



Save the Children



# Forgotten Casualties of War

Girls in armed conflict



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**Save the Children**

**Save the Children fights for children in the UK and around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence. We work with them to find lifelong answers to the problems they face.**

**Save the Children UK is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, the world's leading independent children's rights organisation, with members in 27 countries and operational programmes in more than 100.**

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Cover photo: Faida fought with a militia group in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo after being abducted from school. She is now receiving training in tailoring from Save the Children. Photo by Anna Kari.

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Save the Children would especially like to thank the girls and young women\* who contributed their stories to this publication. We dedicate this report to them.

\* All names have been changed to protect identities.

# Abbreviations and Acronyms

DDR	disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IDP	internally displaced people
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the DRC
NGO	non-governmental organisation
STD	sexually transmitted disease
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPKO	United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia

# Foreword

Conflict strikes at the heart of childhood. Not only are children at the epicentre of instability during and after conflict, they are often used as pawns – or even weapons of war. The appalling abuses of children's rights during conflict demands action.

This report highlights an aspect of conflict that has rarely been exposed before. Around the world, there are up to 120,000 girls, some as young as eight, who have been forced to become front-line fighters, or are otherwise supporting armed groups.

When people speak of 'child soldiers', the image conjured up is of boys. But nearly half of all children associated with armed groups are girls. Used as active combatants, porters, cleaners, cooks and sexual possessions, they are less visible than boys – a 'shadow army'. Many are killed in combat; most are raped and sexually abused. Many are injured or permanently disabled and spend the rest of their lives in pain.

Although the international community has developed a formal process designed to help children leave armed groups and go back to their families after a conflict ends, it is drastically under-funded. And, because of their invisibility and the discrimination they suffer, it is girls who particularly lose out.

Most girls who manage to escape or leave an armed group do so on their own because the formal programmes have not been designed with them in mind and can actually make matters worse. For those girls who do make it home, their homecoming can be as depressing as their departure. They are often ostracised by their families and communities because

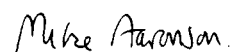
they are seen as immoral and unclean. Even where they are accepted back, their families and communities may have been so torn apart by the conflict that they can provide no support. Some girls simply 'disappear'.

In order to find out how girls can be better cared for and find a path back into civilian life, Save the Children asked the girls themselves what they need. What we found out was that meaningful reintegration is only possible when the girls have some means to support themselves, and when everyone in the community is involved and helped to come to terms with what has happened.

Until the international community funds reintegration programmes that reflect girls' needs, the cycle of violations against girls will continue unchecked. Left to fend for themselves in a climate of hostility, suspicion and fear, they will remain isolated – physically, emotionally and developmentally.

Like me, you will no doubt find some of this report shocking and deeply disturbing. And, like me, you will probably be angry that the international community has failed the girls whose voices are recorded here. But our purpose is to do more than shock. We aim to change the system and ensure that there is funding to meet girls' specific needs so that they can – with dignity – regain some sense of a normal life.

Mike Aaronson



Director General  
Save the Children UK

# Executive summary

Latest estimates suggest that of the approximately 300,000 children involved in conflicts around the world today, up to 40 per cent (120,000) are girls. These girls are rarely acknowledged and are often hidden by the armed groups\*. Sometimes the girls are also reluctant to identify themselves. They face discrimination on a daily basis – from their fellow soldiers, commanders, fellow citizens, governments and – perhaps most shocking of all – from the international community.

This report shows how girls are being overlooked in current efforts to release children from armed groups and support their return home. It challenges existing systems and argues that the international community must fund programmes designed to meet girls' needs. This means focusing on strengthening communities.

## Invisible soldiers

All figures to do with children, and particularly girls and armed groups, are highly speculative and should be treated with caution. However, it is reasonable to estimate that across the world there are approximately 120,000 girls associated with armed groups. Reports of girls being used within armed groups come from Colombia, East Timor, Pakistan, Uganda, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and west Africa, among others. In the DRC, there are up to 12,500 girls currently in armed groups. In Sri Lanka, 43 per cent of the 51,000 children involved in the conflict are girls – more than 21,500.

## What girls do

Like boys, girls take an active part in fighting. They

\* In this report, 'armed group' is used to describe both government forces and non-government militia forces.

also take on other military duties, such as portering, cleaning, providing medical assistance and gathering information. Most girls are sexually violated by members of the armed group, and a commander will often take a number of girls as 'wives' – in effect, as sexual possessions.

## Girls failed

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) is the international community's current means of trying to ensure combatants are released from armed groups. Contrary to international agreements, the current process of DDR fails and discriminates against girls.

As a conflict in a particular country ends, the international community usually instigates a DDR programme for former combatants – usually co-ordinated by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations (UNDPKO).

The success of a DDR process is often measured by the number of weapons collected rather than the successful reintegration of former combatants. The reintegration phase for children is usually left to non-governmental organisations and UNICEF, and is invariably under-funded. Those at the end of the queue for entering the process are children. At the end of this queue are girls, who are by and large invisible.

Despite research showing that girls make up to 40 per cent of all children involved with armed groups, only a few girls participate in formal DDR processes. To date, fewer than 2 per cent of children passing through Save the Children's reintegration programme in the DRC have been girls. In Sierra Leone, just 4.2 per cent of girls known to have been in fighting forces went through the formal DDR process.



In interviews, girls said they were put off the military orientation of the DDR process. Moreover, involvement in the process highlights the fact that they were in an armed group and increases the chance that they will be stigmatised by their community.

DDR packages generally do not assist girls' long-term reintegration into their communities. Often the assistance packages are some food, water, oil, plastic sheeting for shelter and a lift home or somewhere on the way home. Sometimes the 'package' consists of a one-off payment. Once a girl arrives back in her community, there is little further assistance.

Girls returning home are often marginalised and excluded from their communities. They are viewed as violent, unruly, dirty, or as promiscuous troublemakers. Girls returning pregnant or with babies face the additional pressure of protecting and providing for their babies with little or no support from a community that resents their presence. With no other means of supporting themselves, many are forced to turn to sex work, making them even more stigmatised and isolated.

## What girls want

Girls have identified a number of ways that the international community could better help, particularly in long-term reintegration:

- mediation work with the community and family to explain that the girls were coerced into joining the group. This understanding would help reunification with the community
- assistance in establishing and maintaining livelihoods, based on analysis of local markets
- access to school and skills training
- networks that provide emotional support
- medical tests and assistance – especially related to

reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

None of these services are currently provided for girls as part of the current reintegration process.

## Strengthening communities

Save the Children's research over the last 20 years has consistently demonstrated that family and community are vital in ensuring children get the necessary help to reintegrate after conflict. Indeed, research suggests that the only way to ensure that girls are reached is through the community. This cannot be achieved without the international community placing as much emphasis on – and therefore funding – the reintegration of girls into their communities as is currently placed on disarming children.

## Summary of recommendations

- 1 The international community should support and fund the release of children from armed groups outside formal DDR programmes – even during conflict.
- 2 The international community must fully fund and deliver on the reintegration component of DDR for children over the long term.
- 3 Community-led development must be put at the centre of formal DDR programmes for children.
- 4 A special pool of funding should be established to meet girls' specific needs during demobilisation and reintegration. Such funds must be independent of any formal DDR or political processes.
- 5 All states should ratify, enforce, monitor and report on international treaties to protect children, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its optional protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

14-year-old Chantale was raped when she was 12 by a member of a military group in the Democratic Republic of Congo and was rejected by her family as a consequence.



Anna Kari

# Introduction

The threats children face during times of conflict strike at the very heart of childhood. Conflict kills tens of thousands of children every year; it also maims them physically – through injury, an increased risk of disease and malnutrition. It affects their development by increasing the risk of separation from parents, making them more vulnerable to abuse and less able to get humanitarian assistance, and it often stops their education as schools are shut down. Inevitably the violence they experience and witness has an emotional impact. Children are invariably on the sharp end of conflict and, despite their resilience, they need help to cope with its effects.

During conflict, community and families are fragile. They are often forced to flee their homes, and children are more likely to get separated from their parents. It is in these circumstances that children – as young as eight – are abducted or coerced into joining armed groups where they become spies, porters, combatants and so-called ‘wives’ (ie, forced into sexual activity and ‘owned’ by military commanders).

Save the Children believes that all children affected by conflict have a right to, and must receive, assistance. All children living in situations of armed conflict are at risk of abuse and exploitation. This includes recruitment into armed groups. Research by Save the Children has consistently shown that families and communities provide the best protection to children during times of conflict. Effective protection requires simultaneous initiatives at family, community, national and regional levels.

This report addresses the protection issues for children associated with armed groups and, more specifically, to the largely unrecognised protection requirements of girls. It draws on recent research conducted in the DRC, Rwanda and west Africa,<sup>1</sup> as well as programme experience from Sri Lanka and many of the other countries where Save the Children works.

**As a matter of principle, assistance should be provided to all children during and after conflict. It should be community-led and aimed at strengthening communities.**

Furaa fought with an armed group in the Democratic Republic of Congo after fleeing from her violent father (read her story overleaf).



## **Furaa, Democratic Republic of Congo**

"One day my father took the money that we had in the house and gave that money to a prostitute. Then he said that he would kill me, accusing me of taking the money. He took a machete and he wanted to kill me, but then some people came and tried to stop him. I entered the armed forces because of the situation with my father.

"I fought for the Interahamwe\*. We fought because we have to return to Rwanda. I spent three years with my unit.

"Sometimes we carried many things – weapons, bullets, and if you had a child you needed to carry the child as well. A spell was cast over me while I was with them, and I became ill for a year. They have no medicines there – only local medicinal herbs and plants. There was great suffering.

"When the men [in the Interahamwe] were pillaging people's villages, they would rape women. But at that time they wouldn't take us with them.

"I became the wife of a soldier. It was the first time that I knew a man. One day he was sent to attack and pillage someone's house. He was caught and tied up and put in prison.

"It was a terrible war. The higher officers were scared of the war. As I was a sub officer, when they gave me orders to go in front, as a soldier, I couldn't ignore the orders. In one battle, I fought against some Tutsis and was harmed. They shot me. Happily I was wearing new boots and the bullet didn't enter into my leg.

"We fought in four battles and in the fourth battle our commander was killed and since that day we never fought on the front again. I found people in the armed group to be very bad. They were pillaging people's houses, they didn't work and they stole other people's things. So I asked God to help me escape that situation that I was in.

"At that time MONUC\*\* started to make calls over the radio telling people to stop and to return to their country. MONUC freed my husband from prison and put him in a transit centre. I was also at the transit centre with him and we carried on our relationship together. After three months of staying at the centre, his papers were organised, his family was found in Rwanda and he was sent to Rwanda by MONUC.

"Now God has blessed me because for me life right now is good. I am wearing a new dress bought at the market, which hasn't been stolen."

*Furaa is about 15 years old and is heavily pregnant. She is staying at a transit centre for children in the eastern DRC. The centre is supported by Save the Children.*

\*The Interahamwe is a militia group that carried out mass killings during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and now recruits from Rwanda and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

\*\* MONUC is the United Nations Mission in the DRC

# I Children associated with armed groups

All figures to do with children, especially girls and armed groups, are highly speculative and should be treated with caution. However, latest estimates suggest that there are up to 300,000 children actively involved in armed conflict worldwide,<sup>2</sup> of which one third are in Africa.<sup>3</sup>

This report focuses on the findings of recent research and programme information from three regions of the world where children, and particularly girls, have been most heavily involved in and affected by conflict: west Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire), the DRC and Sri Lanka.

## West Africa

During the course of the civil war in Sierra Leone, thousands of children were killed. Of a total population of 4.8 million, approximately 1.8 million people were displaced at some time during the conflict.<sup>4</sup> Between 50,000 and 64,000 internally displaced Sierra Leonean women were raped or sexually abused.<sup>5</sup> Save the Children found that girls in Sierra Leone were often infected with HIV after being raped by rebels terrorising civilians.<sup>6</sup> Between 20,000 and 48,000<sup>7</sup> children were associated with armed groups during the civil war. Many of these had been abducted.<sup>8</sup>

At the height of the recent conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, approximately 8,000 children were involved with armed groups and more than 3,000 children remain so.<sup>9</sup>

In Liberia, it is estimated that 21,000 children have been used as part of an armed group at some point over the past eight years.<sup>10</sup> Between 1989 and 1997 some 5,000 girls were actively involved in the conflict;<sup>11</sup> the number of girls associated with armed

groups in Liberia rose to 8,500 by December 2003. Due to the nature and the common causes of cross-border conflicts in west Africa, some children have fought in more than one country.

## Democratic Republic of Congo

The six-year conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the deadliest war on the planet since the second world war, and the worst ever recorded in Africa.<sup>12</sup> From 1998 to 2004, approximately 3.8 million people have died as a result of the crisis. Eighteen months after the signing of a formal peace agreement, people in the DRC continue to die at a rate three times higher than the average for sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>13</sup> The war has led to extreme violence, widespread rape, mass population displacements and a collapse of public services. Deaths from non-violent causes, such as infectious diseases, are highest in conflict-prone regions where security problems continue to affect access to healthcare and humanitarian assistance.<sup>14</sup>

All the parties involved in the conflict in the DRC have recruited, abducted and used child soldiers. Children made up approximately 40 per cent of the members of some armed groups in the eastern DRC in 2003, with at least 30,000 taking an active part in combat.<sup>15</sup> There are thousands more children, mostly girls, attached to these groups who are used for sexual and other services.

## Sri Lanka

In the recent action plan resulting from the peace talks between the Sri Lankan Government, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and UNICEF, some 50,000 children associated with armed groups were

identified in the north and east of the country. More than 43 per cent (21,500) of these children are girls.

## **Not just children with guns**

The term ‘child soldier’ suggests only those children directly involved in fighting and carrying weapons. However, *all* children associated with armed groups have a right to support, not just those actively engaged in hostilities or those who have been using weapons. Children perform many roles. Some are scouts who are sent into enemy territory to gather information; others work as porters and cooks. All are deprived of a normal childhood. They are separated from their families, miss out on education, risk injury, death or brutal treatment, and are often raped or forced into sexual activity that leads to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

### **All children associated with armed groups have a right to support, not just those actively engaged in hostilities or those who have been using weapons.**

In recognition of the damage caused to children involved with armed groups, international organisations adopted the Cape Town Principles in 1997. These call for a broad definition of a ‘child soldier’ which includes: “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 anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.”<sup>16</sup> This definition explicitly states that non-combatant children must be given the same status as those children who took a fighting role in conflict, and that resources must be applied to all children who were part of a ‘regular or irregular armed group’ in whatever capacity they served.

Many members of the international community still do not consistently use this broad definition of

children associated with armed groups. In Sierra Leone’s disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme, the broader definition of ‘children associated with armed groups’ was initially used – but funding constraints subsequently restricted the programme to only those children who could demonstrate experience in using a weapon.

In Liberia, up to 21,000 children associated with armed groups should have gone through a DDR process. The process was due to start in December 2003, but stopped within a few days because of poor management, limited funding and lack of preparedness. Children initially had to produce a weapon to be registered into a DDR camp. In the important initial stages of implementing the process there was no distinct mechanism to address the needs of children, particularly girls. The process started again in February 2004, this time without children being required to produce a weapon.

In Liberia and other countries, Save the Children has been advocating against children receiving a payment as part of a demobilisation package. Individual payments can place children at risk, as commanders often force children to give them the money. Children who have received individual payments are sometimes accused of having been rewarded for their actions, and can be rejected by their community. We maintain that any money should be used for community-led development instead of payments to individual children.

Despite the explicit reference to girls in the Cape Town Principles, the international community has failed countless thousands of girls by consistently ignoring their particular needs or making inappropriate payments to individual children. Part of this is due to restricted funding; part is due to discrimination and poor and inflexible planning and implementation of DDR processes. As a result, girls are marginalised and their rights barely recognised, far less respected.

Hawa, 14, has found it hard to be accepted by her family after being captured and raped by rebels in Sierra Leone. She is joining a children's club, supported by Save the Children, which helps children to help their community and be valued again (read her story overleaf).



Gar Powell/Evans



## Hawa, Sierra Leone

"When the war came to our village it was about five o'clock in the morning. There were about 20 men. We ran to the bush, but I got separated from my family. I was with other people from the village and we were captured by the rebels and taken to Liberia.

"There were about ten women there, but the men there were so many, maybe 20. Everybody slept in the same room together. At first I refused to be a 'wife', but I had to agree because there was nobody to speak up for me, and nobody to give me food except for the rebels. So I agreed to be one of their wives, but he gave me nothing. He only had sex with me. Sometimes I would join him just to get food. I was a wife for about eight months. I was not feeling well, because I had not even started my periods. I used to have a pain in my abdomen.

"I escaped when there was an attack on one of the villages because during the attack the rebels couldn't take me along. I walked for three days in the bush and travelled to another town, where I met my parents. They were also there as refugees, labouring for other people just to get food to eat. Though there was nothing to eat there, I was happy to see my parents. They were happy to see me, but on the other hand they were sad about the way the rebels had treated me. It was very sad when I came home and met my sisters because I felt that I was somehow discriminated against because I had been raped.

*After two years back living with her parents, when she was ten, a different group of rebels came to Hawa's village and she was captured again. She was with them for two years.*

"I spent two years with my parents before I was captured again. It was a different group. This time I was always with them at night as their wife. I escaped and walked through the bush for one week to return to my village. I only had water, and even the water wasn't pure, but I needed it to stay alive.

"When I first returned [from the war], I wasn't at school and I wasn't doing anything, but with the help of Save the Children I went to workshops, and saw other children doing training. I wasn't lucky enough to go to school, so now I'm sitting around doing nothing, except helping my father on the farm. I would really like to do the skills training because I'm about the right age for that now. I would be like one of the children in the bigger towns. My village is one of the remote villages in this area, so if I was lucky enough to get the training, I would like to stay here to help other girls. I would like to learn hairdressing, because there's nobody here who knows how to do it. But, for now I have no means to help me train, because my mother and father are poor.

"Before the war, I remember I would help my mother and father. I could fetch water for my mother, lumber for my father, and join them on the farm. I helped my mother with the cooking, and also helped to dry seeds. When we returned from the war we used to eat bush yams, but now with the help of our fathers, we are farming leaves and rice.

"I'm trying to join the Children's Club [run by other children after training from Save the Children] so we can work together as children to help our community. We don't have water or toilets here, and we don't even have proper shelter to live in. So we'll come together and help each other to help organisations promote our community."

*Most weeks, 16-year-old Hawa meets with a Save the Children programme worker and discusses what she went through during the war to help her deal with her experiences. Hawa now wants to pursue skills training and join the Children's Club so that she is less isolated.*

## 2 Girls associated with armed groups

Recent studies in the DRC, Rwanda and west Africa examined why girls are being overlooked in efforts to release children from armed groups. Explanations include latent gender discrimination, poor programme design and a lack of funding. This report challenges existing systems and argues that the international community must make efforts to overcome the problems.

Girls are forcibly recruited or abducted into armed groups almost as extensively as boys. Despite this, since Save the Children began working with children associated with armed groups in the DRC, fewer than 2 per cent of children passing through our programmes and interim care centres have been girls.<sup>17</sup> Yet we know from experience and from talking to girls and boys who were caught up with armed groups that girls make up to 40 per cent of all children in such groups in the DRC. Thousands of girls remain in armed groups across the country. Still further thousands have run away and returned home independently rather than go through a formal DDR process.

In the light of this evidence, we estimate that there remain some 12,500 girls associated with armed groups in the DRC alone. In west Africa, best estimates suggest that approximately 20,000 girls have been associated with armed groups and in Sri Lanka, some 21,500. It is estimated that the global figure for girls associated with armed groups is up to 120,000,<sup>18</sup> with girls being used regularly in, for example, the Philippines, Colombia and Sudan.

### Why girls join armed groups

The majority of girls who end up as part of an armed group are abducted or coerced into it. Thousands of girls have been taken by force while working in fields or when a village was under attack.<sup>19</sup>

A minority of girls choose to join armed groups. In some cases, girls are adamant that they are participating in an activity of patriotic value and in other cases girls join to escape conflict or abuse at home, or because their families are too poor to provide for them.

For some girls, 'following' an armed group is the best chance they will have to get food and other material goods. Warlords rule armed 'fiefdoms' and get rich by exploiting natural resources, abusing civilians for labour and sexual purposes, and stealing livestock and other goods. Perversely, in many areas, a militarised life can seem like the only option.

### What girls do

Girls often remain invisible in armed groups, partly because so few enrol in formal demobilisation processes. Research from the DRC shows a prevailing assumption that girls are used only as sexual possessions (or 'wives'), and do not serve in active combat roles.<sup>20</sup> While it is true that the vast majority of girls have been raped and subjected to gender-based violence, it is a misconception that girls do not take part in combat. In 2002, nearly half the girls associated with armed groups described their primary role as a 'fighter'. Others listed other military duties such as portering, cleaning, providing medical assistance, gathering information or cooking.<sup>21</sup>

*"When the war came, I was captured and forced to be one of the wives of the commander of the NPFL [a militia group]. Besides being his wife, I also received military training for fighting. I also used to guard the main gate to the camp. I fought for the NPFL several times but I eventually escaped to Cote d'Ivoire."*

Rose, Liberia

There is an obligation for all children associated with

armed groups to be treated equally. But all too often military officials do not release girls during formal processes at the end of a conflict. Most assume ownership of girls under their command, claiming that they are their 'wives' and are therefore different to boys, whom they are obliged to release.

**Girls often face a double threat: of recrimination from the armed group if they leave and recrimination from community members if they return home.**

## **Obtaining girls' release**

Many girls are killed in combat; others try to desert only to be recaptured. Securing the release of girls associated with armed groups and supporting their reintegration is a highly complex process. Often, girls do not have the choice of leaving their armed group. Their commanders do not inform them of the possibility of their release or simply do not let them go. In instances where children are informed of their right to leave, and this is granted by commanders, they can be either formally demobilised or informally

released. The former entails going through an official DDR process following a ceasefire agreement, peace agreement or process; the latter usually involves the children finding their own way home.

Even when girls are informed of their right to leave, they often feel there is no viable alternative to staying in the group. Those who have become commanders' 'wives' sometimes have babies or young children to look after, and the child will be seen as the property of the father. Also, girls often do not want to be released because in an armed group their daily requirements of food and shelter are met.

In the majority of cases, if a girl has had sexual contact with a man outside marriage – voluntarily or not – she is considered to no longer have value in society. Knowing this, girls may not seek to be released because they are more fearful of the social stigma they will face when they return to their community.

Girls often face a double threat: of recrimination from the armed group if they leave and recrimination from community members if they return home. Girls are caught in a cycle of recrimination: too scared to stay and too scared to leave.

Sisters Zaina and Vumilla were both raped by rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo and were consequently rejected by their family (read their story overleaf).



Anna Kari

## **Zaina and Vumilla, Democratic Republic of Congo**

### **Zaina**

"I was going to school and a soldier raped me while I was walking there. I was 14 years old. The men were from the Mai Mai (pro-Congolese government militia group). I was very scared. I cried out for help but no one came because I was in a forest and no one heard me. Despite my cries, they carried on doing what they were doing to me.

"It's a habit here. Men in militias or in the military take women by force and no one talks to them about it, and no one stops them. It's commonplace.

"After being raped, my life became unbearable in my family. When I got home I told my family what happened. Directly afterwards they asked me how I could have accepted what had happened to me, and they drove me away. They refused to let me go back to school and they kicked me out. So, I came here to my maternal aunt's house. I do not understand how they could treat me like this.

"There are two of us – my sister and myself. We were both raped. When we eat, we eat separately from the other children.

"Normally my aunt doesn't mistreat us. But when a member of our immediate family came to her house, she would begin to mistreat us. For instance, when I touched my aunt's things in her house she insulted me. But the community network visited us and gave advice to my aunt. And sometimes they give us cabbage seeds so that helps us with our farming.

"Except for the community network no one comes to talk to me or to give me advice. What I want is for my parents to accept me again. That is my main worry that hurts me."

### **Vumilla**

"When I was going to buy manioc flour at the market, they caught me. I was on a dirt road in the bush. They took me by force and they raped me in the forest. They were (Congolese) government soldiers.

"Then they let me go and I continued on my way. When I got to the house my family drove me away saying that if I stayed there and the military returned they could kill us all, so my parents chased me away. My sister and I live to this day with our aunt. We work very hard."

*Zaina was raped when she was 14, and rejected by her immediate family. Her sister Vumilla was raped a year later when she too was 14. Now aged 16 and 15, respectively, they have both benefited from the support and assistance provided by a community network funded by Save the Children.*

# 3 Gender-based violence during conflict

During armed conflict, the deterioration and collapse of the economy, infrastructure and legal systems, and the breakdown of social structures and protective mechanisms make gender-based violence\* even more likely, particularly sexual violence and sexual exploitation. Atrocities against civilians, such as rape, may be systematically committed as a weapon of war and a means of control and humiliation, further breaking community cohesion.

Children, particularly adolescent girls, become vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse as they come under increased pressure to support themselves or their families when rations run low. These factors increase the risk of children becoming victims of sexual violence and exploitation.

The consequences of gender-based violence can be devastating, often leading to death, permanent injury or disability. Consequences include an increase in rates of STDs including HIV/AIDS, forced or unwanted pregnancies (which may lead to terminations being carried out by unqualified practitioners) and a high maternal and infant mortality rate due to lack of infrastructure and healthcare. Babies born as a result of rape and exploitation are more likely to be abandoned. Other consequences include girls being ostracised by their communities due to the shame of having been raped or becoming pregnant outside of wedlock. Not only does this decrease their opportunities for marriage, it can leave them vulnerable to being trafficked, or entering the sex trade, particularly if they lack alternative means to support themselves.

\* Gender-based violence is defined as physical, psychological or emotional harm, including sexual harm or the threat of harm which is directed at an individual or group of individuals (children and adults) on the basis of their gender

**The consequences of gender-based violence can be devastating, often leading to death or permanent injury or disability.**

## **Violence against girls associated with armed groups**

Recent research shows that the majority of girls associated with armed groups in the DRC have experienced gender-based violence.<sup>22</sup> Save the Children's programmatic experience suggests this is true of girls associated with armed groups in many other countries around the world. Many are forcibly recruited to become a 'wife' of one of the military commanders; they face sexual violence from the outset.

In one of Save the Children's programmes in west Africa, 32 per cent of all girls in the armed group reported having been raped,\*\* 38 per cent were treated for sexually transmitted infections and 66 per cent were single mothers.<sup>23</sup>

Girls are typically 'taken' or 'allocated' as the sexual partner of a particular member of the armed group. It is common for members of the armed group, particularly the commander of the unit, to have a number of 'wives' used specifically for domestic chores and sexual purposes. Such is the turbulence of life in armed groups that girls have often said they felt safer with one of the commanders, as other men in the group would then leave them alone.

Not surprisingly, the abuse and exploitation that girls suffer in armed groups and the stigma they face when they return to their families can lead to fatalism and

\*\* It should be noted that wherever it occurs, because of the stigma attached, rape and sexual assault are always under-reported.

despair. Many cases of suicidal behaviour have been recorded.

Although families may be forced into publicly spurning their daughters because of external pressures to uphold moral and social codes, recent research in the DRC found that the majority of parents want their daughters to be able to return home. This should encourage the international community to find ways of removing the stigma for these girls. There is evidence for example, that supporting mediation and conflict resolution projects can assist in addressing the social marginalisation and stigma that girls face.

To protect children from gender-based violence and its effects, humanitarian agencies must ensure that prevention strategies include physical security, access to food, water, education and livelihood options. They must make sure that survivors receive medical assistance, reproductive healthcare and community-based support. Perpetrators must be adequately prosecuted and victims protected and provided with a safe environment that respects the rights of children, particularly girls. Children must have access to education, as this can act as a form of prevention for

recruitment and for preserving the integrity of children.

## Recommendations

- To reduce the incidence of sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and particularly to prevent girls from joining armed groups, assistance must be distributed fairly and appropriately to the most vulnerable populations in accordance with minimum standards for disaster response (ie, Sphere standards<sup>24</sup>).
- Resources must be allocated to invest in livelihood options for communities, particularly girls associated with armed groups, to prevent further abuses such as re-recruitment, exploitation and trafficking.
- States should ensure that perpetrators of violence against civilians, particularly sexual violence against children and women and the recruitment of children into armed groups, are prosecuted, either through their own courts or by signing up to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Aimerance, a former combatant in the Democratic Republic of Congo, managed to escape the rebels and is now living back with her family. Save the Children is supporting her with sewing training (read her story overleaf).



Anna Kari



### **Aimerance, Democratic Republic of Congo**

"My father and mother are farmers – they cultivate other people's fields and then people pay them something. Our grandparents left a field for us but when they died, the rest of the family took the land back for themselves and my father was left with nothing.

"I was in the third year of primary school. I left because my father had no money to pay for me. After leaving school I spent my time at home. I was 14. One day a girl friend who I studied with visited me at my house and told me to join the armed forces. My friend was in a Congolese rebel faction in 2002. She said that she was doing well, and that I would do well if I also joined. So, that's why I joined.

"I was in the group for two years. I used a gun many times, in many battles. We fought over the Congo because the Congo is our country. Kagame wanted to take the country [Kagame is the President of the Republic of Rwanda], so we fought against his forces.

"We suffered a lot. I had lice in my hair. In the morning they would take us to guard places like the houses of a military authority. We also had to do all the cooking for lots and lots of people who were there. It was a lot of work.

"The men took us as their 'wives' – they treated us very badly. They didn't start to rape me at the beginning, for the first year. It was later on that it began. There were lots of little houses in the military camp. They put girls and men in the houses. Then, the military men took us as their women; they didn't consider the fact that we were still children. At any time they wanted, they came and had sex with us. There were so many men. You could have one man who had sex with you and then he left. Then, a second came and talked to you and then had sex and went back to his home. Then a third would come to you, talk and have sex with you and go to his home. So, they did what they wanted with me. We were only there to do what they wanted. Even if you refused, the men took you anyway – they would insist.

"I felt like I had no more energy left within me. I felt so weak and feeble and like I had lost all of my intelligence. There were seven of us girls who were treated that way. We all experienced the same thing. Now, I feel very bad here [pointing to her lower abdomen/reproductive area].

"There was no way for me to escape and come back here. We were in Kisangani. It is far from here. One day, when they sent me to the market, I saw that my uncle was driving a car in the village. I hid in the car and he drove to Bukavu. From Bukavu I took another car from there to my home village.

"Two times since then rebels have come to bother me. They came to my house and tried to take me back calling me a deserter. But the local community here pleaded with them to leave me alone. It is two months now since they have stopped coming to bother me.

"Because I fled and didn't leave the group officially, I have no official papers (the papers formally declare that the former child combatants have left the armed group). If the rebels had let me go then I could have that document.

"Now, I live with my family, which is good, except for the fact that we are really poor. I do little jobs for people here and there and try to make a bit of money. So, now I suffer but at least I am with my family."

*Aimerance is 17 years old and lives in South Kivu province with her family. She has begun a sewing training course provided to girls who were formerly associated with armed groups by a local organisation, which is funded by Save the Children.*

## 4 Returning home

The international community usually responds to the end of a conflict by establishing a formal DDR process. The focus of DDR is invariably on the disarmament and demobilisation – or military – elements. It is usually judged a success if large numbers of former combatants are processed or a large number of weapons collected. One of the common misunderstandings in countries where a DDR programme for children exists is that a gun or some proof of military life needs to be submitted in order to access the benefits of DDR.

As a result of the focus on the military aspect of the DDR process, the critical reintegration element often gets lost. One reason is that once the excitement of a declaration of peace has subsided, and the hard graft of longer-term peace-making is underway, the promised international assistance dries up. Effective reintegration is difficult and needs to be tailored to each community's needs. This takes time and experience, and is expensive. It is easy to see why it is so often neglected.

In Sierra Leone, more than 20,000 children were entitled to a DDR package. Children would get either a school package (which included the payment of school fees for three years, uniform and learning materials) or a skills training course and start up kit of basic materials. At the beginning of the DDR process, children had to prove they had been part of an armed group for one year but, as funding slowed down, this changed to two years. Eventually resources were so scarce that children could only qualify for the DDR package if they could dismantle and fire a gun.

The total number of girls in armed groups in Sierra Leone was estimated to be 12,056. However, the numbers of girls going through the formal DDR process amounted to just 506 – only 4.2 per cent of girls known to have been in fighting forces.<sup>25</sup> In

interviews, boys and girls associated with armed groups report that 30 to 40 per cent of the children in their group were girls.

In Liberia up to 53,000 soldiers were entitled to go through a formal DDR process. The process was focused on the disarmament and demobilisation elements of the process – to the virtual exclusion of reintegration. The result was that children were given cash or gifts and expected to reintegrate themselves into their communities. In the event, a heavily revised plan for DDR in Liberia was designed with significant input from Save the Children, UNICEF and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – but by this time confidence in the process was extremely low. By late August 2004, out of a total of 21,000 children associated with armed groups, only 5,800 children had passed through the formal DDR process and only 20 per cent of these were girls.<sup>26</sup>

Reintegration should focus on changing attitudes towards peace, co-existence and forgiveness. It should also provide for children's education and support sustainable livelihoods. However, it is usually underfunded – sometimes missing completely – and can be carried out in a completely inappropriate way (for example, training thousands of former combatants as car mechanics in Sierra Leone, where few people possess cars).

### DDR fails girls

While the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations (UNDPKO)'s *Principles and Guidance* recognises that “special attention should be devoted to . . . female ex-combatants and child soldiers”,<sup>27</sup> the military emphasis of DDR has the effect of discriminating against girls. Girls repeatedly say that they do not want to go through the DDR process. Because the focus is on disarmament, many simply do

not feel that the process includes them: many don't see themselves as 'child soldiers', but as 'wives' or camp followers and therefore not entitled to benefit from the assistance on offer.

Moreover, while DDR may provide immediate assistance (because DDR packages can include food, clothing, fuel, etc), it acts as a signpost, letting everyone in the community know that the girls were previously involved with armed groups. In the DRC many girls refused to go through a DDR process where they would be grouped together and easily identified by the community.

*"We are not respected because they [peers] are always calling us rebels. Even when we are given school supplies [as part of the DDR benefits], they tell us that the supplies are blood supplies."*

Sarah, Sierra Leone

The alternatives for girls are to ignore the DDR process entirely and make their own way to civilian life, or remain with the armed group. It is not actually known what happens to many girls. For many the future outside the armed group is bleak – a choice between sex work, often in urban areas away from their homes, or going hungry. Thousands remain unaccounted for.

## Community rejection

One of the most common experiences of children who return to their communities is that their neighbours tend to blame them – to 'point the finger' – for everything that goes wrong. Children are often suspected of any theft, petty crime or other infraction in their family or neighbourhood. Families then become fearful of their social standing when it is always their child being 'pointed at' for a real or rumoured infraction.

**Children who return to their communities tend to be blamed for everything that goes wrong.**

Community reactions to male children returning home from conflict are usually mixed; families are often divided about how, and if, the boys should be treated and re-integrated into the community.

However, community reactions to girls who return home are usually unambiguous. Girls from the three areas highlighted in this report said that members of their community assumed that they had been sexually abused or had had multiple sexual partners. Girls in the DRC reported that the community regards such girls as having 'lost their value' and their families 'dishonoured'. Girls often report that the community is fearful that they are returning with transmittable diseases. HIV and other STDs are the primary concern, but other diseases, such as tuberculosis, were highlighted too. Even symptoms of skin diseases, malaria or losing weight are presumed to be due to STDs or a result of induced abortions.

Communities also fear that the girl's military commander or 'husband' will pursue the girl and that they will commit further violence against the community as part of 'reclaiming' her and any children she may have had, or avenging her escape. While this 'reclaiming' is unlikely to happen with boys, the likelihood of it happening is much higher with girls. Communities fear that the 'reclaiming' of girls and their children may lead to the recruitment of other girls in the village.

The fear that girls associated with armed groups have learned a 'military mentality' – to be brutal, impolite, aggressive, and to collaborate with criminals – is also a concern for communities.

Children are often the ones who engage in the actions that offend communities the most – direct combat, killing and serious abuses against their communities – because they are the ones who obey orders precisely. The experience of children participating in killing and pillaging transgresses traditional concepts of children as submissive and obedient. For girls, the stigma is two-fold – girls are traditionally seen as submissive-obedient *and* incapable of violence.

Girls who return home with a child or pregnant face additional stigma. One girl in the DRC was told her child had become an ‘extra charge’ that the family could not afford. Others were shunned because the father of their child was not known, and this was seen to bring additional dishonour to the family. Some girls described how their children were viewed as potential enemies because of the father’s ethnicity or nationality.

*“When I was 14 years old, I spent three months in military training. There were many girls in the same group as me. My role was to find food, and fight when I needed to. I had a child when I was in the rebel camp . . . and I returned home to my village when I had two children. I was recently married but my in-laws told my husband that he should not marry someone who already has children. So he married another woman and left me. The whole community is against me now.”*

Florence, Rwanda/DRC border

Communities also fear that somehow the girl associated with armed groups would ‘contaminate’ or corrupt other girls, encouraging them to have sexual relations without family consent, dowry and official sanction.

## What girls want

Girls associated with armed groups say they should be treated like other girls in the community. During research, they identified the following elements that contribute to successful, long-term reintegration:

- recognition from community and family that their role in the armed groups had been coerced
- mediation, where necessary, to gain the understanding and support of family and community
- ability to establish and maintain relevant livelihoods
- access to school and skills training
- places/networks that provide emotional support
- denunciation and follow up of perpetrators (although some girls suggested that this could lead

to reprisals and so hinder their long-term reintegration).

A better understanding of these issues will help the international community to create more effective reintegration programmes and help girls in more sustainable ways.

## Supporting girls’ reintegration

The international community now needs to ensure that assistance is provided to the communities where demobilised girls live, regardless of whether girls go through a formal process of DDR or not. Providing support directly to the community acts as a safety net for all children associated with armed groups, particularly girls.

### **Providing support directly to the community acts as a safety net for all children associated with armed groups, particularly girls.**

Effective reintegration can lessen the chance of renewed armed conflict. In the 2003 World Bank study *Breaking the Conflict Trap*,<sup>28</sup> one of the vital components to ensure countries do not slip back into conflict is to provide socio-economic stability. One of the most effective ways of ensuring this stability is through the community.

However, at the moment the DDR process is the only way to support reintegration. And because the DDR process is entirely dependent on donor funding, those who may benefit from it are dependent on the vagaries of international commitments. The table overleaf provides a list of some of those DDR processes where the required amount of money has not been delivered. If the whole amount pledged had been delivered, in a timely manner, all combatants (adults, boys and girls) would have a better chance of demobilising and reintegrating effectively.

When money begins to dry up, difficult choices have to be made. Donors want to see people with guns

removed from the sight of the public; these are usually adults, and sometimes boys. Girls, at most risk of further abuse and violation, suffer most when donors do not support DDR processes.

<b>Country undertaking DDR</b>	<b>Amount required for DDR (US\$)</b>	<b>Amount delivered for DDR (US\$)</b>	<b>% of shortfall</b>
Liberia	88,000,000	30,000,000 <sup>29</sup>	63%
DRC	200,000,000	23,500,000 <sup>30</sup>	88%
Afghanistan	167,000,000	83,378,372 <sup>31</sup>	51%

## Recommendations

- 1 It must be recognised that ‘children associated with armed groups’ includes girls.
- 2 All DDR processes should pay special attention to securing the release and facilitating the reintegration of girls.
- 3 Specific attention should be paid to the needs of those girls reintegrating into the community who have their own children.
- 4 Donors should deliver on all pledges made to existing DDR programmes as a matter of priority and ensure funds are sufficient to cover all children associated with armed groups.

Zoe was one of four children taken as 'wives' by a rebel in Liberia and raped repeatedly. Save the Children took her to an interim care centre after she escaped, then returned her home and is now providing long-term support (read her story overleaf).



Gar Powell/Evans

## Zoe, Liberia

"They were beating people and they said to follow them and go. We followed them to Konia. When we were there, they would bring ammo, like AK47s, and say you must carry it to the front line. When they brought water we washed clothes, we cooked for them, and we made hot water and bathed the wounded. They took us in 2001, and we left them in 2003. The men were 18 to 40 years old. We lived in tents.

"One man took me. His name was Lively. I didn't want to be his 'wife'. He forced me; it was war-time. He had three other wives; they were my age. I felt bad. I didn't want to get married because I hadn't reached that yet.

"When other rebels came to the place that we were, all the soldiers there were running away to Monrovia. We followed them and passed our village where we went to see our people. Mama was there.

"Then we walked until we came here [to the IDP camp]. There were 80 of us. While we were running I fell in a hole and broke my foot. The rebels put me in a hammock and carried me. Now, when I walk far, it hurts.

"I was part of the fighting people, so I went to disarm. I had gun shells. [UNMIL – United Nations Mission in Liberia – gave her the standard US\$300 for her armaments and Save the Children took her to an Interim Care Centre – see page 8 for Save the Children policy on individual payments to children.]

"I was there [at the care centre] two months. They gave me two bags, with two towels, slippers, a spoon, plates, a bag, wraps, clothes, underclothes, soap, a cup, a copybook and a pen. At daybreak we ate, then we went to the football field. We used to play together, cook together, eat together. We'd take baths together; we were friends. We went to school there. They used to tell us how to read and write our names. When we were there we could do something for ourselves for the future. To learn at school is good, because if you haven't learnt, then anybody can say 'what do you know?' and if you know nothing, they will make fun of you. At first the people outside of the IDP camp made fun of me. I felt bad. I felt unhappy. I cried.

"I'm afraid of the man who took me. He's a long way away. His brother come here and told me.

"When I saw my family again I was happy. They welcomed me. They ran to me and hugged me. My sister came to me. She took my bag and carried it for me.

"When Save the Children brought us home, mama was sick. We used the money I got for her sickness. I bought clothes for my brother, myself and the baby. And we started doing petty business [buying and selling seed, etc]. Then my grandma was sick and we used the money to buy food for her. When we went to the clinic, they said you've got to buy eggs, bread, meat and things to feed her.

"Now, I want to be a tailor, because I'm not going to school, and because when I'm trained it will help me in my future. After that I want to do business in dry goods, bran and rice. I would buy and sell. I like the resource centre because I learn there. They lend us books to read. If the centre wasn't there, I'd have nothing to do.

"I want to get married one day. When you're married, you can do something for your future. I'd like to have three children, two boys and a girl!"

*Zoe, now 18, was abducted and forced to join an armed group when she was 14, during the civil war in Liberia.*

## 5 Community support

*The international community should “pay special attention to the problems of . . . child soldiers and their reintegration into society”.*<sup>32</sup>

President of the United Nations Security Council, 1999

Conflict has a corrosive effect on community.\* The inter-dependencies, alliances and relationships that in times of peace create a strong community are often shattered during war. In recent years battlegrounds have moved into villages, with more civilians being killed than combatants, and homes and community structures destroyed. Children are often separated from their parents or carers. Civil wars are particularly destructive and are now more common than international ones. They create fear and suspicion that can leave communities divided for generations.

### Strengthening communities

Over the last 20 years, Save the Children has promoted support for communities as the best basis for the reintegration of children associated with armed groups. This approach is premised on the community as the best form of protection for children generally.

Due to the cyclical nature of most conflicts, children who leave armed groups are often re-recruited by others. The community can act as a deterrent for their re-recruitment. It can act as a barrier between military commanders and the children being targeted.

Save the Children has extensive experience of working with members of the community to raise their awareness of the need to actively protect children, of

\* Community is a difficult term to define, but for the purposes of this report it is defined as the nature and experience of social bonds, ties and connections that integrate us as individuals into wider social structures and relationships.

their role in preventing recruitment and in supporting the reintegration of children. Where this work has been intensively carried out, and in particular where community protection networks have been established, it has made a real difference to the lives of children. However, this work requires a long-term commitment, a strong understanding of dynamics within the community, and a serious engagement with key individuals and groups.

### Formal DDR processes ignore community

Three organisations are principally responsible for rolling out and implementing DDR as part of the peace process: the UNDPKO, the World Bank and the United Nations’ Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDPKO has acknowledged the importance of reintegration as part of an overall peace process. Importantly, in its *Principles and Guidance* it acknowledges that “demobilisation of child soldiers should not merely be the formal exercise of surrendering a weapon to obtain a benefits package but rather a process that ensures the physical and psycho-social recovery and social reintegration of children affected by armed conflict”<sup>33</sup> into the community.

Furthermore, the UNDPKO identifies reintegration programmes as “assistance measures provided to former combatants that would increase the potential for their families’ economic and social reintegration into [the community]. Reintegration programmes could include cash assistance or compensation in kind, as well as vocational training and income-generating activities.”<sup>34</sup> The principal objective of these aid packages is to “assist the ex-combatants in their initial transition from a military to a civilian environment”.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, Save the Children’s experience demonstrates that communities are rarely supported,



*"[We must] ensure that governments protect their most vulnerable children . . . by channelling resources to families and communities."*<sup>36</sup>

James Wolfensohn, World Bank, 2004

or invested in, during the transitional post-conflict stages of a country's development. If communities were assisted more in the transitional stages of post-conflict reconstruction, there would be a significant reduction in the likelihood of the country slipping back into conflict. The 2003 World Bank study *Breaking the Conflict Trap*,<sup>37</sup> suggested that ethnic tensions and ancient political feuds are rarely the primary cause of civil wars. In a country that has deep poverty, amongst other things, in communities, the risk of a recurrence of war is 80 per cent. Indeed, one of the criteria for judging a disarmament process should be to see whether it facilitates economic growth in a target population.

If sustainable reintegration is not prioritised, the resurgence of conflict is likely to be all the more swift. From global programmatic experience, it is clear that relations and work with the community need to be strengthened – even before children are recruited and certainly before they begin to demobilise – if children are to be better protected from the effects of conflict.

*"The people in the village did not like me when I first came home. They made my life very difficult. I could not speak to them or spend time with other people my age. Because I have a baby and the father is not from my village and people do not know him, they think I am to blame. They do not understand that I was forced to be with him. They think I am a prostitute and that I will encourage their daughters. No one speaks to me."* Rose, Liberia

## Supporting girls in their communities

The earlier the community is approached and the sooner it understands the plight of the girls, the more successful reintegration will be in the long term.<sup>38</sup> For

example, in Sierra Leone girls said they were not ill-treated by community members at the end of the war because their neighbours had seen how badly they had been treated by adult soldiers during the war.<sup>39</sup>

Girls themselves have highlighted what would make their reintegration more meaningful for them, and more effective over the long term:<sup>40</sup>

- community-based girls' clubs (open to all vulnerable girls in the community, particularly those with children of their own) could support girls' reintegration. The clubs could be used discretely as a base to reach girls who are or have been associated with armed groups
- family mediation and follow up
- work with community members to convince them to accept girls and to recognise the events that led to the girls being associated with armed groups
- medical tests and assistance, especially related to reproductive health and STDs
- economic assistance that supports safe, alternative livelihood opportunities based on the local economy, and independence
- access to education, including for girls with children
- denunciation and follow up of perpetrators of abuse, especially particular groups that abduct girls
- documentation, signed by recognised military authorities, to prove to armed groups that an individual is no longer part of their group, such as the '*attestation de sortie*' in the DRC.

In a few cases in the DRC, Save the Children has managed to obtain funding to 'sensitise' the community before the girls' return. These sensitisation programmes can help the transition to civilian life, and stop the fears and assumptions of communities that contribute to the stigma girls face. Members of the communities were told what the girls had been through and what they would need on their return. We worked with community leaders, for example in the church, education officials, women's associations and other local groups to build up support networks. The result was that girls who were known to have been associated with armed groups were more quickly accepted and less ostracised by community members.<sup>41</sup>

## The international community

Save the Children calls for the establishment of dedicated funding for programmes to facilitate the return and long-term reintegration of girls associated with armed groups. Such programmes should take into account the stated needs of girls, as well as the context of the communities. Save the Children believes that it would be better for these programmes to be designed and managed by non-military agencies to avoid allegations of partiality and to ensure best practice. There must be a clear distinction between the short-term, military component of the DDR process (disarmament and demobilisation) and the long-term, civilian component (reintegration) and those who implement them.

Save the Children recommends that this funding should be accessible during *and* after conflict to ensure that agencies can best help girls to reintegrate.

The size of this fund must reflect the needs of all girls. However, at an absolute minimum, the size of the pool should represent 40 per cent of all available funding for the DDR for children. By ring-fencing money designed to meet the needs of girls, the international community can truly say it has acted in the best interests of children, and reached its own standards of gender equity.

## UN reforms

*“Failure to successfully implement such [reintegration] programmes will result in . . . a relapse into conflict.”*  
Para 228, UN’s High Level Panel Report, January 2005

The UN’s High-Level Panel Report recognised that demobilisation and reintegration are vital elements of peace building. It recommended that the Security Council should mandate the funding for this important element of peace building through the assessed budgets.

It also recommended the establishment of a peace-building commission, which would have at its disposal

a standing fund of at least \$250 million. The suggestion is that this money would be used to finance the recurrent expenditures of a nascent government, as well as critical agency programmes in the areas of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Should such a peace-building commission be established, Save the Children recommends that the separate funding pool referred to above should be incorporated, as a discrete budget-line, within the commission’s standing fund. Again, this pool of funding should be permanently accessible, during and after conflict, and should not be tied to any formal DDR or political process, to ensure that agencies can provide communities with the mechanisms that will better assist girls to reintegrate. Similarly the size of this pool of money should reflect the needs of all girls but, at an absolute minimum, 40 per cent of all available funding should be used for the DDR of girls. This funding should be channelled through agencies with a comprehensive and acknowledged expertise in DDR work with children.

In this event, Save the Children would seek to ensure that the commission’s mandate specifically recognises and aims to address the needs of all children during reintegration.

## Recommendations

- 1 Adequate funding should be secured for the long-term, sustainable reintegration of girls associated with armed groups, whether they register into a formal DDR process or not.
- 2 DDR programmes should be redesigned to ensure a focus on long-term reintegration packages for girls through support to their communities.
- 3 The international community should support and fund the release and reintegration of children from armed groups, including outside formal DDR programmes, during and after conflict.
- 4 If established, a UN peace-building commission must recognise that most children, and girls in particular, demobilise and attempt to reintegrate outside formal DDR processes and should allocate resources accordingly.

# Recommendations

- 1 Most children – especially girls – do not enrol onto formal DDR programmes and so the international community should support and fund the release of children from armed groups outside formal DDR programmes, and at all times – even during conflict.
- 2 The international community must fully fund and deliver on the reintegration component of DDR for children over the long term. A short-term approach to reintegration that does not address the *community's* needs has been proved to be unsuccessful.
- 3 Reintegration assistance should be provided through local communities rather than as individual benefits received through participation in DDR programmes. Community-led development must be put at the centre of formal DDR programmes for children.
- 4 A special pool of funding should be established to meet girls' specific needs during demobilisation and reintegration. Such funds must be independent of any formal DDR or political process. This funding should be used for the planning and funding of community-led reintegration programmes. Such programmes should specifically aim to:
  - work with community leaders and expand social follow-up networks by women's associations or local networks
  - establish girls' clubs in communities to reach out to all vulnerable girls in the community and to provide non-formal education or life skills sessions (particularly reproductive health topics) and activities that contribute to psycho-social well-being
  - provide livelihood options for girls, so that they can demonstrate that they can 'be of value' and integrate into civilian life. In particular these may be small-scale activities that quickly generate an income, such as market gardens or livestock
  - provide quality education and skills training for all children affected by conflict, not just those who have been associated with armed groups
  - provide healthcare to address general and reproductive health.
- 5 In order to prevent the recruitment of children and ensure accountability, all states should ratify, enforce, monitor and report on international treaties to protect children, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its optional protocol on the *Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*.

# Notes

## Introduction

1 In particular this report draws heavily on Beth Verhey's research undertaken for Save the Children and the NGO Coalition in the DRC, Emily Delap's research undertaken for Save the Children in Sierra Leone, and Ratiba Taouti-Cherif and Abraham Sewonet's research undertaken for Save the Children into cross-border DDR between Rwanda and the DRC.

## I Children associated with armed groups

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6 *HIV and Conflict: A double emergency*, International Save the Children Alliance, 2002, p11

7 Mazuauna, D & Carlson K, 'From Combat to Community: Women and girls in Sierra Leone', January 2004. [www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/SierraLeoneFullCaseStudy.pdf](http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/SierraLeoneFullCaseStudy.pdf)

8 Save the Children, *War Brought us Here: Protecting children displaced within their own countries by conflict*, Save the Children, 2000, p93

9 'An Assessment of the Situation of Children Associated with Armed Forces in Western Cote d'Ivoire', Save the Children UK and Save the Children Sweden, September 2003 (unpublished)

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

11 Save the Children, *When Children Affected by War Go Home: Lessons learnt from Liberia*, Save the Children, 2003

12 International Rescue Committee/Burnett Institute, *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from nationwide survey – April-July 2004, 9 September 2004*, International Rescue Committee/Burnett Institute piii

13 *Ibid*

14 *Ibid*

15 *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, p51

16 Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilisation and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, New York, UNICEF, 1997

## 2 Girls associated with armed groups

17 Figures extrapolated from Beth Verhey, *Where are the Girls? Study on girls associated with armed forces and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children and the NGO Group, November 2004; 1,502 boys demobilised, 20 girls demobilised between May 1999–Dec 2003

18 When working with children associated with armed groups, figures are incredibly difficult to authenticate. Therefore, this report has worked on the basis that there are 300,000 children associated with armed forces globally and 40 per cent of this global figure represents girls (ie, 120,000)

19 Beth Verhey, *Where are the Girls? Study on girls associated with armed forces and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children and the NGO Group, November 2004

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21 McKay S & Mazurana D, *Girls in Militaries, Paramilitaries and Armed Opposition Groups*, 2002, [www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca/girls-en.asp](http://www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca/girls-en.asp)

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22 Beth Verhey, *Where are the Girls? Study on girls associated with armed forces and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children and the NGO Group, November 2004

23 Save the Children UK, Quarterly Programme Report, Kambia District, Sierra Leone, October 2004 (unpublished)

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### 4 Returning home

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26 UNICEF, 'Reintegrating Children Associated with Armed Forces in Liberia a "Success"', UNICEF, 26 August 2004, [www.unicef.org/media/media\\_23398.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23398.html)

27 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment, Principles and Guidelines*, 1999, p19 <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons/DD&R.pdf>

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### 5 Community support

32 Statement by the president of the Security Council, UNITED NATIONS Security Council Distr.; GENERAL; S/PRST/1999/21; 8 July 1999

33 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment, Principles and Guidelines*, 1999, p19, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons/DD&R.pdf>

34 *Ibid*, p23

35 *Ibid*, p84

36 James Wolfenson, keynote address to the Global Partners' Forum on Orphans and Vulnerable Children, James D Wolfenson, President World Bank Group, Washington DC, 15 December 2004

37 World Bank (Collier, Elliot, Hegre, Hoeffler, Raynol-Querol & Sambanis), *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil war and development policy*, World Bank/Oxford University Press, 2003, <http://econ.worldbank.org/prr/CivilWarPRR/text-26671/>

38 Taouti-Cherif & Sewonet, Rwanda-DRC: *Cross border DDRRR report*, Save the Children, 2004, p27

39 *Ibid*

40 Beth Verhey, *Where are the Girls? Study on girls associated with armed forces and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children and the NGO Group, November 2004

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# Save the Children

## **Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in armed conflict**

Around the world, there are up to 120,000 girls, some as young as eight, involved in conflict. That's around 40 per cent of the overall total of children associated with armed groups.

*Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in armed conflict* shows, through a combination of research and case studies, the harsh reality of life for girls forced to work with armed groups. Like boys, girls take an active part in fighting, as well as taking on other military duties, such as portering, cooking, cleaning, providing medical assistance and gathering information. Most girls are sexually violated by members of the armed group they are with.

Save the Children is working to provide long-term support to girls associated with armed forces. Girls are frequently left out of the official process for removing children from armed groups. Thousands face returning home without any assistance. *Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in armed conflict* calls on the international community to ensure that girls associated with armed groups are protected and helped to return to their communities and rebuild their lives.

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