



Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

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Child soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa

A survey of programmatic work on the involvement of children in armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone

**With the support of the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund &
The Baring and John Ellerman foundations**

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers unites national, regional and international organizations and Coalitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. Its members are Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva.



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The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers works to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to secure their demobilization and to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The Coalition was formed in May 1998 by leading international human rights and humanitarian organizations. It has regional and national networks in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. The International Coalition has its headquarters in London.

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The Coalition's **Child Soldiers Global Report 2004** contains detailed information on child recruitment and use, by country and region. Purchase a copy of the report by sending a cheque for £25 (book) or £5 (CD-ROM) to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, or download it from the website <http://www.child-soldiers.org>.

¹ This document summarises a survey carried out by Guillaume Landry in 2005, which he followed up in 2006. It was written by Guillaume Landry and edited by Sarah Finch, Claudia Ricca and Andrew Lawton.





Introduction

West Africa is one of the regions in the world most seriously affected by the practice of child soldier recruitment.

According to the Coalition's estimates, over 8,000 children were still fighting in 2005 in the region, and over 20,000 were involved in demobilization and reintegration programs or waiting to be demobilized.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers commissioned a survey of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) projects carried out by child protection agencies in four countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The aim was to obtain an overview of the current situation regarding the use of child soldiers in West Africa, to foster collaboration between agencies, and to provide a tool for other stakeholders to describe the main challenges and needs these programs are currently facing.

The researcher carried out field studies between May and December 2005, holding over 290 meetings with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, armed forces groups, local media, former child soldiers, United Nations bodies and community-based organizations and groups.

The meetings were an opportunity to learn about the organizations' profiles, programs, experience and strategies, as well as their observations on the challenges and recommendations for improving DDR for children in West Africa. For fuller details of meetings held, see the appendix.

This report describes current child soldier and DDR programs, as well as gaps, funding needs and overlaps identified by those organizations. It further outlines proposals for information sharing and more effective advocacy work on child soldier issues in the sub-region. Ideas for new research are also proposed.

This report is not an evaluation or compilation of best practices, but an attempt to share knowledge about the organizations working on DDR in the region, giving an overview of programs being undertaken by child protection agencies in West Africa. It does not intend to give a complete picture and many relevant and important programs and activities are not mentioned here simply because it was not possible to meet every stakeholder.

The survey offered participants an opportunity to share reflections, contradictions and assessments made by the very people involved in the struggle to end the use of child soldiers. This report must be read bearing in mind that the issues addressed are the subjects of continuing debate, rather than organizational positioning or policies. The aim of this report is to bring these arguments to the fore and promote further reflection on DDR processes for children.

Resources did not allow for a literature review to be included in this report. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and Save the Children Sweden are currently conducting a review and analysis of some of the research conducted in West Africa that relate to the child soldiers issue.



Conclusions and recommendations

For further proposals and discussion, see pages 16-28.

1. Ensuring DDR programs reach all children who need them: Stakeholders should ensure that the special needs of all children associated with fighting forces are taken into account in the release process. DDR programs could usefully consider lessons learned in Liberia and Sierra Leone about how to meet the needs of **former girl soldiers**. Other groups that need special consideration are **older adolescents** (aged 15-18), **young adults** (18-23) and **foreign children**. A more flexible approach to **funding criteria** and programmatic work could be developed in order to reach children who are **released informally** from fighting forces.
2. Child protection agencies and donors are encouraged to limit direct interventions in favour of **community approaches**. Communities must be engaged in the DDR exercise from the beginning, right through until successful reintegration. Programs must be designed and implemented to ensure that they do not work against **children's integration into the communities**.
3. Programs must focus on **prevention of re-recruitment**.
4. Stakeholders should better **coordinate their work** in order to avoid overlaps and to provide the best service to children. Sharing information and resources and collaborating in the monitoring and evaluation of joint efforts are crucial to prevent overlaps. In particular, there is a need to coordinate efforts across the region.
5. Local staff working for local, and international child protection agencies, need more **specialized training**. All staff working directly and indirectly with children should be trained in Codes of Conduct to ensure that **children are protected against abuse** and exploitation, and reporting and monitoring structures should be created, with measures for action when breaches are reported. Staff turnover should be limited as far as possible.
6. **Training on children's rights** and **child protection** principles should be expanded and systematized for members of the armed forces, peacekeeping forces and law enforcement structures. Specialized training for military observers should be developed in order to ensure their full and continued collaboration in any DDR process throughout the world.
7. A compilation of best practices should be systematized to ensure a **transfer of knowledge** from person to person and context to context. Targeted support should be given to child protection agencies to create and support systems that record this process and thus allow for a transfer of knowledge within and outside the organization and country.
8. Donors are urged to commit more funding though flexible and easily accessible programs that take into account the needs of children to be supported in a process that takes years to complete. **Flexible funding** should be available to cover the gaps between the registration of children and the official launch of reintegration programs. Donors can play a crucial role in supporting **income-generating activities** to facilitate the economic recovery and integration of children into society, a critical element in their smooth return to civilian life.
9. Massive investment is needed in the **education systems** of all countries in the region
10. There is a need to support credible and independent national and regional structures capable of **monitoring states' implementation of their international obligations** and encouraging them to take the lead on these issues.



Côte d'Ivoire

Armed conflict erupted in September 2002 following an attempted coup. Children were recruited by both sides, often by force. Although the fighting has now stopped, Ivory Coast remains divided. The *Forces Nouvelles* (New Forces), hold the north of the country, while the government controls the south. The *Jeunes Patriotes* (Young Patriots), pro-government militias drawn from the young unemployed, have a strong presence in cities in the south. UN peacekeepers and French troops are present in the country and patrol a buffer zone between the northern and southern parts of the country. A presidential election planned for October 2005 was postponed for a year and will probably be postponed again at least for some weeks or months. Armed conflict between militias and the *Forces Nouvelles* has persisted, particularly in the western part of the country. Both sides have sporadically attacked civilian populations. Under a 2003 peace deal the Government is to disband loyalist militias, enact political reforms, and the *Forces Nouvelles* are to disarm. However, the formal disarmament and demobilization process has been repeatedly postponed and mediation by South African President Thabo Mbeki has failed to reunite the country.

Current use of child soldiers

While government forces are not using child soldiers, reports indicate that the government-backed militias and the *Forces Nouvelles* continue to do so. The number of children involved and the nature of their activities were difficult to establish. Recent information suggests that in a context of insecurity and militarization, children and young people are increasingly drawn into loose affiliations with armed groups or militias and are regularly present at military barracks, where they are possibly assigned specific duties or mobilized to participate in armed activity. A key issue is the widespread ignorance of child rights and child protection principles among adults. If fighting resumes, it is clear that militias will look for extra recruits, and children are likely to be targeted.²

Disarmament and demobilization of adults and children have been repeatedly postponed and this has contributed to the climate of insecurity. On the positive side, by mid-2006 the *Forces Nouvelles* had demobilized several hundred child soldiers and more children were expected to be released in the near future.

Disarmament and demobilization

Demobilization of children has already begun, despite the recurrent adjournment of the formal demobilization process due to stalemates in the political process.

A prevention, demobilization and rehabilitation (PDR) unit was established in the *Forces Nouvelles* in March 2003, conducted by teams composed of military officials, civil society representatives, NGOs and social workers. Save the Children Sweden was in charge of training the teams.³

On 15 September 2003, the Chief of the Defence Staff of the *Forces Nouvelles* made a public declaration to end the use of child soldiers in its forces.⁴

After much delay and high expectations, the first child demobilization took place in Bouaké between October 2003 and February 2004. There was a second wave of child demobilization in April 2004, and a third in July and August 2004.

² Meeting with local and international NGOs, Guiglo (Région du Moyen-Cavally), Côte d'Ivoire, July 2005.

³ Confidential source, June 2005

⁴ Meeting with the *Programme national de Démobilisation, Désarmement et Réintégration*, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 11 July 2005.



The DDR program in Côte d'Ivoire is led by the government through the *Programme national de Démobilisation, Désarmement et Réintégration* (PNDDR), National Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Program, which is mainly funded by the World Bank. Its PDR branch deals with the demobilization of children. State involvement makes it difficult for funding agencies to control the implementation of international standards.⁵

According to the PNDDR, there has been insufficient exchange of experiences between national structures supervising DDR programs in other countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁶ Other agencies also highlighted difficulties in communications between various initiatives. Language has been cited as an issue, where the transfer of expertise from Sierra Leone and Liberia is made difficult because staff do not speak English.⁷

PDR in Bouaké

Throughout 2003, UNICEF met various leaders from the *Forces Nouvelles* in Bouaké to train them on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the work of the International Criminal Court regarding the recruitment of children.⁸ As a result, the *Forces Nouvelles* declared its willingness to collaborate with the demobilization of all children and handed children over to cantonment sites for demobilization.⁹

UNICEF's main partner in Bouaké is the Maison de l'Enfance, a Catholic centre turned into a *Centre de Transit et d'Orientation* (CTO), an Interim Care Centre which administers all aspects of the demobilization, including identification, psychosocial support, medical services, literacy and vocational training courses and family tracing.¹⁰

There are two separate CTO structures, one coordinated by La Maison de l'Enfance, with three centres for boys, and another by Les Soeurs de la Providence with two centres. A psychiatrist, a doctor and a nurse cover all five centres and at least one educator in each centre has been trained to provide basic medical care.¹¹ The CTO managed by Les Soeurs de la Providence assists girls who are victims of prostitution, delinquency and substance abuse as well as girls associated with the armed forces.¹²

UNICEF also assists Akwaba, an organization working since November 2003 to reintegrate 100 former boy soldiers from the early PDR program in Bouaké.

PDR in Man and Guiglo

Towards the end of 2003, UNICEF began discussions with the *Forces Nouvelles* in Man, replicating the strategy used in Bouaké. In May 2005, a unit from UNICEF met with various groups within the *Jeunes Patriotes* in Guiglo to inform them of legal issues regarding the rights of the child.

⁵ Meeting with the European Union Delegation, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 26 June 2005.

⁶ Meeting with the Programme national de Démobilisation, Désarmement et Réintégration, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 25 June 2005.

⁷ Meeting with International NGOs, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, June 2005.

⁸ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities" as a war crime in an internal armed conflict.

⁹ Confidential source, June 2005.

¹⁰ Meeting with La Maison de l'Enfance, Bouaké (Vallée du Bandama), Côte d'Ivoire, 9 July 2005.

¹¹ Meeting with La Maison de l'Enfance, Bouaké (Vallée du Bandama), Côte d'Ivoire, 9 July 2005.

¹² Meeting with La Maison de l'Enfance, Bouaké (Vallée du Bandama), Côte d'Ivoire, 9 July 2005.



Implementation of the PDR began in February 2005 in Man. UNICEF's strategy was to duplicate good practices from Bouaké, in Man, Korhogo and Guiglo. The initiative took longer than expected given the comparatively looser hierarchical and disciplinary structures in the west as well as the inexperience or simple lack of civil society structures in the region. Sporadic changes in local civilian and military hierarchies, tensions between various units and internal fights in the military structure also hindered the process.¹³

In February 2005, a mixed team of civilians and military personnel arrived in Man to share their experiences relating to PDR and train their colleagues on best practices for the demobilization of child soldiers.

A total of 87 children were identified in and around Man for demobilization. As of 29 June 2005, 58 children had been demobilized, the youngest aged 9.¹⁴ They were all boarded in the CTO run by the NGO Famille, Éducation et Développement interpersonnel – Kwa-Fahan (FEDI-KF). FEDI-KF signed a memorandum of understanding with UNICEF on 15 March 2005 and a CTO in Man became operational under its management on 9 June 2005. The centre employs ten educators, five social workers, and eleven assistant helpers. The CTO can shelter up to 100 boys.

Nine girl child soldiers were identified in Man but could not be demobilized because no structure was able or willing to host them. As of July 2005, negotiations between UNICEF and the *Foyer Notre-Dame* on the demobilization of girl soldiers had stalled.¹⁵

UNICEF Man stated that the next step was to complete the demobilization of registered children in Man, and to extend activities to Odienné and other neighbouring communities. In Danane, another team of ten civilians and military was trained to undertake the same identification procedure and meant to begin its activities by the end of July 2005. UNICEF was also examining the possibility of creating an informal daytime-only CTO in Danane, in order to avoid taking children away from their families to attend the Centre in Man.

For a fuller account of the conflict, and the current situation regarding the use of child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire, see the **Child Soldiers Global Report 2004** at: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/global-reports>

Liberia

During armed conflict government armed forces and allied armed groups, as well as armed opposition groups, recruited and used child soldiers, some as young as seven years old. Reports indicated that some 21,000 child soldiers needed demobilization at the end of the war in 2003, including an unknown number of girls abducted into sexual servitude.¹⁶

Liberians have endured many years of civil war. Armed conflict resumed in July 2000, when the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), an armed political group, made incursions into Liberia from Guinea. Fighting intensified in 2002, leading to further recruitment of child soldiers by all parties to the conflict.

In early 2003 the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) broke away from LURD and began an offensive from bases in Côte d'Ivoire, supported by Ivorian government forces and

¹³ Confidential source, June 2005.

¹⁴ Four children were undergoing physical examinations as the field team was unsure that they were minors.

¹⁵ Meeting with the Foyer Notre-Dame, Man (Région des dix-huit Montagnes), Côte d'Ivoire, 29 June 2005.

¹⁶ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, p. 76.



militia.¹⁷ Sanctions imposed by the U N Security Council prohibiting the sales or supply of arms to Liberia were repeatedly violated.

The use and abuse of child soldiers was a deliberate policy at the highest levels of government and the two armed opposition groups.¹⁸ Child soldiers, often under the influence of drugs provided by their commanders, witnessed and participated in the killing and rape of civilians and other abuses.¹⁹ Poorly trained child soldiers were killed and maimed in combat. Girls undertook frontline and other military and domestic duties, and were often abducted into sexual servitude.

A ceasefire agreement in June 2003 collapsed within days. President Charles Taylor was indicted for crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious human rights violations, issued by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. He was accused, with others, of “bearing the greatest responsibility” for crimes, including the use of child soldiers, abduction and forced labour, committed as a result of his support of the armed opposition during Sierra Leone’s ten-year armed conflict.²⁰ In August 2003 the UN Security Council authorized deployment of an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) force that was subsequently integrated into the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). President Taylor left for exile in Nigeria and a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed.²¹

The National Transitional Government of Liberia, which included representatives of forces responsible for gross human rights abuses, was undermined by continuing tensions between and within parties to the conflict and the slow deployment of peacekeepers.²²

In November 2005, presidential elections brought to power Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa’s first elected woman head of state.

Current use of children as soldiers

In 2005 there were unconfirmed reports of re-recruitment of children in Liberia, whether by internal actors or for the purpose of being associated with Guinean or Ivorian actors. Child protection agencies highlighted specific risks of re-recruitment of children in Monrovia, linked to the high concentration of military commanders still active there. In addition, the lack of financial and social alternatives for children in the cities makes them easy recruits. There are also unconfirmed reports of cases of Liberian children being recruited to fight in Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Child labour on rubber plantations

The former LURD hierarchy is allegedly directly involved in the rubber trade. UNMIL confirmed “massive violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child” in rubber plantations, where reports of the population being terrorized, child labourers exploited and children bearing arms are commonplace. The presence of armed children and youth illegally exploiting resources in these areas demonstrates that reintegration efforts have failed in

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *How to fight, how to kill: Child soldiers in Liberia*, February 2004, <http://www.hrw.org>.

¹⁸ Agence France-Presse, “Les enfants soldats libériens ont commencé à déposer les armes (UNICEF)”, 23 August 2003.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, *How to fight, how to kill*, op. cit.

²⁰ Amnesty International, *Urgent Action 283/03: Impunity/Legal concern*, 12 August 2003, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>.

²¹ Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government of Liberia, LURD, MODEL and the political parties, Accra, Ghana, 18 August 2003.

²² Amnesty International, *Liberia: The promises of peace for 21,000 child soldiers*, 17 May 2004.



some parts of the country.²³ There is a distinct possibility that these children would be transferred back to military structures should fighting resume.²⁴

Training camps

According to several child protection agencies, rumours circulate continuously about the existence of training camps in Liberia and Guinea, where forces are waiting until after the elections to resume fighting. Armed groups are said to be active and organized in Liberia.²⁵ Oral testimonies gathered by agencies during May 2005 in particular, have indicated that training camps are still operating in Guinea where children are thought to be among those being trained.²⁶

Links with former military commanders

Rapid demobilization often has failed to break the strong links between former child soldiers and their commanders. The disappointment and frustration felt by children and communities during the reintegration period have led many to seek to re-establish links with their former chain of command – not necessarily in an attempt to become soldiers again, but rather to return to the last person who provided them with food, shelter and protection.²⁷

In a number of cases where child protection agencies were unable to trace demobilized children in the west of the country, they were reported to have returned to their commanders in nearby rubber plantations and mining areas.²⁸ Many girls, in particular, are said to keep in touch with the former commanders because the latter are reported to support them emotionally and financially.²⁹

During 2005 it was reported that commanders expelled children under their ‘protection’ because they were no longer in a position to care for them. This has increased the number of street children and their migration to cities.³⁰

Disarmament and demobilization

At the end of hostilities in August 2003, before the official demobilization, disarmament, reunification and reintegration (DDRR) program started, children came spontaneously to seek help in order to be demobilized to the various child protection agencies present in the country. In October and November 2003, some child protection agencies started to open centres to begin supporting the children who wanted to be demobilized.

The general DDRR program started in Liberia in December 2003, including the formal process of releasing children. It was immediately interrupted because of lack of preparations and capacity.³¹ It resumed in March 2004 and ended in October/November of the same year.

UNICEF coordinated the operations, managed the national operational budget, and financed most international and local agencies that played a role in the disarmament and

²³ Meetings with an international NGO, Monrovia, Liberia, July-August 2005.

²⁴ Meeting with child protection focal point, UNMIL, Monrovia, Liberia, 3 August 2005.

²⁵ Meetings with child protection agencies, Monrovia, Liberia, July-August 2005.

²⁶ Meetings with international NGOs, Monrovia, Liberia, July-August 2005.

²⁷ Meetings with child protection agencies, Monrovia, Liberia, July-August 2005.

²⁸ Meeting with child protection agencies, Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado, Liberia, August 2005.

²⁹ Confidential source, August 2005.

³⁰ Meeting with United Nations agencies, Lofa county, Liberia, August 2005.

³¹ Communications with confidential source, October 2005.



demobilization phase.³² The Trust Fund for the DDDR program was managed by the United Nations Development Program and the 'access' budget was managed by UNMIL.³³

UNICEF hired and trained a Liberian company, the Liberia Crusaders for Peace, to conduct preparatory visits across the country to inform communities about the terms and conditions of the demobilization, and to encourage child soldiers to take part. UNICEF and child protection agencies also conducted their own awareness-raising activities³⁴ and in some counties, the United Nations Population Fund was involved in raising girls' awareness about the disarmament and demobilization process, and encouraging them to register.

In each of the counties in Liberia where disarmament and demobilization sites were established (Montserrado, Bong, Bomi, Grand Gedeh, Nimba, Lofa and Maryland), a child protection agency was appointed to lead operations in the field. This was expanded to the other counties in order to reach children who had already rejoined their families. It is reported to have been successful in coordinating efforts and maximizing inputs.³⁵

There was a three stage process:

- Ex-combatants were asked to meet at designated pick-up points, from where they were transported to disarmament centres, where their weapons were taken away. Children were identified and directed to specific transit centres, away from adults. The operations were directed by military observers from UNMIL, and at least one representative of the different child protection agencies was present to observe and ensure that the Cape Town Principles were adequately applied.
- All children then went through a transit centre or cantonment site, where they were registered and photographed for ID cards. There were separate facilities for girls and boys. Medical screening was also conducted on these premises, as well as some recreational activities and initial counselling. Children were briefed on the DDDR procedures and received a certificate. In each transit centre there was a representative of the child protection agencies 24 hours a day.
- The children were then taken to one of 29 Interim Care Centres (ICC) scattered around the country,³⁶ where services including family tracing, food, water, shelter, healthcare, educational and recreational activities, life-skills training, psychosocial support, career guidance and services for special needs were available.³⁷ No child would in principle stay at an ICC longer than 12 weeks, but some stayed longer (especially foreign children). Some were reunited quickly with their families and spent only a few days at the ICC. All of these centres were closed by December 2004, by which time, 90 per cent of the children had been reunited with their families, and the remaining 10 per cent were placed with host families.

Drop-in centres were created later in some counties (Lofa, Nimba, Maryland Sinoe, River Gee, Grand Kru, and Gbarpolu)³⁸ with insufficient infrastructures and resources to establish ICCs and where most children were already living with their families.³⁹ The drop-in centres provided psychosocial care and support and recreational activities and could also provide short term accommodation to children whose families needed to be traced or those who lived with commanders and had to be separated.⁴⁰

³² Meeting with UNICEF, Monrovia, Liberia, 30 July 2005

³³ Communications with UNICEF Liberia, 31 October 2005.

³⁴ Meeting with UNICEF, Voinjama, Lofa county, Liberia, 16 August 2005.

³⁵ Meeting with UNICEF, Monrovia, Liberia, 30 July 2005.

³⁶ They were located in eight regions: Monrovia (eight centres), Bomi (four), Voinjama (four), Buchanan (four), Bong (four), Zwedru (two), Ganta (two) and Harper (one drop-in centre).

³⁷ Synopsis provided by UNICEF.

³⁸ Meeting with UNICEF, Voinjama, Lofa county, Liberia, 16 August 2005.

³⁹ Meeting with the Children Assistance Program, Monrovia, Liberia, 4 August 2005.

⁴⁰ Communications with UNICEF Liberia, 31 October 2005.



“Mop-up” centres were created by UNMIL as temporary structures during the instant disarmament and demobilization in Sinoe county, Grand Kru and some parts of Lofa County, suffering from poor roads and long distances. The disarmament exercise was conducted for periods ranging from a few days to two weeks in each area. No medical screening, psychosocial support or counselling were made available at these centres.⁴¹

A Transitional allowance of USD 300 was given to each demobilized child, paid in two instalments after the child had been reunited with his or her family. The DDRR program in Liberia led to the demobilization of around 11,780 child soldiers, including 2,738 girls (23 per cent).

For a fuller account of the conflict, and the current situation regarding the use of child soldiers in Liberia, see the **Child Soldiers Global Report 2004** at <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/global-reports>

Sierra Leone

The armed conflict that had begun in 1991 was declared officially over in January 2002. The armed forces and the police – restructured, trained and equipped by the international community – gradually resumed responsibility for security and law enforcement in areas previously affected by conflict, supported by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).⁴²

In elections in May 2002, incumbent President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was re-elected and his ruling party gained a large majority in parliament. Members of the armed forces largely voted for Johnny Paul Koroma, former leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which had seized and held power from 1997 to 1998, but accepted the result. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the armed political group whose invasion of Sierra Leone from Liberia in 1991 had triggered the civil war and which had now transformed into a political party, received little electoral support.⁴³

Some 250,000 Sierra Leonean refugees returned from Guinea, Liberia and other countries in the region as security was re-established in Sierra Leone or because of increased insecurity in their country of refuge. An unknown number of child soldiers from former armed political groups in Sierra Leone were recruited to fight in wars in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.⁴⁴

Continuing armed conflict in Liberia in 2003 threatened to undermine the peace process in Sierra Leone as former combatants were re-recruited by Liberian government and opposition forces. Armed groups from Liberia attacked villages in Sierra Leone near the border.⁴⁵ Following the departure of Liberian President Charles Taylor in August 2003, the threat receded.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted several former leaders of parties to the conflict and former Liberian President Charles Taylor for crimes against humanity, war crimes and

⁴¹ Meeting with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, Voinjama, Lofa county, Liberia, 15 August 2005.

⁴² *Amnesty International Report 2003*, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>.

⁴³ *Amnesty International Report 2003*.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, “The regional crisis and human rights abuses in West Africa,” Briefing Paper to the UN Security Council, 20 June 2003, <http://www.hrw.org>.

⁴⁵ *Amnesty International Report 2003*.



other serious violations of international law, including the recruitment of child soldiers and sexual slavery.⁴⁶

Current use of children as soldiers

In 2005, there were no indications of under-18s in government armed forces.

The ending of reintegration programs for former fighters, including nearly 7,000 former child soldiers, raised concerns of re-recruitment by armed groups across the region. Yet, according to NGO workers, the vast majority of demobilized children do not have contacts with their former commanders. Only in rare cases were these links maintained.⁴⁷ Commanders are reported to have lost their status and power in society, and are no longer a key element in community hierarchy, with the exception of a few neighbourhoods in Freetown and Makeni (Bombali district).⁴⁸

There are reports and rumours of children being recruited for the conflict in Liberia. In July 2005, men from Liberia reportedly held a meeting near Kailahun with the aim of recruiting children for Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) in Liberia. Other visits were reported where Liberian men – later identified as LURD sympathizers – came to recruit children to allegedly work in diamond mines in Liberia. Further investigation has led to the conclusion that this was a cover for a recruitment strategy. In August 2005, two boys who escaped from a recruitment camp in Liberia revealed that there were three levels of camps in Liberia: one for new recruits, one for older recruits and one for the commandos and important guests that also served as an arms depot.⁴⁹ In September, cases of children who went to Liberia to sell goods but never came back were also documented in the Kailahun district.⁵⁰

No recruitment of children into the conflict in Guinea has been reported by local stakeholders. Only rumours of possible recruitment of children into Liberia were reported in Kono district.⁵¹

Disarmament and demobilization

The demobilization, disarmament, reunification and reintegration program (DDRR) for children in Sierra Leone took place in four phases, starting with phase 1 between September and December 1998, where 189 children were demobilized. At the time, the Inter-Religions Council played a key role in ensuring the demobilization of these children in its negotiation with the rebels. The children were handed to ECOMOG (ECOWAS ceasefire monitoring group) who in turn referred them to child protection agencies.⁵²

Between October 1999 and April 2000 (phase 2), the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reunification and Reintegration (NCDDR) reported that 1,982 children were demobilized.⁵³ According to Save the Children UK the demobilization in many parts of the country was not “official”, but involved adults and children who were eager to demobilize and were able to make their way to demobilization points.

⁴⁶ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, p. 96.

⁴⁷ Meetings in Freetown and Kailahun (Kailahun district), Sierra Leone, September-October 2005.

⁴⁸ Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 September 2005.

⁴⁹ Report submitted to UNICEF by a child protection agency, Sierra Leone, 18 August 2005.

⁵⁰ Meeting with a child protection agency, Freetown, Sierra Leone, October 2005.

⁵¹ Meeting with the International Rescue Committee, Koidu (Kono district), Sierra Leone, 21 September 2005.

⁵² Meeting with the Inter-Religions Council, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 4 October 2005.

⁵³ Cited in UNICEF, *The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces: Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002*, West and Central Africa Regional Office, Dakar, June 2005. p. 45.



During that period, the NCDDR, UNAMSIL, UNICEF and child protection agencies conducted many sensitization activities to prepare communities for the return of former child soldiers. Radio was the main channel used, but posters, person-to-person discussions and community meetings were also used to reach the beneficiaries.⁵⁴

In 2000, the war resumed and some of the demobilized children re-joined their armed group, although the majority tried their best to stay away from recruitment sites, according to UNICEF.⁵⁵

An interim phase began between May 2000 and May 2001, where 402 children were demobilized.⁵⁶ UNICEF coordinated the operations related to child soldiers, managed the national operational budget and financed most international and local agencies that played a role in the formal disarmament and demobilization phase. On average, since 2001, about two million US dollars were available each year to finance the different components of the DDR program.⁵⁷ About 30 local staff members were dispatched in each district by the NCDDR to monitor and support the DDR activities.⁵⁸ Its activities ceased in 2003.

Ex-combatants were transported from pick up points to disarmament centres, where their weapons were taken away. This is where children were identified and directed to specific transit centres, away from adults. The operations were directed by military observers from UNAMSIL. Two officers nominated by each military observer team were nominated as child focus officers with the specific responsibility for matters relating to children.⁵⁹ In addition, at least one representative of the different child protection agencies was present to observe and ensure that the Cape Town Principles were adequately applied.

All children then went through a demobilization site, where they were registered and photographed for ID cards. There were separate facilities for girls and boys. Medical screening was also conducted on these premises, as well as some recreational activities and initial counselling. Food was provided. Children were briefed on the DDDR procedures and received a certificate. In each transit centre there was a representative of the child protection agencies 24 hours a day.⁶⁰

Children were defined into one of three categories: (1) child combatants; (2) non-combatant children who do not qualify for demobilization, but who are separated children; and (3) children (including child combatants) who are identified as having parents (combatants) in the demobilization centre or who are non-separated demobilized children.⁶¹ The two first categories of children were allowed into the Interim Care Centres (ICCs), although only the child combatants obtained an ID card and could later benefit from reintegration packages.⁶² If children were already established in their family (category 3), they were allowed to return to them immediately after leaving the demobilization site, avoiding time spent in the ICCs. The International Rescue Committee reported that between 20 and 30 per cent of the demobilized children were immediately reunited without passing through the ICCs.⁶³ Children

⁵⁴ Communication with a confidential source, Freetown, Sierra Leone, September 2005.

⁵⁵ Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 September 2005.

⁵⁶ Cited in UNICEF, *The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces*, op.cit.

⁵⁷ Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 September 2005.

⁵⁸ Meeting with former representative of the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reunification and Reintegration, Kailahun. Sierra Leone, 29 September 2005.

⁵⁹ UNAMSIL, *Procedures for Processing Children through the DDR Program*, 368/DDR/OPS, April 2000, p. 2.

⁶⁰ UNAMSIL, *Procedures for Processing Children*, op.cit., p. 6.

⁶¹ UNICEF and National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reunification and Reintegration, *Guidelines For Assisting Children From the Fighting forces in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Program*, Freetown, Sierra Leone, October 2000.

⁶² Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 19 September 2005.

⁶³ Meeting with the International Rescue Committee, Koidu (Kono district), Sierra Leone, 21 September 2005.



associated with armed forces (category 2) were assisted if they were separated from their families, while girl-mothers received special care and attention, notwithstanding their association with the fighting forces.⁶⁴

The third step was then to bring children from category 1 and 2 to one of 12 ICCs scattered across the country, where each child received his or her ID card. Services included family tracing, sleeping facilities, food, water, access to latrines, healthcare services, educational and recreational activities, non-food items, life-skill training, psychosocial support, career guidance and services for special needs.⁶⁵

Not all disarmament and demobilization took place simultaneously throughout the country. Kailahun, for instance, was the last district where the demobilization took effect, with the largest ICC in the country.⁶⁶

A total of 6,845 child combatants were demobilized between September 1998 and January 2002; eight per cent were girls. In addition, approximately 5,000 separated children (category 2) were screened and assisted.⁶⁷ No cash allowances were given to demobilized children. At the time of the demobilization phase in Liberia, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red-Crescent (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) joined efforts to sensitize Liberian children residing in Sierra Leone, to make sure that those who were eligible for demobilization in Liberia were aware of the process and were assisted in reaching the demobilization sites.⁶⁸

For a fuller account of the conflict, and the current situation regarding the use of child soldiers in Sierra Leone, see **Child Soldiers Global Report 2004** at <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/global-reports>.

Republic of Guinea

Guinea has been deeply affected by the conflicts which have ravaged neighbouring countries. Children as young as 15 were recruited to government militias in 2001 and 2002. By 2004 most members were over 18.

Guinea provided support to Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a Liberian armed political group which recruited children in Guinea, often forcibly. The Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) reportedly abducted Guinean children. Programs for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers began in December 2002.⁶⁹

Violence throughout the region forced tens of thousands to seek refuge in Guinea. By March 2004, Guinea was hosting about 110,000 refugees, mostly from Liberia. Violence and fear of persecution forced over 100,000 Guineans in Côte d'Ivoire to seek safety in Guinea in 2003.⁷⁰ The rights of refugees were not respected.⁷¹

The use of Guinea as a base by Sierra Leonean and Liberian armed political groups, and Guinea's involvement in conflicts in the region, led to the ever-widening recruitment of child soldiers and the proliferation of small arms. Human rights groups and others, including the

⁶⁴ Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 19 September 2005.

⁶⁵ Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 September 2005.

⁶⁶ Meeting with confidential source, Freetown, Sierra Leone, September 2005.

⁶⁷ Meeting with UNICEF, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 15 September 2005.

⁶⁸ Meeting with ICRC, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 September 2005.

⁶⁹ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, p. 96.

⁷⁰ UNICEF, Guinea donor update, 8 March 2004, <http://www.reliefweb.int>.

⁷¹ *Amnesty International Report 2003*.



United Nations Panel of Experts on Liberia, frequently reported on the support Guinean authorities and military gave LURD. The Panel accused LURD of recruiting in Guinea and other countries, and expressed concern at the link between arms trafficking and the diamond trade.⁷² Guinea repeatedly denied that it was a supply route for arms in violation of the United Nations arms embargo against Liberia.⁷³ In May 2003 the Liberian authorities and fleeing civilians reported that Guinean troops were fighting alongside LURD in Liberia, an accusation denied by the Guinean authorities.⁷⁴

Despite having reportedly trafficked weapons imported from the United Arab Emirates and Iran to LURD, Guinea received considerable military aid from the United States,⁷⁵ and in May 2003, one month before LURD's attack on the Liberian capital Monrovia and despite Guinea's well-documented support of LURD, the United Nations Security Council under American pressure refused to extend the arms embargo to Guinea. The deliberate blindness of the international community to Guinean support and hosting of LURD was a major factor in the recruitment of child soldiers and forcing of girls into sexual servitude in both Liberia and Guinea.⁷⁶ Only in August 2003, after LURD had reached Monrovia, with weapons supplied by Guinea, did Washington officially ask Guinea to cease its support of LURD.⁷⁷

In several instances, fighters abducted Guinean women and children and took them to Sierra Leone. Refugee camps in Guinea were also attacked by RUF fighters during 2002.⁷⁸ RUF incursions in 2000 and 2001 caused between 150,000 and 180,000 people to be displaced.⁷⁹

Guinea reportedly supported the Côte d'Ivoire government in its activities in opposition to Liberia. At the same time, Guineans were said to have joined armed opposition groups in Côte d'Ivoire.⁸⁰ It is not known whether these groups included child soldiers.

Current use of children as soldiers

Many local and international organizations asserted that, to their knowledge, no recruitment of child soldiers was taking place in Guinea.⁸¹ The Government of Guinea reiterated this, stating that the risk is very low because of the regional appeasement, with the exception of the region bordering Côte d'Ivoire, where the risk may fluctuate.⁸²

There are many unconfirmed reports that children have contact with the military, making them easy targets for recruitment by the Guinean army or foreign forces. In 2005, UNICEF Liberia, UNICEF Guinea and UNHCR investigated rumours that children were being trained and recruited as soldiers in *Guinée forestière*, or transiting via this region towards conflict zones. They found no evidence of such recruitment or use.⁸³ Some child protection workers continue nevertheless to report "strong rumours" of recruitment of children along the border

⁷² Report of UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Doc. S/2002/470, 19 April 2002, <http://www.un.org/documents>.

⁷³ Report of UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Doc. S/2003/498, 24 April 2003.

⁷⁴ Alphonso Toweh, "Liberia says Guinean troops join rebels in battle", Reuters, 19 May 2003.

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Weapons sanctions, military supplies and human suffering: Illegal arms flows to Liberia and the June-July 2003 shelling of Monrovia*, 3 November 2003, <http://www.hrw.org>.

⁷⁶ Confidential source, Guinea, June 2004.

⁷⁷ International Crisis Group, *Guinée: Incertitudes autour d'une fin de règne*, Africa Report No. 74, 19 December 2003; *Liberia: Security challenges*, Africa Report No. 71, 3 November 2003, <http://www.crisisweb.org>.

⁷⁸ *Amnesty International Report 2002*, Sierra Leone.

⁷⁹ Confidential source, Guinea, May 2004.

⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, *Guinée: Incertitudes autour d'une fin de règne*, op. cit.

⁸¹ Meetings, among others, with the International Rescue Committee (Kissidougou, 7 November), Monde des enfants (Kissidougou, 8 November 2005), UNHCR (N'Zérékoré, 9 November 2005) and UNICEF (Conakry, 15 November 2005), Republic of Guinea.

⁸² Meeting with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Women Advancement and Children, Conakry, Republic of Guinea, 14 November 2005.

⁸³ Meeting with UNHCR, N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea, 9 November 2005.



with Côte d'Ivoire and towards N'Zérékoré.⁸⁴ A humanitarian worker called this area a "prolific zone of recruitment of adults and children."⁸⁵ There are also reports that in *Guinée forestière*, children still exercise a certain form of arbitrary authority.⁸⁶

It is understood that no recruitment is taking place in the refugee camps, given the number of actors monitoring the needs and the protection of refugees there.⁸⁷ However, the risk of re-recruitment is high in the current repatriation phase, given the delay and weaknesses in the reintegration packages.⁸⁸

Weapons smuggling

Several actors have confirmed that the *Guinée forestière* region is a crossroads for the trafficking of small arms. International actors have asserted that such weapons are sometimes made locally by well-organized criminal rings. It was repeatedly established that weapons are stocked in Guinea and eventually smuggled into Côte d'Ivoire.

The trafficking is alleged to be intimately linked to drugs trafficking. Trafficking networks are reported to be loosely linked to the armed groups operating on the road between Kankan and Kissidougou, where attacks have occurred. Some argued that the bandits might be *Jeunes Volontaires* (the name given to those who joined the movement to repel the Liberian attack in 2000) but this allegation has not been documented.⁸⁹ Gunfire is often heard during the night in N'Zérékoré, although no arrests have been made.⁹⁰

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

At the time of the attack on Guékédou from Liberia in 2000, UNHCR reported that broad child protection programs were put in place. Although former child soldiers were not targeted at the time by specific programs, efforts were invested to ensure that their needs were covered.⁹¹

During the attack, the Guinea government issued an appeal to young people to defend the nation, promising that the *Jeunes Volontaires* would be employed in the regular army after the assailants had been expelled. In fact, only two per cent of the *Jeunes Volontaires* were promoted in the years that followed.⁹²

After the attack, German International Cooperation (GTZ) was commissioned to design and implement a reintegration program, with the support of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Women Advancement and Children and funding from UNICEF, for 350 young people from Kissidougou and Guékédou. The original plan was to place the participants in apprenticeships. However, in view of the difficulties in monitoring their progress, it was decided to create a centre where for six months, the *Jeunes Volontaires* learned among

⁸⁴ Meeting, among others, with the International Rescue Committee, N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea, 10 November 2005.

⁸⁵ Meeting in Republic of Guinea, November 2005.

⁸⁶ Meeting with an international organization, Republic of Guinea, November 2005.

⁸⁷ Meetings with UNHCR (9 November 2005) and with the Jesuit Refugee Services (10 November 2005), N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea,.

⁸⁸ Meeting with international organizations, Republic of Guinea, November 2005.

⁸⁹ Meeting with local and international NGOs, Kissidougou and N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea, November 2005.

⁹⁰ Meeting with the Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea, 10 November 2005.

⁹¹ Meeting with UNHCR, Kissidougou, Republic of Guinea, 7 November 2005.

⁹² Meeting with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Women Advancement and Children, Conakry, Republic of Guinea, 14 November 2005.



other things carpentry, agriculture, electronics, computer science, boiler making, mechanics, masonry and tailoring.⁹³

Currently, the World Food Program has integrated a number of the younger *Jeunes Volontaires* in its activities, providing some of them with income generating activities.⁹⁴ In the past few months, 23 Guinean boys who were in the LURD during the Liberian conflict and demobilized in Liberia were repatriated to Guinea by the ICRC.⁹⁵ An informal network is maintained between these children, so that they can keep in touch and exchange information.⁹⁶ The ICRC signed a memorandum of understanding with UNICEF, UNHCR and the International Rescue Committee to exchange information about these children in order to allow for the creation a reintegration programs to cater for their needs.⁹⁷

With funding from UNICEF, the local NGO Sabou Guinée began in December 2005 reintegration activities for about 30 such former child soldiers and about 115 vulnerable minors living in villages from Macenta to Guiké, Yomu and Guékédou.⁹⁸

For a fuller account of the conflict, and the current situation regarding the use of child soldiers in Guinea, see **Child Soldiers Global Report 2004** at <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/global-reports>.

Key findings

The survey revealed a vast amount of interesting information and ideas. This report attempts to summarize the key findings, but for a fuller account, please read the long presentation, available from the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.

Standardizing terminology

The Cape Town Principles define a “child soldier” as “any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of 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.”

During the demobilization exercise in Sierra Leone, a narrower definition was used, and as a result a substantial number of children were left out of the process. Over 6,800 children were demobilized: about half the number of children estimated to be involved. In Liberia, continued lobbying by child protection agencies led to a better application of the Cape Town Principles during the demobilization, with more than 14,000 children demobilized.⁹⁹

⁹³ Meeting with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Women Advancement and Children, Conakry, Republic of Guinea, 14 November 2005.

⁹⁴ Meetings with the ICRC (Kissidougou, 7 November 2005) and with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Women Advancement and Children, Kissidougou (Conakry, 14 November 2005), Republic of Guinea.

⁹⁵ Meeting with the ICRC, N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea, 10 November 2005.

⁹⁶ This network allows them to share difficulties and support each other during the reintegration phase. However, it has the potential to be used to spread information on rejoining the armed forces.

⁹⁷ Meeting with the ICRC, Conakry, Republic of Guinea, 14 November 2005.

⁹⁸ Meeting with Sabou Guinée, N'Zérékoré, Republic of Guinea, 9 November 2005.

⁹⁹ UNICEF, *Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa*, New York, 1997. Since 2005, UNICEF has undertaken a global review process of the Cape Town Principles to incorporate lessons learned and advances in international legal standards, and to obtain greater political endorsement and global coherence and ownership. An updated version of the Cape Town Principles is expected to be released in late 2006.



There is a movement within certain UN agencies, especially the Department of Peace Keeping Operations, in favour of narrowing the definition of child soldiers to apply to combatants only in order to better control the disarmament exercise and to prioritize the security component of demobilization over the long-term socioeconomic aspect.

This point of view is gaining momentum in Côte d'Ivoire, where the formal demobilization is in preparation. There is a need to continue advocating for strict application of the definition of a child soldier as set out in the Cape Town Principles, and to render compulsory this application within any formal DDR process and peace accord negotiation.

Peace accords should also standardize the framework according to which those who recruited children are held responsible.

Ensuring DDR processes serve all children

Identification and registration procedures within the DDR should ensure the establishment of a child-friendly environment that prioritizes children's needs over technical procedures. Informal registration should be facilitated.

Many children are left outside official DDR programs, as occurred in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Furthermore, former child soldiers, especially children who leave through informal demobilization (also known as "self-demobilized" children), often do not receive any assistance and support in informal DDR, as in the case of Côte d'Ivoire. Several actors throughout the region expressed concern about the reintegration of children who were not demobilized, formally or informally.

The difficulties encountered in Guinea with the reintegration of the *Jeunes Volontaires* illustrate the need to commit more flexible resources to match the needs of children and youth that are informally released from fighting forces. These children are reported to suffer from marginalization and stigmatization, and to cause problems within the communities. A more flexible approach to funding criteria and programmatic work must be developed in order to reach these children and address their needs, wherever they are. The answer does not necessarily lie in an increase of infrastructure and staff; local partnerships may be just as effective for identifying these children's needs and responding to them in a simple and direct manner.

The demobilization exercise in Liberia has shed light on the need to decentralize and multiply demobilization sites, in order to reach as many child soldiers as possible. 'Mop-up exercises' – temporary structures created in areas with unreliable roads, long distances and where no medical screening, psychosocial support or counselling was made available¹⁰⁰ – had negative impacts on the number of children disarmed and on the reintegration of those who were registered.

Girls

In Sierra Leone, Liberia and now Côte d'Ivoire, the disarmament and demobilization processes had limited success in ensuring that girl soldiers had access to the services and opportunities offered to boy soldiers.

¹⁰⁰ Meeting with the United Methodist Committee on Relief, Voinjama, Lofa county, Liberia, 15 August 2005.



In Liberia and Sierra Leone, disarmament infrastructures were particularly inappropriate for girls, who feared stigmatization as a result of the lengthy public process, or did not know that they were entitled to participate.

Research has shed light on some of the reasons why girls were left behind in these processes. There is a need now to support initiatives that seek to address the needs of former girl soldiers in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Also, these lessons learned must be integrated into programs and strategies in Côte d'Ivoire where informal disarmament and demobilization continue to take place.

Particular attention should be given to girl-mothers, girl victims of sexual violence and girls 'married' to combatants, in order to ensure their full involvement in all aspects of the DDR and to ensure that their needs are adequately met.

Older children

Children aged between 15 and 18 years are entitled to the same protection as younger children. Their experience as child soldiers often increases their difficulties in making the transition to adult life. Throughout West Africa, adolescent girls and boys are often heads of households, because they are either parents themselves, have lost their parents or their families have separated.

Programs should take into account children's needs to be empowered and to participate in their own integration into a community. Alternative care, independent living arrangements, alternatives to family reintegration, vocational training courses, accelerated learning programs and income-generating activities are already applied in the field and should be expanded to ensure that these adolescents return to civilian life in their communities with the tools necessary for their welfare.

Young adults

Most child protection agencies stipulate that their beneficiaries must be under 18. Yet combatants demobilized between the ages of 18 and 23 often became associated with the fighting forces when they were children. This group falls through the gaps in most programs: whilst they can access the quick reintegration packages given to adults in most formal DDR processes, they have needs similar to those of adolescent children when it comes to building capacities and accessing opportunities to ensure their reintegration into communities. Special programs are needed to address the particular situation of these young combatants.

Foreign children

No foreign children were demobilized in Sierra Leone and about 100 foreign children were demobilized in Liberia, where the DDR process did not provide particular responses to their special needs. In Côte d'Ivoire, as of August 2005, no guidelines, policies or structures were in place to prepare for the demobilization of foreign children. After more than two years of informal demobilization, foreign children were still being demobilized on an *ad hoc* basis. Meanwhile, across the region, detailed testimonies and reports confirm the scale of cross-border recruitment and the association of foreign children with various armed groups and forces.

Too often, these children have to wait in interim care centres or temporary placements much longer than their local counterparts before their families are traced. Governments and stakeholders are urged to adapt their procedures to reduce the waiting time as much as possible. In particular, family tracing procedures for foreign children should take priority in order to accelerate the process.



Child protection agencies in the child's country of origin must ensure that returning former child soldiers have access to the same services and opportunities as those reintegrated in the country where the fighting occurred. Stakeholders should ensure that their programs cater for the special needs of foreign children.

Refugee children

Refugee children are vulnerable to cross-border recruitment, especially those living outside refugee camps. Internally displaced children (IDPs) face similar threats. It has been established, for instance, that a number of refugee children in Guinea have been used as soldiers in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. However, there is no systematic documentation of this type of experience, and no specific program catering for the needs of refugee children. Many children recruited as refugees or IDPs demobilize themselves and reintegrate into their communities without the assistance of any formal or informal DDR program. Efforts are already made to protect refugee and internally displaced children. However, more prevention work and capacity building are needed inside and outside refugee camps to empower these children and reduce their risk of being recruited.

Working with community structures

It has become the norm to support the communities or families of returning child soldiers, rather than just the individual children. The goal is to avoid stigmatization and to promote a community-approach to the child's reintegration.

In Liberia, several reintegration programs restricted access for children from the community who had not been soldiers, assuming that these children would be supported by other development structures. In fact, no such support was available, and the exclusive focus on assisting former child soldiers led to frustration within the community and stigmatization of the former child soldiers.

Child protection agencies and donors must be pragmatic in the conception and implementation of their programs to ensure that education, life-skills and training programs aimed at former child soldiers are not carried out to the detriment of their integration into the communities.

Community leaders and structures, as well as families, are often used in the final, reintegration phase of DDR processes for children. If the desired outcome is the children's integration into a community, the latter must be involved throughout the entire process, to prepare and facilitate this integration. War-affected communities can play a crucial role in the disarmament and demobilization phases, despite the security imperative and the limited resources, and this will facilitate the rest of the process. Stakeholders should engage entire communities in the DDR exercise from the beginning.

Whether formal or informal, DDR processes for children are generally challenged by individuals who misinform potential beneficiaries about the purpose and procedures of the exercise. Bullying and mistrust are rampant in the period that follows a war, as the Liberian, Ivorian and Sierra Leonean examples have shown. Moreover, distances, movement and lack of communication infrastructure often make it difficult to reach every affected child. Information is therefore vital to the success of the children's release and return to civilian life. There is a need to better coordinate and increase the support to awareness raising efforts before, during and after the disarmament and demobilization phases. Public education work must be linked to community-based structures and initiatives that will ensure and support the children's protection and integration.



The difficulties children encounter in their daily life upon their integration into a community should be countered with longer-term and more regular follow-up and support to overcome obstacles to their inclusion.

Supporting staff

Local staff working for local and international child protection agencies in all four countries have reiterated their need for more specialized training in psychosocial support, to be better able to identify, support and refer cases of children in need of such services.

Personnel working in interim care centres and day and night centres for vulnerable children also need medical training. In particular, staff working with girls who are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases requested the services of a gynaecologist.

The region is host to many local and international NGOs that have developed a unique expertise in offering psychosocial support. Opportunities should be given to those who have acquired such expertise to document and share it with others.

One of the greatest challenges child protection agencies face throughout the DDR process is to establish and maintain a relationship of mutual trust with the children, which is an essential condition if the program is to succeed. All stakeholders (child protection agencies, military observers, social workers, etc.) should therefore limit staff turn-over as much as possible, as changes in personnel hinder the development of trust.

DDR processes often involve a wide range of actors with diverse responsibilities and knowledge of children's rights. Codes of Conduct are essential to ensure that children are protected against abuse and exploitation throughout the DDR exercise. Such codes do not always exist, and where they do, can vary greatly between agencies. There is a need to standardize Codes of Conduct, to adapt them to the context where they are applied, and to mainstream them across every step and location where the DDR process for children is taking place. All staff working directly and indirectly with children should be trained in the Code, and reporting and monitoring structures should be created, with measures for action when breaches are reported. Moreover, in recognition of the stressful and demanding nature of child protection work, stress-management mechanisms should be created for staff working in the DDR processes, with continual access to psychosocial services.

Promoting a long-term vision

Whether or not fighting resumes, international actors will eventually leave communities to deal with their own challenges.

In Guinea, now that most international actors are scaling down their initiatives and planning exit strategies, the local population remains more vulnerable than ever. After decades of assistance, when hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of staff members flooded the *Guinée forestière*, humanitarian assistance programs for refugees will end, and local communities will be left without much experience and knowledge of how to cope. A sustainable approach to the protection of children includes making sure that local structures have the expertise and capacities to maintain and develop child protection measures. International actors are thus encouraged to use and develop local structures throughout the preparation and implementation of child protection programs, with the prevention of recruitment of children as the overarching aim. The development of a regional network is encouraged to enhance these local capacities.



In Sierra Leone, the DDR experience is coming to a close without an assurance that the prevention work carried out would be successful in preventing child recruitment were fighting to resume in Sierra Leone or a neighbouring country.

In Guinea, where no specific prevention program is in place, local actors highlighted the high risk of children being recruited into armed groups and forces in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere.

There is a need to frame reintegration programs within a prevention strategy in order to guarantee the sustainability of assistance programs beyond the children's immediate survival, and to prevent recruitment and re-recruitment of all children. Prevention programs must be created and implemented on a national and regional basis.

Working with the armed forces and authorities

Several programs are in place in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and elsewhere in the region to train members of the armed forces on children's rights and child protection principles. To a lesser extent, law enforcement authorities have also been trained in the same issues. Such programs should be expanded and systematized. The creation of child protection units or focal points for children within military and law enforcement structures should be pursued and supported, and education on children's rights should be made mandatory in military and police training.

Peacekeeping forces, especially military observers working under peacekeeping operations, play a key role in the disarmament and screening processes in the formal DDR for children. They are often responsible for deciding whether a child can be registered as a child soldier. Months of advocacy and consultation in favour of a child-friendly DDR can be compromised if the military observers are unaware of child protection principles or unwilling to collaborate. Specialized training for military observers should be developed in order to ensure their full and continued collaboration in any DDR process throughout the world. Female military observers are encouraged to participate in the process, and knowledge of at least one official language used in the country where DDR takes place should be a prerequisite for military observers to be involved in the process.

Armed forces and groups need to better understand their role and to see the release of children as a process rather than a single event. Commanders must demonstrate their understanding of the difficulties these children face, by dissociating themselves from children in all possible ways. More advocacy work is needed to break the links between military structures and children before, during and after the DDR process.

Monitoring governments' actions

Few local and international actors regularly monitor the roles and responsibilities of governments in the fight against the use of child soldiers. Larger agencies have sometimes done this, but their lobbying is often intermittent rather than continuous. There is a need to support credible and independent national and regional structures capable of monitoring states' implementation of their international obligations and encouraging them to take the lead on these issues. For example, child protection agencies, donors and the international community should together lobby the Ivorian, Guinean, Liberian, and Sierra Leonean governments to ratify and implement international standards such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.



Coordinating actions

The coordination of initiatives involving multiple actors remains a continuous challenge. Overlaps occur simply because of a lack of consultation between stakeholders or because of competition for funding, beneficiaries or recognition.

Child protection agencies need to better coordinate their actions in every step of DDR for children, especially in informal settings, from planning through to implementation. Sharing information and resources and collaborating in the monitoring and evaluation of joint efforts are crucial.

The cross-border programs of the Sub-Regional Inter-Agency Child Protection Network in Liberia's border areas with Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, funded by ECHO and UNICEF, are good examples of regional collaboration to monitor the movements of children, rehabilitate schools, begin recreational activities and work to prevent sexual exploitation and trafficking of children.

Limiting direct support

It is important to pay greater attention to the effects of giving assistance directly to demobilized children.

In Liberia, Sierra Leone and to some extent in Côte d'Ivoire, communities identify children according to the child protection agency that was in charge of their demobilization. There is a tendency for demobilized children to believe that stakeholders are there to provide everything for them. Stakeholders are invited to limit direct interventions in favour of community approaches, not only in the reintegration phase, but also when children pass through interim care centres.

In Liberia, a Transitional allowance (TSA) of USD 300 was given to each demobilized child after his or her reunification. While many child soldiers saw this as an entitlement, and compensation for their losses, some communities saw the TSA as 'blood money'. The TSA also created problems in families and communities where the children were reintegrated, because of misunderstandings about the purpose of the money and the person who was entitled to decide how to spend it. Conflicts occurred between parents and children over whether the money should be spent on family needs or the child's own, school fees or clothes and electronics devices, etc.

Experiences in Liberia also demonstrated the problems caused by inconsistencies in the practices of different agencies. For example, some agencies offered participants on skill-training programs USD 30 a month, while others offered a daily meal. Children shopped around and registered in the program that offered the best perks, rather than the one which best suited their needs. Some programs which did not offer direct incentives were finding it difficult to maintain children. It is important to maintain coordination between donors in order to ensure harmony rather than competition between implementing agencies and programs.

The Liberian DDR exercise has clearly demonstrated that cash payment in the form of a release package should be avoided in all contexts.

Working with street children, children in conflict with the law and child victims of prostitution

Street children, children in conflict with the law and child victims of prostitution are three vulnerable groups that are often closely associated with the fighting forces during an armed



conflict. They are often recruited as child soldiers, and a noticeable proportion of former child soldiers join their ranks after their association with armed groups ends.

In Sierra Leone, for instance, the magnitude and repercussions of the problem of street children are a direct consequence of the failure to reintegrate some former child soldiers. While many have been successfully reintegrated, some, as well as many who were not formally demobilized, are now found in the street. Many street children are in fact abducted or displaced children from other parts of the country or from neighbouring countries. A large proportion are former child soldiers who were not accepted or reached during the demobilization process.

It has also been established that drugs are more commonly used by former child soldiers than any other group of children. Thousands of former child soldiers are forced to work in gold and diamond mines by adults who exploit them.

Programs that cater for street children, children in conflict with the law and child victims of prostitution should be more involved in the response to the use of children as soldiers, since these social phenomena trigger the use of child soldiers and are a major factor in child recruitment. Prevention programs should collaborate with organizations working with these groups to enable them to directly address the risk of recruitment with their beneficiaries. Organizations working with them should also be supported directly rather than indirectly in the reintegration efforts, as their work is often at the forefront of the reintegration of child soldiers.

Counter-trafficking programs

Efforts and resources are currently invested by child protection agencies – especially in Sierra Leone and Guinea – in tackling the internal and cross-border trafficking of children in the region. In some instances, these efforts include activities that take into account cross-border recruitment as one of the manifestation of these trafficking schemes. Stakeholders should better coordinate their work in order to systematically integrate the risk of recruitment of children into the prevention and sensitization activities conducted against trafficking.

Using the example of the Special Court in Sierra Leone

The prosecution of nine individuals for war crimes in the Special Court in Sierra Leone, on charges that include the recruitment of children under the age of 15, is a groundbreaking opportunity to expand prevention and awareness raising activities in the region to stop the use of child soldiers. These indictments set a precedent that those who recruit children as soldiers are not above the law.

This is especially valuable in Côte d'Ivoire where the issue continues to be of current concern. Child protection agencies have already used this case to convince some representatives of the *Forces Nouvelles* to collaborate to stop using child soldiers.

Production of education materials, training sessions, media strategies and awareness campaigns should be supported in the region to spread the word that the recruitment of children as soldiers is a war crime resulting in harsh sanctions.

Using the Security Council's Resolution 1612 and the European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict

While discussions are under way to find the best way to enforce United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612 without compromising principles of neutrality and impartiality or the security of organizations in the field, the introduction of a Monitoring and Evaluation



Mechanism in Côte d'Ivoire is a benchmark development. Stakeholders must find a way to prioritize the protection of children, communities and humanitarian personnel in the field while seizing the opportunity to combat impunity and end the use of children as soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire and throughout the region.

Meanwhile, the review process of the Guidelines of the European Union on Children and Armed Conflict was completed in December 2005. Although the revised document ignored some important recommendations, including maintaining Sierra Leone on the list of priority countries, it constitutes a key commitment by European Union nations to take specific action to redress the rights of child soldiers.

As recommended in the review of the guidelines, the European Union should now develop a strategy on how it can engage and add value to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1612. The focus should now be on implementing these guidelines and the recommendations made in the review document, and on making sure that European Union strategies and decisions take into account the situation of children affected by armed conflicts. It is important that monitoring and reporting by the European Union, working with NGOs, is translated effectively into programming by the European Commission and by European Union member states, filling the gaps that have been identified in various reports. Stakeholders are thus invited to use these guidelines to inform European Union decisions in West Africa in order to ensure that child soldiers are adequately considered, especially in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, which are on the priority list.

Ensuring inclusive long-term funding for DDR processes

Most actors in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea have highlighted the difficulties in raising the funds necessary to implement holistic, sustainable DDR programs for children. Short term funding, which is difficult to anticipate and renew, often impedes work at every stage, especially in the reintegration and prevention phases. Funding gaps that occur between phases, and between projects, are significant obstacles to the success of the whole process. Donors are urged to commit more funding through flexible and easily accessible programs that take into account the needs of children to be supported in a process that takes years to complete.

Humanitarian assistance is characterized by short-term funding that aims to bring about an immediate change. However DDR is a process that takes many years. Experiences from around the world repeatedly show the need for longer-term planning.

Four years after the end of the disarmament and demobilization processes in Sierra Leone, there are signs of 'donor fatigue' on the child soldier issue in that country. Child protection agencies are shifting their attention to other vulnerable groups, such as street children and child victims of trafficking, judging that former child soldiers are now well reintegrated into the communities.

However, evidence shows that former child soldiers still need specific support, to ensure the sustainability of their reintegration. This is especially true of the large number of children who were not registered during the formal disarmament phase. Programs must not only continue to support these children, but also link current efforts with prevention work to bring an end to the use of children as soldiers. Donors and agencies need to connect reintegration to prevention work and address the regional dimension of the use of child soldiers.

Sierra Leone is now accessing transitional funding for its child protection programs. This allows organizations to run vocational training courses over eighteen months, which have been shown to be far more successful than four to six month courses. But reintegration programs cannot generally access such long-term funding. The same conclusion is valid with



regards to education, psychosocial, recreational and any community-based programs. Mechanisms should be in place to develop stability in funding and to facilitate the anticipation of funding for the development of sustainable and meaningful programs during the reintegration of former child soldiers.

Funds for formal disarmament and demobilization are included in the budget for peacekeeping operations. However, the provision of resources for reintegration is left to the donors' discretion. Given that the reintegration of former child soldiers is a core component of formal DDR processes and that their successful inclusion in meaningful activities in their communities is at the centre of long-term peace and security in any country, funding for this crucial phase should be included from the beginning in the planning of any DDR processes that involve children. This inclusion would facilitate and accelerate the preparation of reintegration programs and ensure a successful transition from military to civilian life, which is at the heart of the DDR and peace process.

There is a tendency for humanitarian agencies to limit the proportion of funds spent on human resources. For example, donors have set limits on the capacity of child protection organizations in Liberia to hire more personnel to adequately implement programs. Yet a lot of the support children need during the DDR processes consists of psychosocial care, family tracing, medical assistance, education and training programs and capacity building, all of which require trained personnel. Donor agencies must allow implementing partners to expand and train their staff when needed if they are to offer good quality services and follow-up, both of which are at the heart of a successful reintegration experience.

Preventing gaps between the demobilization and reintegration phases

The DDR experience for children in Sierra Leone and Liberia has been characterized by months of gaps between the end of the disarmament and demobilization phase and the beginning of the reintegration phase. Children who were demobilized in the first weeks of the disarmament had to wait additional months for the whole disarmament and demobilization phase to be completed. Stakeholders stress that this is a crucial period when children are left on their own to face communities' reactions. Recognizing that organizations generally have to stretch their resources to complete the disarmament-demobilization phase, it is often unrealistic to expect them to simultaneously implement reintegration projects in a formal demobilization process that involves thousands of children. That said, the planning and preparation should be completed in order to launch reintegration programs immediately after the demobilization. Flexible funding should be available to cover the gaps between the registration of children and the official launch of reintegration programs, in order to ensure the training of personnel, establish the necessary infrastructures and inform children about programs.

Supporting social and economic reintegration programs

There is a general consensus that education is central to the prevention, release and reintegration of child soldiers. In Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the education system suffers from poorly trained and paid teachers, deficient school infrastructures and lack of learning materials. Moreover, girls have great difficulties in accessing and pursuing their studies. In Côte d'Ivoire, the education system is used as a negotiation tool in the conflict, jeopardizing the present and future education of millions of pupils, who have not been able to take a national examination since the 2002-03 academic year.

Massive investment in the education systems of all countries in the region is necessary to ensure a lasting effect on their development and on the prevention of the use of children as soldiers as well as the successful reintegration of former child soldiers. Concrete and



persuasive measures need to be taken against those who create obstacles to the education of children.

Career counselling is a crucial element in supporting a child's future. In spite of the destruction of local economies in the aftermath of war, market studies remain an important tool for determining the most appropriate ways to match children's aspirations to realistic economic prognostics. Donors can play a crucial role in supporting income-generating activities to facilitate the economic recovery and reintegration of children into society. In rural settings, agriculture plays a key role in the development of communities; agricultural programs should be promoted among demobilized children to support this sector.

Developing regional responses to a regional problem

In recent years, stakeholders have been more pro-active in developing and implementing strategies that take into account the regional nature of the use of children as soldiers. This shift requires further support. Developing prevention programs in border areas, coordinating responses and sharing information between agencies on each side of a border, building the capacities of border communities and educating communities along the borders about trafficking schemes that might affect them are examples of activities that should be expanded and better funded throughout the region.

Evaluation and learning

Organizations and individuals have learned an enormous amount through running DDR processes for children, yet they have little time to absorb this experience and often repeat mistakes. Regular opportunities should be provided for child protection staff to explore past experiences. A compilation of best practice should be systematized to ensure a transfer of knowledge from person to person and context to context.

Four years after the end of the disarmament and demobilization exercise, child protection agencies in Sierra Leone have already started to lose their institutional memory because their experience and learning have not been properly documented. Maintaining records is often a low priority compared with immediate tasks. Targeted support should be given to child protection agencies to create and support systems that record this process and thus allow for a transfer of knowledge within and outside the organization and country.

There was no external evaluation of the DDR processes for children in Sierra Leone, nor of the informal DDR in Côte d'Ivoire. Such evaluations are essential to learn from good and bad practices and to improve the processes. A recent inter-agency evaluation in Liberia was a step in the right direction.

Sharing information and consolidating databases

Three different databases exist in Liberia, managed by different agencies. Efforts are underway to devise a system of sharing data and information between them, but significant efforts and resources have been invested in this process that could have been devoted elsewhere. In cross-border programs and repatriation exercises, the process is often slowed down by the difficulties involved in sharing information quickly and effectively. While it is essential to ensure the confidentiality of information about former child soldiers, an overarching priority is to make sure that this information is used in the best interest of the child, to facilitate any process that impacts on his or her well-being. There is a need to better coordinate information, harmonize database systems and strengthen platforms that facilitate inter-agency collaboration.



Research needs

Informal demobilization of children prior to a peace process

The experience in Côte d'Ivoire raises a lot of questions about the efficiency and impact of child demobilization exercises in a situation where fighting has not officially ceased and the formal DDR for adults has not yet taken place. Informal disarmament and demobilization programs were piloted and are still currently operating in two regions. A number of children have been successfully reintegrated in their communities and broken their links with the armed forces – however, “a significant proportion” of children who were demobilized in Bouaké are now back with the rebels.

Such mitigated demobilization exercises through informal DDR programs help the case of those that challenge the application of the Cape Town Principles. While it is clear that stakeholders must react at all times to protect children from harm by armed forces and groups, there is a need to further investigate the various options available in such circumstances to ensure that the best interest of the child is effectively served.

Staff involved in the demobilization of children in all four countries have repeatedly raised concerns about their own security and that of the children in their care. In Côte d'Ivoire, several cases of staff members being harassed and attacked were reported. In particular, staff members working against the use and trafficking of drugs among demobilized children were the victims of reprisals. Violence is a common means of expression for some of these children, and staff are not always well equipped to resolve this situation. There is a need to further investigate the security challenges for personnel and children during the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration phases in order to find ways to increase their protection.

Links between the use of child soldiers and worst forms of child labour

Children are trafficked and exploited in cocoa and rubber plantations, in gold and diamond mines and in timber industries in all four countries. Various smuggling and trafficking schemes involve children, especially in drug trafficking; the use of weapons is common among members of these operations. These criminal networks and industries are often intertwined with armed groups, and rebel groups have been identified in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire as directing these rings. Former child soldiers remain associated with their commanders in Liberia for instance, their role shifting from soldier to worker.

The children exploited in these rings are often former child soldiers or are highly vulnerable to recruitment. There is a need to further explore these risks and links in order to better inform programs to counter them.

It is recognized that child prostitution is closely linked to the use of children as soldiers. The children involved in this trade are highly vulnerable to recruitment, especially girls acting as sexual slaves and ‘wives’. Some children end up being involved in prostitution part- or full-time after their association with armed groups. The links between these two exploitative contexts are manifold and need to be better understood in order to act to reduce the risks of children being exploited in either way.

Border monitoring and cross-border recruitment of children

Several substantiated reports have established the cross-border nature of recruitment of children in West Africa. Some cases have been well documented, but the extent of the phenomenon is difficult to assess. More research is needed to better understand the forms this particular type of recruitment takes. Also, the response to this problem has been



innovative in West Africa, with cross-border monitoring initiatives in particular in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. There is a need to evaluate these approaches, expand them and further explore other possibilities to counter this aspect of child soldiers' recruitment.

Lack of child participation as a push-factor to recruitment

Local actors have unanimously highlighted the lack of child participation in West African societies and its numerous effects on the development of children. For example, access to land, domestic violence and the treatment of children in formal, informal and religious schools and training programs are issues that influence the tendency of children to perceive that joining fighting forces will improve their situation.

In particular, the relationship between violence and the ill-treatment of children and children's association with fighting forces has been stressed by many actors in the region as being insufficiently addressed. Some have argued that the nature of the atrocities committed by children against their fellow citizens in Liberia and Sierra Leone is connected to the rampant violence against children in the communities. Further research is needed to verify these links and develop practical and culturally-sensitive approaches to address them.



Appendix: Methodology

In researching this report, the author held more than 290 meetings with local and international non-governmental organizations, governments, members of (former) armed groups and forces, local media, former child soldiers, UN bodies and community-based organizations and groups.

Côte d'Ivoire 19 June – 12 July 2005

With the assistance of Save the Children UK and Sweden, missions were organized to the West (28 June – 2 July) and North of the country (3–10 July). Seventy-four meetings were held with stakeholders in Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Man, Danane, Guiglo, Bolequin, Bouaké, Korhogo and Ferké. In addition, four focus group discussions were organized with members of the Forum des ONG in Abidjan (24 June); local NGOs in Danane (30 June); members of the Comité de Protection de l'Enfance in Bolequin (1st July), and with ten youths in Ferké (7 July). The researcher also facilitated a three-hour workshop with 17 children in Korhogo (6 July) and participated in a field visit to the Nikla refugee camp in Guiglo (1st July).

Liberia 29 July – 21 August 2005

With the assistance of Save the Children UK, World Vision International Liberia, Christian Children's Fund and the International Rescue Committee, four field missions were organized: to the West (Grand Cape Mount county, with World Vision, 5 August); to the Centre-North and East (Bong, Nimba and Grand-Gedeh counties, with Christian Children's Fund, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children UK respectively, 8 to 12 August); to the North-East (Lofa county, with the International Rescue Committee, 15 to 17 August); and one to the slum districts and suburbs of the capital (Montserrado county, with Save the Children UK, 19 August). Seventy-six meetings were held with stakeholders in Monrovia, Tiene, Kollietawolai, Sergent Koli Town, Gbarnga, Ganta, Zwedru and Voinjama.

Sierra Leone 13 September – 6 October 2005

With the assistance of the International Rescue Committee, ICRC, Save the Children UK and War Child Netherlands, four field missions were organized: to the Centre-East (Kono District, with the International Rescue Committee, 20 to 22 September); to the suburbs of Freetown (Western Area, the International Committee of the Red Cross, 23 September); to the East (Kailahun district, with Save the Children UK, 27 to 30 September); and to the Centre-West (Port Loko district, with War Child Netherlands, 5 October). Seventy-five meetings were held with stakeholders in Freetown, Koidu, Small Sefadu, Waterloo, Kailahun, Ngema, Daru, Masika and Magbeni.

Republic of Guinea 5-6 November 2005

With the assistance of Plan Guinea and UNICEF Guinea, field missions were organized to the Centre-East (Kissidougou, 6 to 8 November) and to the *Guinée forestière* (N'Zérékoré - 8 to 11 November 2005). Forty-one meetings were held with stakeholders in Kissidougou, N'Zérékoré and Conakry.