were not allowed to listen.

Many interviewed youth have indicated that MONUC did not actively look for young fighters and demobilize them. Instead, the children must take the risk and escape the fighting groups by themselves. This might be one of the reasons why many youth were not demobilized.

6.3.2 The Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC)

Established in January 1997, the RDRC is the main government body that coordinates the overall DDDR programs in Rwanda. Its main functions include implementing and coordinating rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants, community sanitation and capacity-building activities.

RDRC re-screens the ex-combatants who have been identified and repatriated by MONUC. Although prior screening is carried out by MONUC, due to a fear that some civilians, especially refugees, might pretend to be ex-combatants in order to benefit from the more attractive DDDR package, RDRC conducts secondary screening. In addition, because some Congolese children are mistaken for Rwandans, the secondary screening is said to be important.

RDRC has also the responsibility to provide reunification kits that include non-food items, primary education and access to health care for up to 12 months, to those who will be reintegrating with their families and communities.

6.3.3 The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

ICRC's major role in the DDDR process is to re-establish a family link and reunify youth ex-combatants with their families. Once child ex-combatants are at the rehabilitation center in Ruhengeri, ICRC visits and interviews each youth and their families in order to launch family tracing activities and facilitate communication between the two.

One of ICRC's major challenges during family tracing is that the much younger youth ex-combatants who are between 11 – 14 year old and who left Rwanda in 1994, do not remember about their life in Rwanda, hence, they do not always provide tangible

information to enable family tracing. This problem is compounded when the child's family is located outside Rwanda or the DRC.

ICRC has its own inherent limitation that hampers proper child protection and timely family reunification. Due to its policy of neutrality and impartiality, it can only raise sensitive issues diplomatically, with the right to go public only 'if the violations are major and repeated and if ICRC delegates themselves have witnessed the violations with their own eyes, or the existence of those breaches were established by reliable and verifiable sources' (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994:153-154).

6.3.4 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Armed groups who want to recruit young people often target refugee camps. One aspect of recruitment from the camps is when there is a dispute over distribution of scarce resources to refugees. Because the youth are viewed as incapable of making major decisions in their lives, the responsibility to deliver assistance rests on powerful individuals or refugee leaders. In most cases, aid agencies do not provide aid to the young people directly but through their caregivers, leaving the young ones often frustrated. Young girls are particularly sidelined in the provision of aid. While there is an increasing awareness that women should be the initial point of control in distribution of assistance, in practice this has not been implemented (Machel 1996: 25). The response of the young people to the exclusion is sometimes to join an armed group where they could easily become in charge of resources using their guns (Machel 1996: 25).

UNHCR plays a limited role in the DDR process because of the mandate that restricts its interventions only to civilians within the framework of on-going repatriation programs of Rwandan refugees from the Great Lakes Region (UNHCR & MONUC 2002). Although

UNHCR's conventions and protocols do not specifically deal with issues pertaining youth recruitment in armed conflicts, UNHCR plays a major role in the protection of refugee camps so that they do not become youth recruitment centers (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill 1994:152).

In Rwanda, one of UNHCR's roles is to provide separate accommodation for refugees and ex-combatants at Nygatare transit camp, when they come through the Bukavu/Cyangugu border. This provision is limited to no more than two days, until the ex-combatants are transferred to Mutobo Solidarity camp in Ruhengeri.

There was an assumption by aid agencies and the government of Rwanda that some ex-combatants, particularly girls might choose to return to Rwanda through the civilian route as refugees in order to avoid the stigmatisation associated with being a soldier. However, it was difficult to identify these children because it was not within UNHCR's mandate to ask the child whether he/she has been associated with armed groups (Personal Interviews: UNHCR Field Assistant, Kibuye: 2004). Therefore, the youth who might have been combatants in the DRC but choose to return as civilians miss out on some of the DDRR benefit packages. This indicates that the DDRR programs do not fully contribute to the needs of all youth ex-combatants. It could thus be said that in this case the program is dysfunctional to the survival of the child

6.3.5 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF generally has very important responsibilities for the protection of 'vulnerable' people such as mothers and children particularly in times of conflict. Within the framework of DDRR, UNICEF has the responsibility 'to monitor the implementation of CRC which is the standard against which UNICEF measures the success or failure of

efforts to serve the best interest of children' (UNICEF 2002:3). UNICEF advocates parental education and other psycho-social counselling initiatives in all its country programmes in order to 'assist children develop and build those capacities that will facilitate a re-attachment to families and communities' (UNICEF 1997). Psychological counselling and the enhancement of 'self-esteem' has been one of the most important components of UNICEF's work. For instance, in 1993, UNICEF organized a Self-Esteem Project in Vojvodina, Yugoslavia, that involved over 400 teachers and 15,000 children in just two years (UNICEF 1995: 12).

Prior to 2001, UNICEF in Rwanda had been an active partner, providing financial and technical support to NGOs and government counterparts to implement demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programs with a particular focus on psychological counselling to war affected youth. At the time of this study, however, UNICEF's involvement in DDRR activities has been reduced significantly, and its main focus was limited to advocacy on children's rights, research facilitation and provision of training to the Rwandan military officers on child rights (Interviews with UNICEF's Child Protection Officer, Kigali, 2004).

The reason for the diminution of UNICEF's roles in the DDRR program was that, unlike some countries in the Great Lakes region such as Burundi and DRC that required UNICEF for support, Rwanda has a stable and functioning government that can manage DDRR funds directly from the multi-donor trust funds (Personal Interviews, UNICEF Child Protection Officer, Kigali, 2004). In the DRC, UNICEF has been active in the areas of psychological counselling, reintegration and follow-up monitoring. Nevertheless, the DDRR program in that country, particularly the reintegration component has been somewhat of a failure because most of the ex-combatants who had been reintegrated with their communities were re-recruited by the roaming armed groups. No study has

been conducted as to why these children chose to go back to war despite attractive DDRR benefits (Sewonet & Taouti-Cherif 2004).

6.3.6 Save the Children UK (SC UK)

SC UK is quite active in DRC and Rwanda. It has played a major role in lobbying the governments in opening a separate rehabilitation center for youth ex-combatants. Prior to this, the youth were rehabilitated in the same rehabilitation center as the adult ex-combatants, which is said to have exposed young ones to further physical abuse. Some of these young people children, however, preferred not to be separated from the adults as they have built close friendship and comradeship with them.

SC UK has also been involved in *Baratashye* ('going home') project that focused on reintegration activities and follow-up of youth ex-combatants after these have gone to their communities. The report produced by SC UK that evaluated the *Baratashye* concluded that the major challenges faced by the youth ex-combatants include: lack of income in order to start small business, lack of school materials and financial support for those who are interested in going back to school, lack of vocational training opportunities, property and land disputes, and stigmatisation by some community members.

6.4 The Implementation of DDRR Programs

As indicated above, DDRR programs are intended to bring peace, security and stability to a country. But DDRR in a post-conflict environment poses a serious challenge for every one involved. Some combatants face real security and survival concerns when they give up their weapons. For some people, demobilization may represent not only the

formal disbanding of military forces but also a process that “strips them of the prestige, comradeship, and economic opportunities that may have been secured through their participation in the fighting” (Weinstein & Humphreys 2005:3). Therefore, the DDRR programs could be regarded as dysfunctional to specific combatants who would not want to be disarmed, demobilized or integrated into their previous situations.

For international and government aid agencies, rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants is the main focus, with the principal aim of preparing and facilitating ex-combatants to return to their communities and start a civilian life. Within this process, the aid agencies consider the provision of psychosocial counselling essential particularly to youth ex-combatants who are believed to be traumatized by the war experience. According to a major donor, the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO),

“...lack of attendance to these problems [psychological trauma], can impact on at least the next two generations – even if the war stopped now. The symptoms to be expected are, for example, a massive increase in alcohol and drug addiction, suicides, all kinds of violence (criminal and domestic) and psychiatric illness. Moreover, unresolved traumatic experiences are likely to be ignited by new hatred and new wars (Agger 1995:14).

It is because of this assumption of the direct link between conflict and social problems at community level as arising from trauma dysfunctionality, that almost all aid agencies continue psychological intervention to war affected children (UNICEF 1994). In this way, the population is perceived as dysfunctional. Because it is believed that war causes distress and dysfunctionality, they have to receive intensive psychosocial rehabilitation program for 3 months. Implicitly, this implies that the process of rehabilitation requires an international presence to attend to the children’s recovery for the period of ‘at least the next two generations.’ The purported need for extended psychological counselling also presupposes that the population affected is emotionally immature and passively recipient of Western professional intervention (Pupavac: 2001: 11).

In recent times, there seems to be a wider recognition by aid agencies regarding the social effects of conflicts as well, although psychological impact is still considered to be the major one. Recognizing this, UNICEF and other NGOs organized a workshop in 1997 and came up with the following comprehensive definition of the psychological and social implication of armed violence on young people:

“The word ‘psychosocial’ underlines the dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects of armed conflict, the one type of effect continually influencing the other. By “psychological effects” is meant those experiences which affect emotion, behaviour, thoughts, memory, learning ability and how a situation may be perceived and understood. By “social effects” is meant how the diverse experiences of war alter people’s relationships to each other, in that such experiences change people, but also through death, separation, estrangement and other losses, family and community breakdown, damage to social values and customary practices and the destruction of social facilities and services. “Social effects” also extend to the economic dimension as many individuals and families become destitute through the material and economic devastation of conflict; losing social status and place in their familiar social network” (UNICEF 1997).

For aid agencies, reintegration should take place through psychosocial counselling and family reunification (Verhey 2000:6). Earlier, I have indicated that youth ex-combatants in Rwanda were taken to the same rehabilitation center as adults at the Gitagata center. After a great deal of lobbying by UNICEF and SC UK, the Rwandan government opened a separate rehabilitation center for child ex-combatants in Ruhengeri province. Since the opening, the center has received 103 child ex-combatants.

As mentioned earlier, the logic behind the provision of separate demobilization and rehabilitation centers for youth was to break the military command structure and prevent further abuse by adults. In some cases, however, the youth’s social, psychological and emotional attachment with adult combatants has been so strong that they preferred to be rehabilitated with the adults in the same center. This might have been because some of

the children who lost their parents see their adult armed group members as substitute family.

The youth stay in the center for about three months while receiving a variety of rehabilitation programs that were believed to hasten their reintegration to civilian life. These programmes include psychosocial counselling, literacy classes, lectures on the civic, socio-economic and political events of Rwanda including the history of the genocide and post-genocide, unity and reconciliation, recreational activities such as football games and traditional dancing are also part of the rehabilitation program.

Most of the youth interviewed, particularly those between 11 to 16 years old, said they enjoyed the literacy classes and expressed their eagerness to go back to school upon return to their communities. However, some of them said even if they want to go to school, their families may not be able to afford to send them to school.

Older youth, particularly those between 16 to 18 years, felt that they were too old to go back to school with younger children, so they said they prefer vocational and skills trainings in order to open businesses. The government and some aid agencies were against the provision of long-term trainings such as vocational trainings in the belief that this will lead to a permanent institutionalisation of the rehabilitation centers. Experience in other post-conflict countries such as Liberia and the DRC, however, showed that a combination of conventional schools and skills training could work well and benefit the youth not only in preparing them for community reintegration, but also in building their confidence (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004: 37-41).

There has also been a debate among aid agencies and the government on how long the youth should stay in the rehabilitation centers. Some argued that stay in the rehabilitation centers should be transitory with maximum/or minimum of three months

period during which the youth receive psychosocial rehabilitation. Others argued that the rehabilitation period should be flexible and be judged based on individual cases because some youth may not have family members to return to, or family tracing might take longer time than anticipated. Some of the youth wanted to be reunited with their families as soon as possible, even before completing the three-month period. This was particularly the case for those whose families have been successfully identified and traced.

The Rwandan government firmly believed that all demobilized youth ex-combatants must go through rigorous re-education and re-socialization in a rehabilitation center before they reintegrate with their family and communities. This was because of the particular need for re-educating the youth who were believed to have been extremely brainwashed by Hutu *génocidaires* regarding the current realities of Rwanda. Indeed, the interviews showed that some of these young children were told by FDLR leaders that they would be killed by the Tutsi if they ever go back to Rwanda. When asked about whether they were happy to come back to Rwanda, most of them said they were happy but they were afraid that they might be killed by the current government because of their association with the Hutu rebels.

Child protection NGOs in Rwanda generally have argued that children's stay in the rehabilitation centre should depend on individual cases, with every effort to reunify the children with their families as soon as possible, in order to have stability in these relevant families. This was in conformity with the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC: 1989) that outlined the importance of family, as well as the functionalist perspective:

“Family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of its members ... [and] that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should

grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”

For aid agencies, therefore, family tracing and reunification activity was considered to be one of the most important and urgent components of DDRR. Greater emphasis was placed in minimizing or avoiding center-based childcare, and launching community and family based childcare alternatives. It is argued that in the absence of family, children could be vulnerable to re-recruitment, abuse and exploitation (Verhey 2001, Machel 1996).). For those youth who have lost their biological parents, the Rwandan government’s policy generally encouraged four types of arrangements:

- a) children could be adopted;
- b) they could live with extended family;
- c) they could live in supervised foster care; or
- d) they could live in spontaneous foster care

There is no doubt that reunification of youth ex-combatants with their biological parents or other alternative mechanisms could indeed facilitate proper reintegration. However, the assumption that only family reunification should be sought for successful reintegration will lead us to ignore the youth’s capacity in managing their lives. Interviews with demobilized youth proved that their separation from their biological family members did not automatically make them vulnerable to emotional trauma and distress. There were individual, social and cultural contexts that were crucial in determining whether the youth’s separation from their biological families will make them vulnerable. For example, the nature of childcare practices among Rwandan and Congolese communities show that even if the youth were separated from their biological parents, they had community support. They also have their own coping strategies in the absence of adult caregivers. In many cases the youth were responsible for looking after and providing emotional

support to their younger siblings. This in turn provided them with the sense of resilience, confidence and self-efficacy. One of the interviewed boys said:

“A Congolese woman took care of me and my brother for 3 months. But I was also working on her land. Some times I work on neighbours’ land too to get more money and buy food and other things for me and my brother.”

In addition, reunification with biological families is often impossible in Rwanda where the whole or part of the youth’s family members might have died in the conflict in the DRC, or they are still in the DRC and will never return to Rwanda. Some youth did not know the exact address of their families in Rwanda due to their long stay in the DRC. In some cases, the family refused to accept the youth either because they cannot afford or because the family was afraid of being stigmatised by the community for accepting a Hutu rebel. Therefore, the reintegration program for ex-combatants was functional for aid agencies, but dysfunctional for families as well as their child soldiers. This can also be explained as a latent, or unintended, function of the DDDR programs.

In any case, at the time of this research, ICRC has successfully conducted family reunification for 75 youth ex-combatants out of 103. However, there was no clear alternative solution in place for those whose families were not/will not be successfully traced. RDRC claimed that it was in the process of identifying alternative solutions such as identifying foster families and establishing group homes for those who want to live independently. Although yet to be seen, foster families may not be a viable solution in Rwanda as the ethnic division was still manifest and the majority are not in a position to support even their own children let alone additional ones. The government, together with aid agencies have launched sensitisation¹⁵ at a family and community level in order to

¹⁵ Sensitization is the mobilization of communities to participate, and positively contribute in various development projects. While the term sensitization is widely used by aid agencies to refer to community awareness interventions about demobilized soldiers, some NGOs

encourage community members to accept demobilized youth ex-combatants. Sensitisation was believed to be very important particularly where the youth are seen as threats by the community due to their association with the Hutu rebels.

It was believed that the provision of non-food reintegration packages including basins, buckets, kitchen utensils and school uniforms to the ex-combatants would facilitate the family reunification and reintegration process. However, some of the youth interviewed expressed their disappointments regarding their reunification packages, because, unlike adult ex-combatants they were denied the choice to receive cash. The youth felt that this approach failed to take into account that they are capable of managing their lives just like the adult ex-combatants (Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet 2004: 24).

6.4.1 *The Social Reintegration*

Once reunified with their families and communities, the final stage of DDDR process which is reintegration, begins. The Rwandan Ministry of Gender and Family is responsible for the implementation of reintegrating the ex-combatants. Through its decentralized provincial authority, this government body is mandated to: 1) follow-up the status of the youth who were reunified with their families, or identify other community based alternative cares, and 2) follow-up the provision of social services such as education, income generation activities, etc to those who have been reintegrated.

It should be noted that the research was conducted immediately after the reintegration of the recently demobilized youth. Thus it was too early to determine the status of their reintegration or the social outcomes. However, some enquiries were made about the previous group of child ex-combatants who were demobilized and reintegrated in 2002.

particularly SC UK now believe that the term has a connotation of brain-washing and therefore is derogatory

These enquiries, together with interviews with a number of newly reintegrated youth ex-combatants provided insights on some of the key issues that should be considered for the latest group of demobilized youth under study.

Generally speaking, the reintegration of the first group of demobilized youth was more or less successful. However, a number of challenges have been identified. One of the problems identified was related to whether the youth should receive cash payment as part of the reintegration package. As stated earlier, unlike the adult ex-combatants who received cash directly, aid agencies chose not to do so to the youth but to channel such payments through their families. There were two reasons for this: firstly, there was fear that the youth will abuse the cash; secondly, aid agencies feared that giving cash will send wrong messages to other civilian children who might see this as rewarding those who are involved in conflicts. In a country like Rwanda, where the majority of Tutsi children were victims and survivors of genocide, any assistance that benefits only Hutu children (particularly soldiers) could easily be misconstrued and might fuel tensions.

On the other hand, the youth, who used to be in-charge of their own income and destinies while they were in the armed groups, saw the supervision of adults as intrusion in their lives. According to one boy, the youth “were entitled to receive full demobilization and reintegration packages just like the adult ex-combatants.” Some youth ex-combatants also said that their real disappointment was not because they did not receive cash but because the promised vocational training opportunities in the community did not materialize. They complained that upon their return to their communities, they were given only hoes to till the land – a profession which most of them were not familiar with given their long stay in the military. The government claimed that there was no sufficient resources to meet all the reintegration needs of the ex-combatants, particularly in a situation where, if one youth says he would like to be a

carpenter, all the others would follow suit. And there is not enough money to provide carpentry training for every one. These facts point to a dysfunction and even a non-function in the reintegration process of youth ex-combatants into the Rwandan society.

It should be noted that ensuring some sort of self-reliance is paramount for the ex-combatant youth in order to discourage their return to armed groups for money. At the same time, caution must be made when these types of economic programming is planned. As Kemper (2005: 34) indicated, some skills training 'programs may prepare the children for non-existing jobs and opportunities, leaving them better educated but more frustrated than before'.

6.4.2 Considering Social Factors in DDRR programs

It is to be recalled that some community members were suspicious of the returning youth, especially due to their association with Hutu *génocidaires*. This has hampered the smooth reintegration process. Generally, however, the community particularly in the Northern part of Rwanda was welcoming the demobilized ex-combatants. According to interviews with community members, this was due to at least three reasons:

- a) the communities in the north-western Rwanda (Ruhengeri and Gisenyi provinces) where most reintegration took place have, in one way or another, a family member associated with the Hutu rebels in the DRC;
- b) despite its genocidal legacy, the Rwandan rebel group (FDLR) was said to have not really committed atrocities in the receiving communities;
- c) as a result of community sensitisation that emphasized on the coercive nature of children's participation in violence.

To a certain extent, the view that the youth ex-combatants are innocent victims who cannot be blamed for the violence they were involved in has contributed for a relatively easy reintegration process. However, to say that this was always the case is to attempt to depoliticise the reality on the ground. While the community easily welcomed those youth who were associated with non-Rwandan armed groups in the DRC (Mai Mai militia, RCD-Goma), this was not the case for those who were associated with the Rwandan Hutu rebel group (FDLR) who were viewed with suspicion. Some children, fearing that their association with the Hutu rebels would result in stigmatising them as *Abashengezi* (Hutu rebel) or as *génocidaires*, and provoke retribution from their communities, preferred not to claim any reintegration benefits.

Serious tensions occurred in areas where reintegration assistance was provided exclusively to ex-combatants by ignoring the local resident children who were as poor due to the genocide. Aid agencies focused on providing trauma counselling and other assistance to the ex-combatants, ignoring the importance of inclusive, community-based interventions that targets all vulnerable people in the community.

6.4.3 Youth and Responsibility

Youth could be perpetrators of serious war crimes. For example, in Sierra Leone young children were the major tools to terrorize the civilian population. In Rwanda, many young children directly participated in killing their fellow children during the genocide.

The international law is unclear, and sometimes contradictory in how to deal with youth who perpetrate serious war crimes. The International Criminal Court (ICC) which prosecutes war criminals does not have the mandate to prosecute persons below the age of 18, but the youth can only participate in the Court as victims or witnesses. This is

because children are believed to be in danger of being 're-traumatized' as they are forced to revisit the horrors they have struggled to forget (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2002:15). The international law considers youth perpetrators as victims of criminal policies for which adults are responsible (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2002: 33-34). This viewpoint is, of course, in contradiction to the viewpoint held by the research.

The case of Rwandan Hutu youth presents a unique experience on crime and responsibility in times of conflict and its implication in post-conflict reintegration efforts.

There are mixed reactions on how to deal with youth ex-combatants who may have committed atrocities. Some segments of the Rwandan society viewed child ex-combatants as victims because they were forced to commit atrocities during the genocide, while others consider them as active perpetrators who should be dealt with accordingly with some degree of responsibility. The latter view is shared by the Government of Rwanda. According to the Government of Rwanda (Rwanda Ministry of Local Government, Information and Social Affairs 2003:17), as of 2003, there were over 4000 Rwandan children in prison, most of whom accused of participating in the 1994 genocide when they were between 14-18 years old at the time. These minors are defined as "A child in conflict with the law – a child who has committed an infraction – i.e. an act or an omission which are considered as a breach of the social order which are sanctioned by the law" (Rwanda Ministry of Local Government, Information and Social Affairs 2003:17). According to informal qualitative interviews with various individuals, it is most likely that these children, together with over 100,000 adult genocide suspects, will

face the Rwandan traditional court, known as *Gacaca*¹⁶, with the possibility of receiving half the sentence (imprisonment) imposed on adults.

It is true that experience in the past and present conflicts has taught us if serious war criminals remain unpunished, more crimes could recur, and could even increase. It is in this line that the Rwandan government established that youth above the age of 14 should be held responsible for their acts particularly during conflicts. However, the issue of young people and criminal responsibilities are seen from a different perspective by the Rwandan society.

From the outset, this research has argued that the notion and definition of childhood in Africa are essentially social constructions rather than biological ones. In this way, Rwandan youth ex-combatants were considered by the community as mature, not as a child. However, when it comes to the issue of crime and responsibility, it seems that the youth were seen as innocents who were abducted to join armed groups and forced to commit atrocities. Hence, they were not considered directly responsible for what they did. Although the Rwandan law considered those aged between 14-18 years as legally responsible for crimes they committed, this legal definition of childhood becomes less relevant at the society and community levels. The youth are believed not to be perpetrators of the crimes, or supporters of the Hutu rebels, especially once they go through rehabilitation programs. In this particular case then, it can be argued that the societal definition of childhood which viewed the youth ex-combatants as innocent victims facilitated their social reintegration. This way, the reconciliation and reintegration of ex-combatants was undertaken in a way that could well be characterized as tolerant

¹⁶ *Gacaca*, literally means a “grassy space”. The term now used in Rwanda indicates any open-space where discussions are held and problems resolved by community members. In post-genocide period, the word has come to indicate a traditional justice system to try over 100,000 genocide suspects, which could otherwise take over 100 years (Morrill 2004: 3).

and liberal. This is also similar to the South African TRC because the TRC focuses on reconciliation rather than punishment. It remains a dividing debate. Mawson (2004:131-140) looking at the Ugandan experience, warns us that this approach, which ignores atrocities for the sake of reconciliation may not serve as a long-term solution as direct victims of the atrocities by children and youth may feel that justice has not been served.

6.5 Conclusion

The chapter focused on the third research question: How do the DDRR programs seek to identify and address youth ex-combatants special needs?

As indicated earlier, the tentative hypotheses was that the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programs of international aid agencies often rely on the assumption that the majority of youth are often abducted or forced by armed groups to join and that they are all victims of mass trauma as a result of conflicts. As a result of this assumption, aid agencies rely on a universal intervention mechanism with pre-determined ideas of children's victimization in conflicts.

The DDRR programs implemented by aid agencies are guided by the notion of protecting the vulnerable and victimized youth ex-combatants. Their approach to assist the demobilized youth is predominantly through individualized counselling in order to treat the trauma of war-affected youth.

The argument made demonstrated that while beneficial and functional to some extent, the exclusive emphases on victimization and trauma counselling seems to be inappropriate and dysfunctional for post-conflict rehabilitation and social reintegration of the youth ex-combatants, because it ignores their resilience and resourcefulness. In addition, this type of DDRR intervention further stigmatises the youth because it

automatically labels them as socially and 'psychologically dysfunctional'. The approach also diverts the attention away from focusing on developing alternative livelihood options and other important socio-economic interventions such as education, economic opportunities, reconciliation and justice as well as community and cultural connections.

The reintegration process in Rwanda has proved to be more complicated and met with mixed results. While the programmatic intervention by aid agencies and government did not address some of the specific reintegration needs of the children, the social reality in Rwanda had an important implication, or latent function, whether community members are willing to welcome ex-combatants. Accordingly, when confronting atrocities committed by children, different groups such as aid agencies, community members, family members as well as victims of atrocities have different agendas, and different agendas may become conflicting agendas to the detriment of social stability. For example, although the Rwandan law considers those children between 14-18 years as legally responsible for crimes they committed, the social reintegration of youth ex-combatants has been eased and facilitated because of society's different concept of childhood, which viewed them as innocent victims who were forced to commit atrocities. Children could be perpetrators of serious war crimes. However, international aid agencies tend to view child perpetrators primarily as victims, and suggest a restorative justice system through alternatives, rather than criminal courts.

CHAPTER 7

FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

By answering three key research questions and relevant hypotheses, i.e. why and how Rwandan youth were involved in armed conflicts, the impact of the conflict, and how the DDDR programs addressed youth's needs, the study has challenged the predominant wisdom in addressing the needs of youth ex-combatants. The overarching theoretical perspective of the different approaches of aid agencies regarding ex-combatants is the functionalist perspective. This is based on the notion that social events, like DDDR programs are best explained in terms of the functions they perform or the contributions they make to the stability and continuity of specific societies. Society is seen as a complex system with interrelated parts which are integrated on the basis of moral consensus (Giddens 2001: 16). The integration of parts relates to the integration of the different parts of the DDDR programs which aims to bring stability and continuity to both the Rwandan and the DRC societies. Each program contributes to the continuation of these societies. However, dysfunctions also exist in the programs. Reintegration was not entirely successful for some of the ex-combatants who even returned to the armed groups. These events are seen as latent, unintended consequences of the programs.

In this study all three research questions, stemming from the research problem, have been answered and the hypotheses are confirmed.

The research reviewed existing literature, relevant assumptions, and current approaches. They were applied to the findings at the field level in Rwanda and the DRC.

The research, based on a functionalist perspective, has attempted to highlight the need for review of the existing assumptions, approaches and strategies taken by humanitarian aid agencies.

7.2 Why and How Rwandan Youth Became Involved in Armed Conflicts?

There are no exact data on the number of Rwandan youth fighters in general that are associated with armed groups in the DRC. It is even more difficult to establish the exact number of girl soldiers, mainly because very few girls have so far come forward for demobilization and very little information filters through on the magnitude of their involvement. Since 2001, only two girls out of the estimated 150 girls have been demobilized through the official DDRR programme. However, as the research progressed, it became clear that some girls have self-demobilized without official DDRR programs.

Regarding as to why and how Rwandan youth became involved in armed conflicts the research has confirmed the hypotheses that youth may join armed groups voluntarily. Interviews with demobilized ex-combatants showed that youth ex-combatants should not be considered as immature children who are always forced by adults to join armed groups. The research has shown that in addition to coercive and forced recruitment, some youth and young people join armed groups voluntarily and sometimes for justifiable reasons to survive. While the research does not attempt to justify youth's participation in armed conflicts, it attempts to understand some of the socio-cultural practices and meanings surrounding the youth that make their participation in conflict somehow justifiable. This viewpoint is also in accordance with the functionalist perspective argued throughout the research.

7.3 What are the Effects of Armed Conflicts on the Youth Ex-combatants?

The hypotheses presented by this research was that although the youth suffer from participating in armed conflicts, the impact varies greatly and does not always result in mass psychological and social dysfunctionality. Instead of solely focusing on the psychological consequences of conflict, the research re-directs to the need for focusing on the wider social, political and economic factors that greatly mediate the impact of conflict on youth.

The research revealed that rather than being passive victims, some of the youth ex-combatants came out the armed conflicts with certain resilience and advantages including pride, maturity and respect from their families and communities. Although youth ex-combatants were understandably distressed by their experience, this did not prohibit them from positively, or functionally, rebuilding their lives again. Contrary to the expectation of aid agencies, the scars of psychological trauma did neither pre-occupy the youth's mind nor has caused a lost generation. Instead, the youth were able to develop strong and dependable social structures as combatants as well as survivors and gained stability in their lives. Hence, the notion held by aid agencies about the inevitable vulnerability and passivity of all young people in armed conflicts is wrong and has led to a lack of understanding of the wider socio-economic and political dynamics that greatly influenced the manner in which children participated in and were affected by war.

7.4 How Does the DDDR Process Seek to Address Youth Ex-combatants Special Needs?

The third research assumption was that the DDDR programs implemented by international aid agencies disproportionately focuses on the victimization theory and

often rely on the assumption that the majority of youth are often abducted or forced by armed groups to join fight.

The research has highlighted that the current generalized assumptions by aid agencies on the negative psychological and social effect of conflict on young people undermines our understanding of the complex social agency of the ex-combatants. Various examples in this study testify to this. The current approach leads to inappropriate post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration interventions by over-emphasising 'psychological trauma treatment' as a solution, while neglecting the youth's social coping abilities as well as resilience. In some cases this type of DDDR interventions further stigmatise and isolate youth ex-combatants as psychologically and socially dysfunctional, who are unable to make decisions for themselves. The approach also diverts the attention away from focusing on developing alternative livelihood options and other important socio-economic interventions such as education, economic opportunities, reconciliation and justice as well as community and cultural connections.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the conclusions, it is evident that the intended manifest functions of the DDDR programs were eventually dysfunctional to both the youth ex-combatants and society. Aid agencies might need to change their approaches in the provision of humanitarian programs for young people affected by conflicts, through a solid understanding of the resilience of the youth and the complex socio-cultural contexts in which they live.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

With the abovementioned in mind, it is necessary to look at possible further research to be conducted in the same field:

- Specific aspects of this qualitative research indicated more variables in the DDRR programs affecting youth ex-combatants that could still be investigated.
- A study to investigate the social integration into family life of more than 26 ex-combatants could be launched at a later stage.
- A longitudinal study could be conducted by means of tracing groups of ex-combatants to establish whether the DDRR programs eventually were functional.
- A study could be conducted to research why youth go back to war despite attractive DDRR benefits.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES AGREEMENT FOR STUDY INTERPRETER

As an interpreter, I agree to abide by the rules outlined below. I understand that if I do not abide by these rules, my contract will be terminated.

I also agree to comply with Save the Children Protection Code of Conduct herewith attached.

I. **Keep all names and information confidential**

Confidentiality means that information is not shared outside the setting where it was obtained; it is kept private. There are two types of confidentiality involved with this study.

- a) Participant confidentiality means that we will not reveal the names of the participants who participate in the study. For the consultants and interpreters, this means that we will not discuss or reveal names of participants to anyone except study team. It also means that we will not discuss any information that we learn during the course of any interview with anyone.
- b) Questionnaire Confidentiality means that the interview materials that we will be using are not to be shared with anyone except during the course of an interview. It is important to let participants know what the study is about and the nature of the questions we will be asking.

II. **Protect the safety, security and privacy of the interviewee at all times.**

III. **Translate what the interviewer and interviewee say verbatim; i.e., I will not distort the meaning of what is said during translation.**

IV. Ask interviewer to stop the interview if requested by the interviewee.

V. Interviewer not raise expectations and/or make promises that cannot be fulfilled.

Name & Signature _____

Date _____

ANNEX II

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(The consent form will be read and explained to the interviewee to be certain that it is understood. Research interviews will not be conducted before this has taken place.)

Hello, my name is <<interviewee>> my colleague is <<name of interpreter>> who will translate for you and me. We are conducting some studies regarding the protection and rights of children.

We are interested in knowing your story. What kinds of things you did when you were younger, whom you lived with, where you lived and also information about your family that you would like to share with us.

We would also like to know, how you became associated with armed groups and how you lived in the armed group, what you did and how you felt about it and how you left the armed group and, how your life is today.

What you and other young women/girls/boys tell us will be used to assist policy makers plan appropriate programmes that will include what young women/girls/boys like yourself. The experiences you have had in your life will help us understand young women/girls/boys who have been affected by armed conflict. At the end of our research a report will be written with the help of the information you have shared with us.

If you agree to be interviewed, we will agree on a time and place that is comfortable, private and safe. You can choose that place. I do not know exactly how long it would take but if you are tired or would like to stop and meet a second time, then we will arrange that.

If you give me permission, I will write what you tell me. After we finish, if you want, you and I can read together what I have written. If you want me to make any changes in what I have written you can tell me as we read through the document.

I would like you to know that when I am writing I will not use your name or anyone's real name to protect you and the people you talk about.

During the interview, if questions are upsetting or difficult to answer, you can choose not to answer those questions. You may not want to answer some of them; if you do not want to answer a question, just tell me and we will go to the next question.

Finally, if you change your mind, for whatever reason, and decide you do not want to continue talking with me we will stop our discussion. It is OK to make that decision and you can make it at any time you want.

**ANNEX III : QUESTIONARIES
For Boy Ex-Combatants**

VI. ABOUT SELF AND FAMILY

1. Can you tell me about your life when you were younger?

- Where you are from?
- How old are you?
- Whom you lived with? (parental status/siblings)
- If siblings, were any of them involved with armed groups?
- Who you enjoyed being with?

2. Could you give me some more information about your family and the community? (economic situation)

3. How was your relationship with your family and/community before being with an armed group?

4. Have you ever been to school prior to becoming involved with the armed group?

- Until what year did you go to school?
- Why did you leave?

5. Did you feel safe in your family / community?

ABOUT BECOMING A CHILD SOLDIER

6. Can you tell me when you became involved with armed groups?

7. How old were you then?

8. How did you become involved with the armed group? (free will, forcibly, other)

If voluntarily joined

9. Can you tell me why you joined the armed group?

- Poverty?
- Fame, status?
- Displacement?
- Revenging abuse against family?

If forcibly recruited

10. Can you tell me where that happened?

11. Can you tell me who apprehended you?

12. Can you tell me where they took you? What did they say to you?

13. Did you try to refuse?

14. Were you alone when you were apprehended? If no, what happened to those with you?
15. What is the name of the armed group you were associated with?
16. What was your role in the military camp (combatant, messenger etc)?
17. Can you briefly describe a typical day in the military camp?
18. How did you find life in the military camp?
19. How long did you stay with the armed group?
20. Was there any thing that you liked while you were with the armed group?
21. What was the worst thing you had to face/witness while in the armed group?
22. Were there girls in the armed group in which you were? *If answer is yes, proceed to the following questions*
23. How many of them?
24. How were they treated?
25. Do you know the roles those girls played in the armed group?
26. Where were they from (DRC or Rwanda)?
27. Did some leave while you were there?
28. How did they leave?
29. Where did they go?

VII. ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND ABUSE

30. Can you tell me how your relationship was with girls and other armed group members
32. Were there any acts of violence perpetrated by the armed groups? If so, what was the nature of the violence?
33. Did you experience any violence yourself? If yes, would you mind describing that?

34. Did you have any physical and psychological problems linked with being a soldier? If yes, how this happened and how you dealt (deal) with that?

ABOUT INFORMATION CHANNELS IN ARMED FORCES

36. Can you tell me if you were free to come and go whilst in an armed force?

37. Can you tell me if you had any contacts outside the armed group? (visit to the local community, have radios, go to church service...)

Did you have access to radios or listened to radio programmes? Which radio programmes?

38. Can you tell me if you were allowed to have visits in the military camp?

- How often?
- Who is allowed to visit you? (family, doctors)

39. Were you aware of HIV/AIDS and STD infections? If so, explain how you knew about it and from whom.

ABOUT DECISION MAKING & ALTERNATIVES TO LIFE IN ARMED GROUPS

39. Can you tell me what you thought, while you were with the armed group, about life outside the armed group?

40. Did you ever talk about that? If so, with who?

41. Can you share with me some of the subjects you spoke about?

42. Can you tell me if you were ever told about demobilisation possibilities and that you could leave the military camp?

43. Did you consider yourself qualified for DDDR benefits and entitlements? If so, how did you know about it?

ABOUT LEAVING THE ARMED GROUP

44. How did you leave the armed group? (Escaped, demobilised or captured in fighting)

If escaped

- Why did you want to escape?
- How did you escape?
- At what moment did you escape? Why did you choose that moment?
- Who did you inform about your plans to escape? Why did you or did you not?
- What did you feel at that moment? (fear...)
- Did you receive any help at that moment? (from community, from NGOs etc)
- Then, where did you go? What did you do?

If demobilised

- How did you know about the DDRR?
- How were you demobilized and which organisations were involved?
- Did anyone explain to you what was going to happen next (the stages of the process)?
- Where did you go/were taken first? If taken to a demobilization centre, explain what the demobilization centre looked like?
- What were you thinking: were you afraid, were you happy?
- What happened after that?
- How long did the demobilisation process take?
- Did you feel you were protected/felt safe during the demobilisation process?
- Did you receive any package/help when you were demobilised, from whom?
- What did you think of the demobilisation package?

If captured in fighting

- What were you doing when you were captured?
- How were you captured?
- Who captured you?
- When were you captured?
- How were you treated when you were captured?
- Where were you taken?
- What happened then?

ABOUT LIFE IN THE TRANSIT CENTRE

45. Have you been through a transit centre? Which one? Where was it?

46. Can you describe life in the transit centre?

47. How long did you stay at the transit center? Was it too long, too short?

48. Were you informed of the advancement of your file (what was happening, was your family traced etc) during your stay in the transit centre?

49. When you were in the transit centre, could you go out of the centre?

50. Did you get family/friends' visits while you were in transit centre?

51. What kind of facilities existed in the transit centre?

52. Did you have access to HIV/AIDS and other STD testing, treatment and counselling?

53. Did you get any training while in the transit centre? What kind of training did you receive?

54. Was there anything that you most enjoyed in the transit centre?

55. Was there anything that you least enjoyed in the transit centre?

56. What facilities need to be available in transit centres in order to ensure that the needs of children are adequately met?

ABOUT REINTEGRATION PROCESS

57. Can you briefly explain how you left the transit centre and went to your family?

- How long did you stay at the TC?
- Which actors were involved?
- If united with family, how it was done and how long it took?
- Was there anything given to you to take with you to the family?

58. Did you have any fears/anxieties/concerns regarding the reintegration? If yes, can you please explain them?

59. What was the reaction of your family to your return to civilian life?

60. What is the general perception of the community to ex-child soldiers?

61. Did you receive any psycho-social support, e.g. mediation with family and community, etc?

62. What was (is) your priority during reintegration – school, earning income, etc?

63. What do you think could enhance the reintegration of ex-combatants into the community? (Religious forgiveness or cultural ceremonies)?

ABOUT CURRENT LIFE

64. Can you tell me about your life today?

- Who you live with?
- How is your relationship with your family or community?
- How do you survive (make a living)?
- Do you encounter any problems? If yes, which ones?
- How do you deal with them?
- Do you feel safe in the community?
- Do you receive any help? From whom?

65. Do you think there are any threats that you will be re-recruited or you would rejoin an armed group? If yes, why do you think this may happen?

ABOUT THE FUTURE

66. I would like to know if you sometimes think about the future.

If yes, how do you see it?

What will you do?

Where will you be?

FINALLY, ASK ABOUT GENERAL QUESTIONS AS TO HOW THE CHILD THINKS THE DDRR PROCESS CAN BE MADE MORE CHILD-FRIENDLY

For Girl Ex-combatants

This questionnaire is general questionnaire administered to the girls associated with armed conflict. There are some specific questions that will be asked according to the status of the interviewee: (1) demobilised and reintegrated, (2) demobilised and awaiting reintegration in transit centres and (3) self-demobilised and reintegrated into the community.

ABOUT SELF AND FAMILY

1. Can you tell me about your life when you were younger?

- Where you are from?
- How old are you?
- Whom you lived with? (parental status/siblings)
- If siblings, where any of them involved with armed groups?
- Who you enjoyed being with?

2. Could you give me other some information about your family and the community? **(economic situation)**

3. How was your relationship with your family and/community before being with an armed group?

4. Have you ever been to school prior to becoming involved with the armed group?

- Until what year did you go to school?
- Why did you leave?

5. Did you feel safe in your family / community?

ABOUT BECOMING A CHILD SOLDIER

6. Can you tell me when you became involved with armed groups?

7. How old where you then?

8. Can you tell me how you became involved with the armed group? (free will, forcibly, other)

If voluntarily joined

9. Can you tell me why you joined the armed group?

- Poverty?
- Fame, status?
- Displacement?
- Revenging abuse against family?

If forcibly recruited

10. Can you tell me where that happened?
11. Can you tell me who apprehended you?
12. Were these people soldiers? If yes, how did you know?
13. Can you tell me where they took you? What did they say to you?
14. Did you try to refuse?
15. Were you alone when you were apprehended? If no, what happened to those with you?

16. What is the name of the armed group you were associated with?

17. What was your role in the military camp (combatant, messenger etc)?
18. Can you briefly describe a typical day in the military camp?
19. How did you find life in the military camp?
20. How long did you stay with the armed group?
21. Was there any thing that you liked while you were with the armed group?
22. What was the worst thing you had to face/witness while in the armed group?

ABOUT GIRLS IN ARMED GROUPS

23. Were there other girls in the armed group in which you were?
24. How many of them?
25. How were they treated?
26. Do you know the roles other girls played in the armed group?
27. Where were they from (DRC or Rwanda)?
28. Did some leave while you were there?
29. How did they leave?
30. Where did they go?

ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND ABUSE

31. Can you tell me about your relationship with boys in the armed groups?

32. Can you tell me about your relationship with adult men in the armed group?

33. Where there any acts of violence perpetrated by the armed groups?

34. What was the nature of that violence?

35. Did you experience any violence yourself? If yes, would you mind describing that?

36. Are you aware of any girls in the armed group who were pregnant? If there were, how were they treated?

37. How are girls associated with armed groups treated by the community where they return into when they are pregnant or with babies?

38. Can you tell me if you suffer from any physical traumas? Can you please explain how this happened and how you deal with that today?

39. Can you tell me if you suffer from any psychological problems (like nightmares etc)? Have you received any help about this? By whom? How are you feeling now?

ABOUT INFORMATION CHANNELS IN ARMED FORCES

40. Can you tell me if you were free to come and go whilst in an armed force?

41. Can you tell me how you got information while in the military camp? (visit to the local community, have radios, go to church service...)

42. Did you have radios or listened to radio programmes? Which radio programmes?

43. Can you tell me if you are allowed to have visits in the military camp?

- How often?
- Who is allowed to visit you? (family, doctors)

ABOUT DECISION MAKING & ALTERNATIVES TO LIFE IN ARMED GROUPS

44. Can you tell me what you thought, while you were with the armed group, about life outside the armed group?

45. Did you ever think about life outside the armed group?

46. Did you ever talk about that?

47. Did you talk about it with the commanders or between yourselves?

48. Can you share with me some of the subjects you spoke about?

49. Can you tell me if you were ever told about demobilisation possibilities and that you could leave the military camp?

50. Were they aware of DDDR benefits and entitlements?

51. Did you consider yourself qualified for DDDR benefits and entitlements? If so, how did you know about it?

ABOUT LEAVING THE ARMED GROUP

52. Can you describe to me how you left the armed group? (Escaped, demobilised or captured in fighting) Can you explain why you chose to escape or demobilise)?

If escaped

- Can you explain to me how you escaped?
- At what moment did you escape? Why did you choose that moment?
- Who did you inform about your plans to escape? Why did you or did you not?
- What did you feel at that moment? (fear...)
- Did you receive any help at that moment? (from community, from NGOs etc)
- Then, where did you go? what did you do?

If demobilised

- How did you know about the DDDR?
- Which organisations were involved?
- Did they explain to you what was going to happen next (the stages of the process)?
- Where you went/were taken first? If demob, centre can you explain what the demobilization centre looked like?
- What were you thinking: were you afraid, were you happy?
- What happened after that?
- How long did the demobilisation process take?
- Did you feel you were protected/felt safe during the demobilisation process?
- Did you receive any package/help when you were demobilised, from whom?
- What did you think of the demobilisation package?

If captured in fighting

- What were you doing when you were captured?
- How were you captured?
- Who captured you?
- When were you captured?
- How were you treated when you were captured?
- Where were you taken?
- What happened then?

53. Some children are afraid of what their parents think or do. Were you afraid that you would be you wouldn't be accepted by your family/community if demobilized?

54. Were the armed group commanders willing to let you leave the armed group?

55. Did you want to leave the armed group?

56. Can you tell me why do you think many girl soldiers are not demobilized?

57. What do you think should be done to encourage many children, especially girls to be demobilized?

58. Who would you have liked to talk to during the demobilisation process?
(Would you have liked to talk to children, like you, who were formerly associated with armed forces- peer-counsellors)?

ABOUT LIFE IN THE TRANSIT CENTRE

59. Have you been through a transit centre?

- Which one?
- Where was it?

60. Can you describe life in the transit centre?

61. What kind of staff were working in the transit centre? Men/women?

62. Did a centre staff or anyone else inform you for how long you were going to stay in the transit centre?

63. Were you informed of the advancement of your file (what was happening, was your family traced etc) during your stay in the transit centre?

64. When you were in the transit centre, could you go out of the centre?

65. Did you get family/friends' visits while you were in transit centre?

66. What kind of facilities existed in the transit centre? Were there separate facilities for girls?

67. How long did you spend in the transit centre? What do you think of the time spent in the transit centres? too long? too short?

68. Did you have any problems related to your experiences with the armed groups?

- If yes, was anybody available to help you to deal with these problems?
- What kind of help did you receive?
- What do you think of this help?

69. Did you get any training while in the transit centre? What kind of training did you have?

70. Was there anything that you most enjoyed in the transit centre?

71. Was there anything that you least enjoyed in the transit centre?

72. What facilities need to be available in transit centres in order to ensure that the needs of girls are adequately met?

ABOUT REINTEGRATION PROCESS

73. Can you briefly explain how you left the transit centre and went to your family?

- Which actors were involved?
- If united with family, how it was done?
- How long it took to be reunited with family?
- What you were given to take with you to the family?

74. Did you have any fears/anxieties/concerns regarding the reintegration? If yes, can you please explain them?

75. What was the reaction of your family to your return to civilian life?

76. What is the general perception of the community to ex-child especially girls?

77. Is there any stigmatisation and brand against child soldiers and girls in particular?

78. Did you receive any psycho-social support, e.g. mediation with family and community, etc?

79. What do you think could enhance the reintegration of ex-combatants into the community? (religious forgiveness or cultural ceremonies)?

80. What do you think should be in place for successful reintegration of child soldiers in general and girl soldiers in particular?

ABOUT CURRENT LIFE

81. Can you tell me about your life today?

- Who you live with?
- How is your relationship with your family or community?
- How do you survive (make a living)?
- Do you encounter any problems? If yes, which ones?
- How do you deal with them?
- Do you feel safe in the community?
- Do you receive any help? From whom?

82. What was (is) your priority during reintegration – going to school, earn income, become a farmer, etc? Do you have difficulty in achieving any of these? Explain.

83. Do you think there are any threats that you will be re-recruited or you would rejoin an armed group? If yes, why do you think this may happen?

ABOUT MEDICAL CARE & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH – *This specific interview was conducted by a woman colleague*

The questions I am going to ask you now may be personal and you may not want to answer some of them. I would like to remind you that you are free not to answer the questions you don't want to.

I am interested in knowing what medical care you received when you were in the military camp, during demobilisation, in the transit centre and today in the community. This will help organisations like ours ensure that basic health care is provided to girls leaving the armed forces.

In Military Camps

84. What are the common health problems in the military camps?
85. When you were sick, did you have access to a doctor?
86. (If yes)- were you taken to the doctor or the doctor came to the military camp?
87. (If no)- who treated you and how?
88. Was the doctor a woman or a man?
89. Were there separate health facilities for women/girls?
90. While in the armed group did you have sexual relations? If yes, with whom did you have those relations? Did you want to have a relation with that person?
91. Do you know what contraception is? (*Explanation: contraception is when you can avoid becoming pregnant by taking medicine or using protection*)
92. Did you ever use a contraceptive method? Which one?
93. How did you provide yourself the contraceptive?
94. Were you aware of HIV/AIDS and STD infections? If so, explain how you knew about it and from whom.
95. Did you have access to HIV counselling and other health facilities?

- During the demobilisation process / In the transit centre

96. Did you suffer from any illness, any form of ailment or pain when you were demobilised?
97. Did you tell anyone about it? Who? Did they do anything about it? What?
98. Was there a doctor who saw you when you were being demobilised? Where, transit centre?
99. Did you have any doctor/or any other person talk to you about reproductive health and HIV/AIDS?
100. What would you have needed, health-wise, that was not provided at the transit centre?
101. Were there separate medical facilities for women/girls?

- Currently in the community (for girls living in the community)

102. How is your health?
103. Do you have access to health care?

- What do you think of girl child soldiers who joined an armed group?
- In the current DDRR process, only two girls have been demobilized and reintegrated while there is evidence that there are many more in armed groups. Why do you think girls are not demobilised and reintegrated?
- Do you know any former child soldiers who are self-demobilized and currently living in the community? If so what do you think about their return? How is their relationship with the civilian community?
- What do you think of those girls who wish to return to civilian life but who are still in armed groups? Do you see them as a threat to the community? as impure because they were soldiers or came back with children? or as innocent children who were forced to be soldiers? Please explain
- Is there any community awareness programme that you know of regarding the return of girl child soldiers? If so, by whom and by which media (how)? Can you explain the theme of the campaign and how it affected your perception of child soldiers in general and girl soldiers in particular?
- What do you think should be done to improve the perception of the community towards child soldiers in general and girl soldiers in particular?
- Do you have any ideas of strategies to **prevent** child recruitment?

Question to ask a family (father, mother, tutor) member who has (had) a child associated with armed groups.

- Please explain briefly how many children you have, how you brought up your child/children including your relationship with them
- Were you able to send all your children to school? If no, why not?
- When did your child join an armed group? Was it a boy or a girl?
- Why and how did your child (ren) join an armed group?
- Did you have any contact with him/her while in the armed group? If so, how?
- Please explain what you think of your child who is still in an armed group.
- What do you think about the demobilization of children generally?
- If your daughter (who is a child soldier) has a baby and wants to come back home, would you welcome her back into the house? Please explain anticipated challenges particularly in relation to community perceptions
- (if the family has demobilized child soldier) Please explain how successfully the child has been reintegrated. What are some of the challenges that you had to face in reintegrating him/her? How do/did you overcome them?

- Please explain briefly if you think the community stigmatizes girl soldiers who wish to be demobilized

Questions to ask religious leaders preaching in areas where child ex-combatants were reintegrated.

- How are children in general perceived?
- What do you think of child soldiers in general and girls in particular who are still in armed groups?
- What do you think of the return of girl child soldiers to civilian life?
- Briefly explain how your religious institution (church) perceive girl child soldiers and their families in the community.
- Explain what your institution has done or can do to support the reintegration of ex-child soldiers and particularly girls
- What message do you send out regarding child soldiers and particularly girls?
- What is the community's reaction to your preach whether it is against or pro the return of girl soldiers?

Questions to ask representatives of the local administration

- How does the local administration perceive child soldiers in general and girl soldiers in particular?
- Briefly explain how well child soldiers are reintegrated within the community
- Explain the role they have played or can play
- Do you think the returning child soldiers have access to local social activities such as public parades, football games, girl and Boy Scout activities, etc? If not, why?
- Do you have any public awareness programmes for the community regarding the demobilization and reintegration of girl child soldiers? If there is (was), where are these and tell us its effectiveness and the challenges faced in achieving the desired result and how you deal with them?

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DDRR ACTORS IN DRC AND RWANDA

1. Please describe in what capacity, how and where your agency gets involved in the DDRR process.
2. Do you have any idea on how many Rwandan child soldiers are currently in DRC? How many Rwandan girls? What is the general situation of these children and girl soldiers in particular?

3. Do you have any idea why so few Rwandan girls have so far come through for D&R? Has your agency made any efforts to promoting the demobilisation of girls? If so, how?
4. Is your agency involved in prevention of child soldiers' (re-) recruitment? If so, how?
5. Do you lobby armed groups to release child soldiers? If so, how? (Specific examples)
6. How do you communicate with children still in armed forces regarding DDRR? Are there specific endeavours to reach girls (if radio broadcasts, could we have a copy of the messages)? What are the challenges in the above exercise?
7. How do you communicate with the community to prepare them to the reintegration of children who were associated with armed groups?
8. How effective is the above in shaping communities' attitude towards returning child soldiers, particularly girls? What are the particular difficulties experienced in the above exercise?
9. Are there special and child-friendly reception centers, separated from adults, for child soldiers during the demobilization process?
10. How can we ensure that appropriate health facilities, HIV counselling and screening be accessible to demobilized girls and that there are special services for those who have children?
11. Are there any trauma counselling facilities for DCSs, particularly for girls?
12. Do you have any general recommendations for improving the DDRR process for children in general and girls in particular?