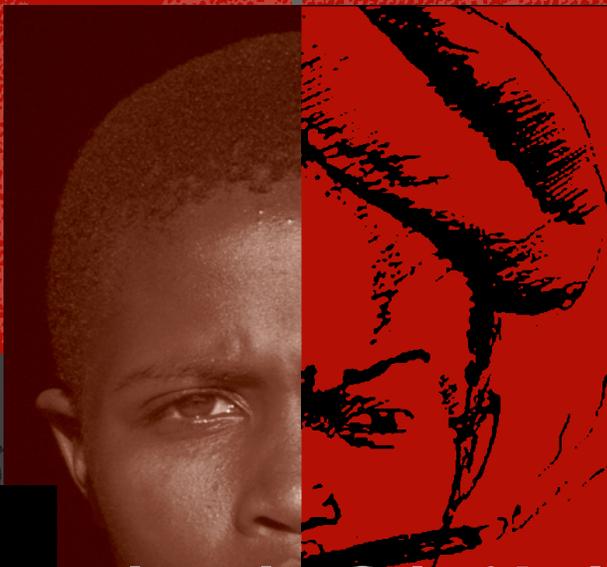




International  
Labour Office



INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE  
ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR (IPEC)

# Wounded Childhood



The Use  
of Children  
in Armed  
Conflict  
in Central  
Africa

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International  
Labour Office

# Wounded Childhood

The Use of  
Children in  
Armed Conflict  
in Central Africa

APRIL 2003

# Foreword

## “WOUNDED CHILDHOOD: THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN ARMED CONFLICT IN CENTRAL AFRICA”

The forced recruitment of children as combatants is one of the worst forms of child labor in the world today. In over 30 countries across the globe, more than 300,000 children under the age of 18 are fighting as soldiers with government armed forces or with rebel movements.

In Central Africa, in particular, thousands of children—many young girls—have been abducted or recruited to fight or assist in protracted military conflicts. Children, as young as 8 or 10 years old, are not only forced to carry rifles and serve on the front lines, but many are also forced to participate by serving as either sex slaves, porters, decoys or spies.

Those Central African child soldiers who are lucky enough to survive combat and war, often find themselves abandoned, poverty stricken and scarred by the memories of war and abuse.

The horrific situation in Central Africa—and everywhere else where child soldiers are used and exploited—is totally unacceptable. The exploitation of children in armed conflicts irrevocably brutalizes them, destroys families, demeans society, and diminishes the future for all of us.

It is a violation of international law and an affront to humanity. It offends the civilized world’s sense of morality and decency.

The Bush Administration and the United States Department of Labor remain committed to assisting global efforts to protect children entrapped in the global web of armed conflict, and to end the horror and exploitation of children used as combatants.

Several years ago, the United States Senate, in an overwhelming show of bipartisan support, ratified the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in record time—in less than three months. Last year, the Administration reinforced its commitment to prevent the use of children in armed combat through the ratification of the UN Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

The United States Department of Labor especially has been active in bringing this crisis to the forefront of global child labor issues, in efforts to rehabilitate child soldiers, and by supporting initiatives to prevent other vulnerable children from being dragged into the vortex of war.

The study “Wounded Childhood,” funded by the United States Labor Department is an important first step in developing new strategies to address the child soldier crisis sweeping through Central Africa.

The study—which is comprised of hundreds of interviews—provides an unprecedented look into the recruitment of Central Africa’s child soldiers and the aftermath of their service and abduction.

Even though results varied by country, the survey data collected clearly demonstrates that so called Central African child soldier “volunteers” made the decision while they were under numerous pressures and were ignorant of the consequences of their decision. Further, the most frequently cited reason why demobilized child soldiers rejoined an armed group was a clear lack of any means of survival—like food or money.



Sadly, only a small percent of former child soldiers said they had been to school in the months prior to being interviewed for the survey. Clearly, only a minority of former child soldiers participated in any type of reintegration program.

It is for these reasons that the Department strongly endorses the recommendations made in this report: including, that former child soldiers should be provided vocational training and access to schooling as a means of preventing their reenlistment and recruitment, and that future programs center their efforts not only on returning child soldiers, but on their families and communities to help facilitate the child's successful reentry into society.

If we are to prevent one of the worst forms of abusive child labor today—the use of children as combatants—we must follow through on these and similar recommendations.

The Administration and the United States Department of Labor remain fully committed to supporting the global efforts now underway to stop this most horrible type of forced child labor. We will not shy away from our moral obligations and leadership.

All of us must, and can, do better to protect the world's children.

Honorable Elaine L. Chao  
United States Secretary of Labor  
April 2003

# Foreword

It is traumatic enough when children are caught in the cross fire of war. How much worse it is when they are direct participants—used as porters, messengers or spies, exploited as sexual slaves, and as soldiers in the front lines. That we continue to allow some 300,000 children to be abused in this way is wrong and a disgrace to humankind.

With the adoption in 1999 of the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (No.182), the ILO was called upon to play a lead role in ending children's participation in such conflict. The Convention sets the age of 18 as the minimum for recruitment and calls for the elimination of forced or compulsory recruitment into armed conflict.

This volume tells the story of children in Central Africa who have been drawn into such conflict. Using methodologies developed by our International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and based on our long experience of tackling child labour in all its forms, surveys were done in the region. We wanted to better understand: What makes certain children vulnerable to recruitment? What do they experience while they are engaged in armed groups? How might this experience affect their rehabilitation and reintegration into peace-time society? This information is vital if we are to design programmes that will make a lasting difference in the lives of former child soldiers.

The findings of the surveys are synthesized and analysed in this report which provides unique insights into the lives of these children. Their testimony shows that they are manipulated by unscrupulous adults. They volunteer without knowing what they consent to. It is also clear that they not only help adults—they are on the frontline as combatants and they perceive themselves first and foremost as soldiers.

Adults use children in this way. It is the responsibility of adults to stop the use of children in armed conflict.

This report emphasizes the need for comprehensive prevention and rehabilitation programmes for former child combatants. Starting from existing experience in each country, prevention and rehabilitation must be part of national policy as well as of regional and international initiatives. The future must be about opening up opportunities for children and their families. In the first instance, former child soldiers need access to schooling and vocational training that improves their prospects for a productive adult life. The ILO works with various partners to make this happen.

But, looking beyond, it is a challenge for economic and social policy to enable parents to work and children to remain in school. The ILO's mission to promote decent work for women and men responds to this challenge. Decent work is at the heart of stable family and social life. It means communities and societies where parents have work, families have basic protection against contingencies and crises and where people can organize and resolve their conflicts through dialogue. We work with communities to find local solutions to their economic and social needs through the world of work. We also aim to make decent work an integral part of the policy agenda nationally and internationally. It is a challenge for all of us.

Children in armed conflict and in other exploitative situations are victims. Some are permanently scarred, physically and emotionally. But these children also show tremendous resilience, promise and potential. We must act rapidly to allow them to draw upon these strengths for peaceful, constructive purposes. It is our responsibility to enable them to enjoy the right to a decent childhood to which they are entitled.

Children should never have to fight for their survival. To make sure that happens, their communities and their societies need and deserve a fighting chance.

Juan Somavía  
Director-General  
International Labour Office  
April 2003



They adopt the casual  
Poses of gangsters (...)  
They assume the looks of  
Gunslingers seen on TV  
and mimic the gestures of riot cops  
Like robots even as they smile (...)

The Carnivorous Flowers,  
*"Childhood Crucified, Absolute Soldiers"*

by Noël Ndjékéry

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# Executive Summary

The use of children in armed conflict being one of the worst forms of child labour, the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) makes every effort to combat it.

In October 2001, ILO/IPEC, in collaboration with the ILO/InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS), launched the "*Sub-Regional Programme for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers and the Prevention of the Use of Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa*". Four countries of the region are participating in this programme: Burundi, the Republic of Congo (Congo), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda.

Understanding the context in which the programme operates is a pre-requisite for designing efficient intervention strategies. Hence, the preparatory phase of the programme consisted of field research in the form of '*rapid assessments*' of the situation in each country. The objective of this exercise was to obtain information about the causes of the use of child soldiers, the mechanisms for their recruitment, their living conditions while in the armed groups, the circumstances surrounding their release and their prospects of reintegration.

This report contains a synthesis of the findings of inquiries conducted by consultants in the four countries and a comparative analysis of them. It is divided into five parts. Part I recalls the legal framework within which the programme operates. In the last few years, international legislation has been considerably strengthened in order to prevent and end the involvement of children in armed conflict. The ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (No. 182), prohibits "*forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict*". All four countries participating in the programme have ratified this convention. However, within each country there are differences in the provisions of national legislations. In Burundi, the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces is 16 years. The Government has stated its intention of modifying domestic law to bring it in conformity with its international commitments. In the other three countries, the minimum recruitment age is 18.

Part I also describes the situation in the region concerning the use of child soldiers. It is estimated that approximately 120,000 children between the ages of 7 and 18 have participated in armed conflicts throughout the African continent. Central Africa is particularly affected by this problem. In this region, more than 20,000 children have been participating in hostilities. In the four countries concerned, children are used as combatants both by government forces as well as by rebel opposition groups. Government forces have been found to incorporate voluntary recruits on the basis of false identity papers either into the regular armed forces or into paramilitary ones. Many children, especially those who are not in school, have no other option but to join these forces. Initially formed to defend the local population against rebel incursions, these paramilitary forces often find themselves drawn into patrolling alongside regular army troops or being made to swell the number of soldiers in combat. In all the countries under review, recruitment methods used by rebel groups are coercive. Outright abduction by them is frequent, especially in the countryside. In towns and cities, street children are particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment. The boys are used as spies and sent to the camps of the regular forces to obtain information. The girls are used as domestic servants and sex slaves. These children typically lack sufficient training and are often massacred in combat.

These Central African countries have been through eight years of political crises, violent conflicts accompanied by massacres, displacement of population and destruction of the social and economic infrastructure. In addition, the embargo and blockage of development aid have had deep consequences on their economies: living conditions have deteriorated and almost all the socio-economic indicators for these countries have declined. The effects of economic crises have been compounded by the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is strongly linked to the proliferation and prolongation of conflicts in Africa. In the next five to ten years, about 40 million children on the continent will have lost a parent due to AIDS. These orphans are easy prey for recruiters. What is more tragic is that they may themselves contract the disease while serving in the army or militia.

Part II of the report presents the methodology that was developed for the field research. It was designed to obtain purely **qualitative** information concerning the evolution of the situation of child soldiers and the characteristics of each consecutive phase from recruitment to release and reintegration. The research does not give an estimation of the number of child soldiers per country or per armed group. For the purposes of this report, a child soldier is defined as a boy or girl who was under the age of 18 at the time of recruitment and who lives or has lived with an armed group. He/she may have been recruited, compulsorily or by force or otherwise, for combat or to serve as a bodyguard, a messenger, a spy, a porter, a cook, a 'wife' or for sexual purposes. On the basis of this definition, the Institute for Applied International Studies (Fafo) prepared a Rapid Assessment manual adapted to the situation of children in armed conflict. The research tools developed include:

- a) a set of six questionnaires, one for each category of respondents (children in armed conflict, former child soldiers, children who were never recruited, parents of children in armed conflict, parents of former child soldiers, and parents of those who were never recruited);
- b) a guide for administering the questionnaires;
- c) a topic guide for individual interviews and focus group discussions.

The entire methodology is described in an ILO publication entitled *"L'utilisation des enfants dans les conflits armés en Afrique centrale: manuel pour l'évaluation rapide"*. The national consultants commissioned to conduct the field research were trained in the use of the methods and survey instruments during a workshop held in Yaoundé, Cameroon from February 4 to 8, 2002. Given the size of the DRC and the fact that rebel groups occupy the eastern part of it, two studies were conducted there: one in the surroundings of the capital, Kinshasa and another around the city of Goma. All together more than 1,000 interviews were conducted in the four participating countries using the questionnaires, the semi-structured interview schedule or through focus group discussions.

Part III of the report, contains an analysis of the findings concerning the situation of the child soldiers, from the time prior to their recruitment and until they leave the armed group. Part IV reviews the existing programmes of prevention and rehabilitation and briefly describes their achievements. The fifth and last part sets forth a series of recommendations for the development of

effective intervention strategies in favour of children who are at risk of recruitment, former child soldiers and their families.

The key findings concerning the situation of child soldiers in Burundi, the Congo, the DRC and Rwanda can be summarized in the following ten observations:

- Two out of three present or former child soldiers surveyed said that they took the initiative of enrolling themselves "voluntarily" —they were not kidnapped nor obliged to do so under threat. However, one cannot consider this to be a real choice on their part because the large majority of them were desperately searching for a means of subsistence and, in the context of war, this was the most plausible solution for survival.
- For many of the child "volunteers", joining the armed group was an escape from a situation in which they were marginalized either at school or in the family. This explains why, in many cases, only one child in a family decided to enrol. These children, for whom the armed group represented an opportunity for social integration, generally say that the ambience in the group was good or even very good.
- Child soldiers who were kidnapped are treated much more harshly and sent into combat more rapidly than those who 'volunteered'.
- Once in the armed group, children are treated in the same way as adults. They are real soldiers recruited for combat, but being insufficiently trained and equipped they are even more exposed than adults to all the dangers.
- In some countries, children easily switch from one group to another either due to opportunism or because they are forced to do so. Children who have escaped from one rebel group are 're-utilised' by militia or paramilitary forces to break their loyalty to the rebel group. There are important differences between the situation of children according to the group to which they belong: living conditions are harder and relations between adult and child soldiers more violent in rebel groups than in the armed forces or militias.
- More than half the former child soldiers surveyed left the armed group of their own accord—most had to escape. In Rwanda and the DRC, organizations have played an active role in demobilizing children, particularly those who were part of the State army.

- Former child soldiers typically experience multiple and deep physical and psychological trauma. Poor material conditions suffered during the time spent with the armed group makes them vulnerable to disease (infections, badly healed wounds, etc.). In addition, the violence they have been subjected to or have themselves committed renders their relations with adults and other children difficult. This must be taken into account while designing rehabilitation programmes for them.
- Communities are not always willing to receive former child soldiers. Children who have never been recruited as well as adults have strong prejudices against them. More than 80 per cent of parents interviewed thought that former child soldiers represent a danger for the population.
- Among the former child soldiers interviewed, 70 per cent were above 15 when they left the armed group. For those who are demobilized when they are young adults, there is a danger of feeling 'infantilised' by certain rehabilitation programmes.
- Reintegration programmes must target simultaneously, the youth, his/her family and the community to which he/she belongs. With all three, medium and long-term follow-up is indispensable if re-enlistment is to be avoided.



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# Introduction

The use of children in armed conflict being one of the worst forms of child labour, the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) makes every effort to combat it.

In the last few years, international legislation has been considerably strengthened in order to prevent and end the involvement of children in armed conflict. In this regard, the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (No. 182) prohibits "*forced or compulsory recruitment of children (persons under the age of 18) for use in armed conflict*".

It is estimated that approximately 120,000 children between the ages of 7 and 18 have participated in armed conflicts throughout the African continent. Central Africa is particularly affected by this problem.

In October 2001, ILO/IPEC, in collaboration with the ILO/InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS), launched the "*Regional Programme for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers and the Prevention of the Use of Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa*". Four countries of the region are participating in this programme: Burundi, the Republic of Congo (Congo), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda.

Understanding the context in which the programme operates is a pre-requisite for designing efficient intervention strategies. Hence, the preparatory phase of the programme consisted of field research in the form of 'rapid assessments' of the situation in each country. The objective of this exercise was to obtain information about the causes of the use of child soldiers, the mechanisms for their recruitment, their living conditions while in the armed groups, the circumstances surrounding their release and their prospects of reintegration.

This report contains a synthesis of the findings of inquiries conducted by consultants in the four countries and a comparative analysis of them. It is divided into five parts. Part I recalls the legal framework within which the programme operates and gives an overview of the conflicts in Central Africa and the situation pertaining to the recruitment of child soldiers in the region. Part II presents the methodology that was developed for the

field research. In Part III, a comparative analysis is made of findings from the four countries concerning the situation of child soldiers from the time prior to their recruitment until they leave the armed group. Part IV reviews existing programmes of prevention and rehabilitation and takes stock of their achievements to date. In the last part, a series of recommendations are made with a view to developing an efficient strategy of intervention for the benefit of child soldiers, children at risk of recruitment and their families.

# Taking stock of ten years of civil war in Central Africa

1

## 1.1 IN VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS...

The first international standards relating to children in war came out of Human Rights Law, namely, the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 that provide protection from hostilities. In 1977, two Additional Protocols to these Conventions were adopted:

- Additional Protocol I (API) relating to international conflicts, requires State parties to "take all feasible measures" to prevent children under 15 being directly involved in hostilities. In addition, if they enlist young persons between the ages of 15 and 18, this protocol encourages them to prioritize the recruitment of the older among them (Article 77 (2));
- Additional Protocol II (APII), relating to non-international conflicts, is more restrictive. It prohibits all participation in hostilities, whether direct or indirect, of children under the age of 15 (Article 4, Paragraph 3(c)).<sup>1</sup>

It is generally accepted that these standards form part of international customary law and are therefore applicable to all States whether they have ratified the relevant protocols or not.<sup>2</sup>

Despite them, the condition of child soldiers in modern warfare did not really attract the attention of the international community until the 1980s. It was then that the world was shocked to discover that thousands of Iranian children were on the front-line detonating land mines and acting as human shields for their elders who were considered more 'useful'.<sup>3</sup> This sparked a series of initiatives to end the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict. On several occasions, these initiatives suffered setbacks due to the conservative positions taken by various States.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, reiterates the obligations contained in API of 1977. It requires State Parties to "take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities" and to refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In addition, "in recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, State Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest" (Article 38 (2) and (3)). The age of conscription was a subject of controversy during the drafting of the Convention and the articles cited above were the result of a compromise that falls short of the requirements of APII that prohibits the direct or indirect participation of children under 15 in internal conflicts. Besides, it is of interest to note that the age limit of 15 contained in Article 38 is an exception to the Convention as a whole, all other articles being applicable to persons under 18. As of today, with 192 States having ratified it, the CRC can be considered to be almost universally ratified.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ICRC: *The legal protection of children in armed conflicts*, ICRC, January 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: *Non aux enfants soldats*, January 1999, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> The Defense Monitor: *The Invisible Soldiers: Child Combatants*, Center for Defense Information (Washington, July 1997), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> The United States of America signed the CRC on February 16, 1995 but has not yet ratified it.

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, international legislation was considerably reinforced. The ILO Convention on the worst forms of child labour and the accompanying Recommendation, unanimously adopted in 1999, prohibit the *“forced or compulsory recruitment of children (persons under 18) for use in armed conflict”* (Article.3 (a)). The Convention places an obligation on member States to take immediate action to eliminate this practice and the Recommendation calls for efficient measures to be taken to ensure the effective enforcement of the provisions of the Convention, including criminal or other penalties, as appropriate. Surveillance mechanisms, action programmes and measures to prevent children from entering the worst forms of child labour as well as to withdraw, rehabilitate and socially reintegrate those who are victims of them, must be undertaken. The Recommendation also requires State parties to mutually assist each other in giving effect to the provisions of the Convention. ILO Convention 182 is a landmark in international law relating to child soldiers, because, for the first time, it set the minimum age for enlistment at 18 years. It was also the first time that the use of children in armed conflict was officially recognised as a form of child labour. In addition to specific mention of the problem, ILO Convention 182 also prohibits persons under 18 being engaged in *“work that by its nature or the conditions in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of the child.”* (Article 3 (d)). It gives member States the responsibility of defining hazardous work at national

level in consultation with organizations of workers and employers. States thus have the possibility of going beyond Article 3(a) by classifying, as ‘hazardous work’, all types of recruitment and use in armed conflict of persons under 18. As of February 7, 2003, 133 member States, three-quarters of those of the ILO, had ratified this Convention.<sup>5</sup>

Another significant step forward in combating the use of children for military purposes was made on January 21, 2000. After six years of negotiations, the UN General Assembly adopted a new international treaty that prohibits the recruitment of child soldiers. This treaty, an Optional Protocol to the CRC, sets the age of 18 years as the minimum age for conscription or for direct participation in hostilities, and bans all military recruitment and use of children under 18 by armed groups. As of February 12, 2003, the protocol, which had come into force a year earlier, had been ratified by 50 member States.

The Rome Statute for an International Criminal Court defines *“conscription or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities”* as a war crime, whether the conflict is international or not (Article 8).

Table 1 indicates the ratification status of relevant international treaties by the four countries participating in the programme.

**Table 1: Ratification of relevant international standards**

<b>Country</b>	<b>ILO Convention (No. 182) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour</b>	<b>Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict</b>	<b>Rome Statute for an International Criminal Court</b>
<b>BURUNDI</b>	✓(11.06.2002)	<i>Signed (13.11.2001)</i>	<i>Signed (13.01.1999)</i>
<b>CONGO</b>	✓(29.04.2002)	-	<i>Signed (17.07.1998)</i>
<b>DRC</b>	✓(20.06.2001)	✓(11.11.2001)	✓(11.04.2002)
<b>RWANDA</b>	✓(23.05.2000)	✓(23.04.2002)	-

<sup>5</sup> Besides ILO Convention 182 that directly addresses the use of children in armed conflict, it should be noted that the Committee of Experts for the Application of Conventions and Recommendations of the ILO also addresses this issue within the framework of the ILO Convention on Forced Labour, 1930 (No. 29). In this respect, please refer to individual observations made to Burundi and DRC in *Report III (IA): Report of the Committee of Experts for the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (2002)*.

At regional level, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child requires State parties to *"take all necessary measures to ensure that no child (under 18 years of age) participates in hostilities and, in particular, that no child is enrolled in the armed forces by the State"* (Article 22). This Charter, adopted in July 1990 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia by the Conference of Heads of State and Governments of the Organization of African Unity entered into force in November 1999. It is the first regional treaty that specifically deals with the problem of child soldiers. The Declaration of Maputo concerning the use of children as soldiers (April 1999) calls on all African States to *"take all the necessary measures to ensure that no child under 18 participates in armed conflict (...)"*.

There are differences in national legislation concerning the minimum age for military recruitment. In **Burundi**, the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces is 16 years, despite the ratification by the country of ILO Convention 182. The Government has stated its intention of modifying domestic law to bring it in conformity with its international commitments. In the **Congo**, the minimum recruitment age into the armed forces is set at 18 years.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in the **DRC**, the national legislation authorizes recruitment into the armed forces from the age of 18 onwards. This is again specified in Decree No. 066 dated June 9, 2000 concerning the demobilization and reintegration of vulnerable groups present in the combating forces. This decree qualifies the legislation relating to child soldiers by defining a child as *"any girl or boy of less than 18 years"*.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, in **Rwanda**, the Transitional National Assembly adopted Law No. 27/2001 relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child against Violence of which Article 19 states that military service is prohibited for children less than 18 years.<sup>8</sup>

Three out of the four countries have legislation that, although not without loopholes, should ensure that children under 18 are not recruited into the armed forces. In practice, however, the duration, intensity and complexity of the conflicts and the acute paucity of resources have caused grave insufficiencies in the application of the legislation in force.

## 1.2 THE HEAVY PRICE PAID BY CHILD SOLDIERS

It is estimated that more than 300,000 children under 18 are recruited to participate in armed conflict worldwide: approximately 120,000 of them are in Africa.<sup>9</sup> They are used as porters, messengers, spies or armed combatants. Girls are particularly vulnerable. Victims of abduction, they often serve as sex 'slaves' and can also be sent to the battlefield. The proliferation of modern, light weapons on the continent has encouraged the use of children for combat. They endure grave physical, psychological and social trauma and are often forced during training to commit atrocities in their own villages.

In the Central African region depicted on the facing page, children have paid a heavy price in these wars. Each conflict has its own specificities but there is a sub-regional dimension to them. They are characterized by internal struggles for power and for control over natural resources against the backdrop of endemic, economic crises.

### 1.2.1 Child soldiers: pawns in a power struggle

The genocide in **Rwanda** in 1994 and the conflicts raging in Eastern **DRC** since 1996 have had serious consequences on the whole of the Central African region. According to UN sources, the "First African World War" caused the deaths of 200,000 persons in the region, the internal displacement of 2 million people and forced 300,000 Congolese to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.<sup>10</sup> It is the children who were most affected by these conflicts.

In the four countries covered by ILO/IPEC's Sub-Regional Programme, children between the ages of 7 and 18 are used as combatants both by government forces as well as by rebel opposition groups. There is a tendency for governments to enlist voluntary recruits on the basis of false identity papers either into the regular armed forces or into paramilitary ones. In **Burundi**, children are used by the army in a less formal

<sup>6</sup> CSC: *The Use of Children as Soldiers in Africa*, March 1999, p. 37.

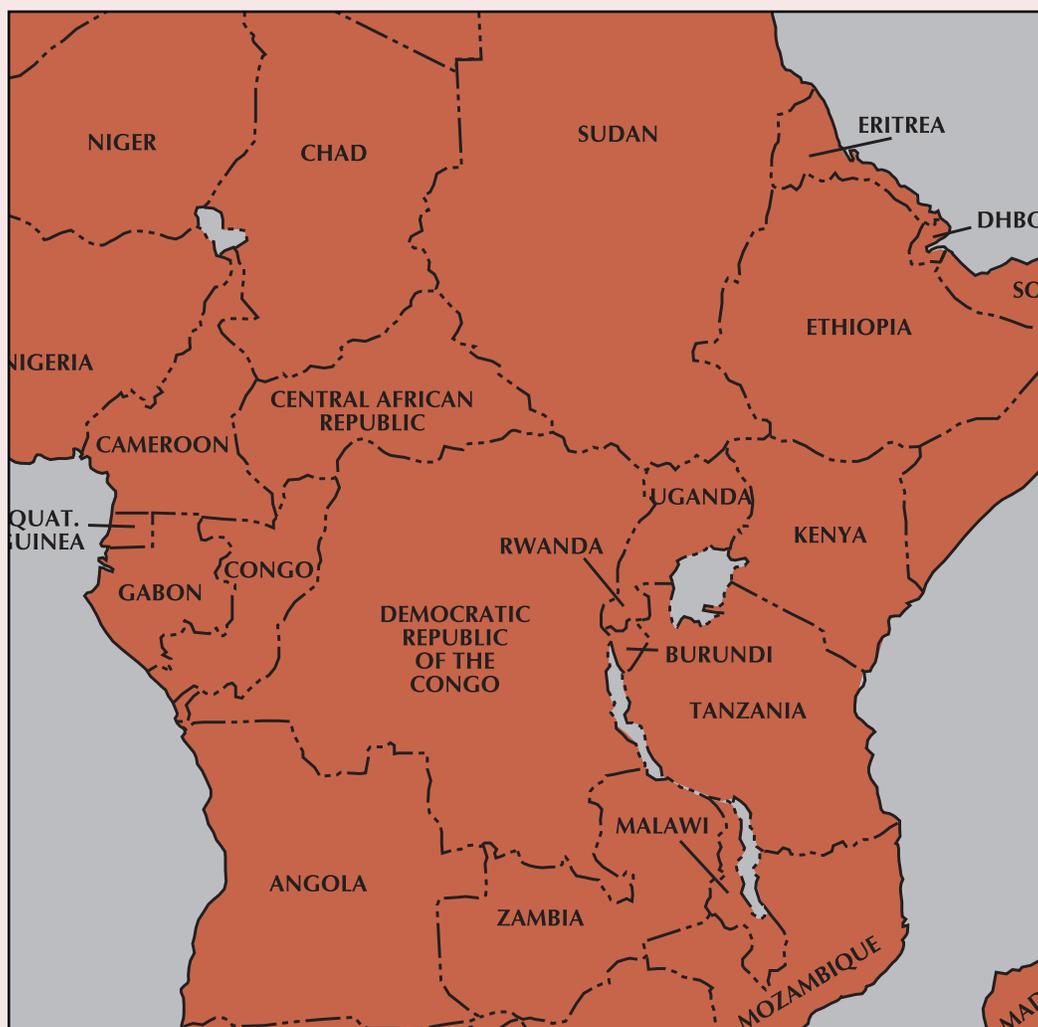
<sup>7</sup> Cabinet du Président de la République: *Journal Officiel de la République Démocratique du Congo*, 41st year, Special Issue (June 2000), pp. 3-6.

<sup>8</sup> CSC: *Child Soldiers 1379 Report* (London, 2002), p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> CSC: *The Use of Children as Soldiers in Africa...*, op. cit. p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Colette Braeckman: *"Guerre sans vainqueur en RDC"*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2001, p. 17. [<http://www.mondediplomatique.fr/2001/04/BRAECKMAN/15007>].

Map 1: Central Africa



way: they are the *'doriyas'* ("look-out" or literally "ear agents" in Kirundi). Most of these children live in or around camps for displaced persons. They no longer go to school, either for security reasons or because they lack the financial means. They are constantly in the company of military personnel who guard the camps. Gradually, they start doing small jobs for them in exchange for food. These may be only domestic, like cooking and washing up, or purely military in nature, like acting as guards, carrying arms or ammunition or serving as spies. As time goes on, they are initiated into the manipulation of arms and start accompanying adult soldiers for patrolling operations. Many of these *doriyas* end up enrolling themselves in the regular army. In the

**DRC**, the enrolment of children in the east of the country dates back to the "long march" organized by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (AFDL), in 1996/97, under the leadership of L.D. Kabila, against the regime of Mobutu. The AFDL is said to have recruited about 10,000 children between the ages of 7 and 16<sup>11</sup> called *'kadogos'* ("little ones" in Swahili). After the First War, some of these children were incorporated into the Congolese Armed Forces (FAC) of the government while others, left to their own devices, are now street children who haunt the streets of Kinshasa. In 1998, there was another spate of massive recruitment of child soldiers when the insurrection broke out in the far east of the country between rebel

<sup>11</sup> CSC: 1379 Report, *op. cit.* pp. 30-31.

groups, headed by local ethnic chiefs, and government forces. On August 7 of that year, an official announcement was broadcast on national radio calling children and youth between the ages of 12 and 20 to enlist in the armed forces to crush the rebellion. Between 4,000 and 6,000 young persons, according to different sources, responded to the appeal. In **Rwanda**, children as young as 15 are recruited into Local Defence Forces, made up of civilian 'volunteers' who are armed and trained by the army.<sup>12</sup>

National armies also organize civilians into paramilitary forces that enable them to increase the number of combatants while keeping costs down, since those recruited are not paid and continue to live in their own homes. Many children, like the '*gardiens de la paix*' (guardians of the peace) in Burundi,<sup>13</sup> having left school, have no other option but to join these forces. Initially formed to defend the local population against rebel incursions, these paramilitary forces often find themselves drawn into patrolling operations alongside regular army troops or are made to swell the number of soldiers when fighting breaks out.

In all the countries under review, recruitment methods used by rebel groups are coercive. Outright abduction by them is frequent, especially in the countryside. In towns and cities, street children are particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment. The boys are used as spies and sent to the camps of the regular forces to obtain information. The girls are used as domestic servants and sex slaves. These children typically lack sufficient training and are often massacred in combat. It is very difficult to estimate the number of children recruited to serve the interests of local warlords. All together, more than 20,000 children have participated in hostilities in the region.<sup>14</sup>

On November 20, 2001, the UN Security Council discussed the issue of Children and Armed Conflict and unanimously adopted Resolution 1379. Paragraph 16 of this resolution requested the Secretary-General to prepare a list of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in violation of the international obligations applicable to them. The list that includes armed groups

in **Burundi** and the **DRC**, was proposed by NGOs and accepted by the Secretary General. He annexed it to his report that was made public on December 16, 2002.<sup>15</sup> On the basis of this report, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1640, on January 29, 2003, requiring an immediate end to the use of child soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.2.2 Ruined economies increase vulnerability

Central African countries have been through eight years of political crises, violent conflicts accompanied by massacres, displacement of population and destruction of the social and economic infrastructure. In addition, the embargo and blockage of development aid have had deep consequences on their economies: living conditions have deteriorated and almost all the socio-economic indicators for these countries have declined.

In the **DRC**, for instance, inflation rose to 9,000 per cent in 1994. A study on employment, conducted in 1999, showed that both the public and private sectors are affected by the crisis: in the public sector, there are delays in payment of salaries all over the country, particularly in the provinces. Disguised unemployment dampens the motivation for work and induces absenteeism and corruption. In the last few years, 90 per cent of State enterprises went bankrupt due to bad management. The private sector is devastated: in 1991 and again in 1993 Kinshasa was sacked and the commercial sector incurred heavy losses. This caused many of the large companies to close down, bringing in its wake, massive retrenchment and a further increase in unemployment. Most of the population depends on the informal economy for jobs and produce. The purchasing power of households has decreased drastically and discontentment has invaded all social classes. The middle class is dwindling, leaving, on the one hand, a large, pauperized population and, on the other, a small, wealthy elite.

Youth are increasingly frustrated due to the deterioration of the social infrastructure. Expenses on

<sup>12</sup> Information taken from the CSC *1379 Report, op. cit.* pp. 78-79.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the guardians of the peace in Burundi, consult: Human Rights Watch: *The Government-sponsored "self defense" program in Burundi*, Vol.13; No.7 (A), December 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by CSC: *The Use of Children as Soldiers in Africa...*, *op. cit.* p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Security Council: *Report of the Secretary General on Children and armed conflicts, S/2002/1299*, New York, 26 November 2002.

<sup>16</sup> The text of Resolution 1640 (2003) is available on the site: [[www.un.org/Docs/scres/2003/sc2003](http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2003/sc2003)].

Table 2: Socio-economic indicators for Central African countries

	GNI per capita (US\$) 2001	Under-5 mortality rate (0/00) 2001	Life expectancy at birth (years) 2001	Total adult literacy rate (%) 2000	Net primary school enrollment/attendance (%) 1995-2001
BURUNDI	100	190	41	48	47
CONGO	700	108	51	81	96*
DRC	100*	205	52	67*	51
RWANDA	220	183	40	67	68
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	519	173	48	61	57
WORLD	5,228	82	64	79	81
INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES	28,210	7	78	–	97

Source: UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 2003*, UNICEF, New York, 2003.

education have fallen, the share of this sector in the national budget having been reduced from 15.1 per cent in 1971 to 1.4 per cent in 1990.

The transport and communications networks are shattered. Civil navigation on rivers has been banned, which has disastrous consequences on the population in the interior. In the Province of *Equateur*, the coffee, manioc and rice harvests that used to be marketed in Kinshasa, are rotting in the countryside while the rural population lacks medicines, clothes and even salt.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the **DRC** is one of the richest African countries in raw materials. The wealth of the country is concentrated in the eastern part and is one of the main causes of the conflict there, as neighbouring countries vie with each other for control of these natural resources.<sup>18</sup>

Table 2 shows the extent of social and economic deprivation that the populations of the four countries are confronted with.

The effects of the economic crisis have been compounded by the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is strongly linked to the proliferation and prolongation of conflicts in Africa. It is estimated that 70 per cent of HIV-positive persons are in Sub-Saharan Africa and that 24 million persons or 30 per cent of the adult population of the continent is infected by the virus. Since 1981, about 11 million persons have died of AIDS, many of them at the peak of their working lives. In the next five to ten years, about 40 million children on the continent will have lost a parent due to AIDS. These orphans are easy prey for recruiters. What is more tragic is that they may themselves contract the disease while serving in the army or militia.

In this troubled context, conducting an inquiry into a subject as delicate as the situation of children in armed conflict is a risky venture that requires, among other things, a solid methodological framework.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Colette Braeckman, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> The wealth of DRC consists of natural resources, particularly diamonds and coltan, a mineral used in the manufacture of planes, cell phones and microprocessors.

## A methodology tailored to the analysis of the situation of child soldiers

# 2.

Investigating the situation of child soldiers is a relatively new field of study for ILO/IPEC. Previous to this, only one study of this category of children was conducted: a survey on child soldiers in the Philippines.<sup>19</sup> The methodology developed for the survey in Central Africa, as with other studies on the worst forms of child labour as defined by ILO Convention 182, is based on the Rapid Assessment survey methodology developed jointly by the ILO and UNICEF. In investigating the situation of child soldiers, the limitations of a uniform approach to all forms of child labour became evident. One cannot use the same approach and research tools to analyse the working conditions of a child domestic slave in Asia, of children working in the mines of South America and those of children involved in armed conflict in Central Africa. This is why it was found necessary to adapt the generic Rapid Assessment survey methodology and develop methods and tools specially adapted to the analysis of the situation of child soldiers.

Since the programme is a sub-regional one and since the different research teams in each country would be using the same approach and tools, it was also necessary to train the consultants in charge of the research, in the use of these methods.

The Institute for Applied International Studies (Fafo)<sup>20</sup> was commissioned to develop a special research method and to train the consultants. The details of the method and the complete set of tools developed have been published by ILO/IPEC, in early 2002, as a research manual.<sup>21</sup> This chapter gives an overview of the contents of the manual and describes the difficulties that the research teams encountered while doing the fieldwork. These were reported during the rapid evaluation of the methodology that was conducted with them.



<sup>19</sup> Cagoco-Guiam, Rufa: *Child soldiers in Central and Western Mindanao, Philippines* (ILO-IPEC, Geneva, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Fafo is a Norwegian research institute that conducts studies of living and working conditions and of public policy at national and international levels. Their main clients are the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NORAD), the World Bank and UN agencies such as ILO, UNDP and UNICEF. They have conducted other studies on the worst forms of child labour in Haiti, Morocco, Zimbabwe, etc. They will be collaborating with ILO/IPEC to analyse the situation of child victims of trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation from the Balkan countries and Ukraine. The results of the national studies on this subject will be combined in a Synthesis Report to be published at the end of June 2003.

<sup>21</sup> ILO/IPEC-Fafo: *L'utilisation des enfants dans les conflits armés en Afrique centrale – Manuel pour l'évaluation rapide* (ILO, Geneva, May 2002).

## 2.1 AIMS OF THE RAPID ASSESSMENT SURVEY

This Rapid Assessment survey of the situation of child soldiers was designed to gather the information necessary for the development of the action strategy that will be implemented in the second phase of the *Sub-Regional Programme for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers and the Prevention of the Use of Children in Armed Conflict in Central Africa*. It aims to identify the causes of the involvement of children in armed conflict and to reveal the different aspects of the phenomenon: recruitment methods, tasks assigned to child soldiers, their daily living conditions in armed groups, the circumstances leading to their release or escape from the armed group, the social and economic conditions they are confronted with after leaving the group and their future prospects.

The Rapid Assessment survey also includes the identification of stakeholders and of existing programmes of assistance to child soldiers. It reviews the achievements of these programmes in terms of prevention and rehabilitation.

There are certain inherent methodological difficulties in investigating the situation of child soldiers that are related to getting access to the field, or to the attitudes that the children may have towards the interviewer or to the types of activities that the children are engaged in. These problems also apply to the other actors involved in armed conflicts: the parents, the representatives of armed groups, etc. Apart from the risks involved in conducting the survey, there are statistical obstacles to estimating the number of child soldiers. They are typically the kind of population that statisticians classify as '*rare*' and '*elusive*'.<sup>22</sup> They are '*rare*' because they represent only a very small proportion of the total population. Hence, even if it were possible to do a large-scale survey, a national one for instance, sampling techniques would yield a small number of child soldiers. If the population of child soldiers were only '*rare*', statistical techniques exist that would permit one to deduce the number. However, it is also an '*elusive*' population and hence difficult to observe. Even if one knows that there are child soldiers in a certain region, it is highly probable that they escape the sampling method.

Hence, this research was designed to obtain purely **qualitative** information concerning the evolution of the situation of child soldiers and the characteristics of each consecutive phase from the time prior to recruitment, during their participation in armed conflict and until they leave the armed group. Under no circumstances does it claim to give an estimation of the number of child soldiers per country or per armed group.

## 2.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

In the context of this report, persons below the age of 18 are considered children, in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the CRC and ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

One must distinguish between children exposed to armed conflict and those participating in it. The research focuses on those who are or who have been participating in armed conflict, that is, those who do jobs or carry out missions for or along with armed groups. In this sense, they are real actors in the conflict.

ILO Convention 182 prohibits the "*forced or compulsory recruitment of children*" (Article 3(a)). Recommendation 190 that supplements this Convention stipulates in Paragraph 12 that this worst form of child labour should be considered a criminal offence and adds that "*the use, procuring or offering of a child (...) for activities which involve the unlawful carrying or use of firearms or other weapons*" is also to be treated as a criminal offence.

According to Graça Machel, a child soldier is "any child, boy or girl aged less than 18, who is recruited compulsorily, by force *or otherwise* with the intention of using him/her for combat by armed forces, paramilitary forces, civil defence units or other armed groups. Child soldiers are used for sexual services, or as combatants, forced spouses, messengers, porters or cooks".<sup>23</sup>

For the purposes of this programme, children recruited by means other than compulsion or force are also considered *child soldiers*. This widens the scope of the research to all girls or boys who live with or who accompany armed groups, whatever the motives or mechanisms of their recruitment may have been.

The term "*armed groups*" refers to both State and non-State armed groups involved in conflict or formed for

<sup>22</sup> Jon Pederson, et. al.: "What should we know about children in armed conflict, and how should we go about knowing it?" in *Filling the Knowledge Gaps: A Research Agenda on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Background Papers* (Florence, Instituto degli Innocenti & UN, 2001), p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Graça Machel: *The Machel Review 1996-2000* (Norway: UNIFEM, Canada: UNICEF, 2000); p. 5.

this purpose. Thus, whether the armed group was actually involved in combat or not at the time of the research is of secondary importance. The term “group” indicates that there is a structure of command exerted over the persons who are its members.

Lastly, in this study, *enlistment* in an armed group goes beyond recruitment. It includes the period during which a child is used or is intended for use in armed conflict.

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As per the above definitions, the study covers boys or girls who were under the age of 18 at the time of recruitment and who live or have lived with an armed group. They may have been recruited, compulsorily, by force, or otherwise, either for combat or to serve as bodyguards, messengers, spies, porters, cooks, ‘wives’ or for sexual purposes.

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## 2.3 PERSONS INTERVIEWED OR “RESPONDENTS”

For a proper understanding of the phenomenon of children involved in armed conflict, it is necessary to gather information from all the actors involved or persons concerned:

- the children;
- the parents or any person who has or has had custody of the child whether a member of the family or not;
- possible intermediaries who facilitated the recruitment of children;
- the representatives of armed groups;
- resource persons such as adult victims or witnesses of the enrolment or use of child soldiers (for example, a teacher who was witness to forced recruitment of children on the school premises), or persons who work/have worked with former child soldiers (staff of assistance programmes, medical personnel, psychologists, researchers, community leaders, etc.).

The survey covers three categories of children:

- children who are members of an armed group at the time of the survey;
- former child soldiers who have left an armed group;<sup>24</sup>

- children who have never been members of an armed group.

The third category of children forms a control group. The information they provide is useful in designing a prevention strategy for which it is as important to understand why a child was *not* recruited as it is to understand why others were. The inclusion of this group of children makes it possible for the study to determine not only the factors that increase the vulnerability of children and contribute to their recruitment but also those that reduce their vulnerability in a given context.

The categories of children included are reflected in the categories of parents that were surveyed. These are:

- parents who have a child who is a member of an armed group;
- parents who have a child who was formerly a member of an armed group;
- parents of families of which no child is or has been a member of an armed group.

“Parents” can be either the biological parents (the father or mother) or a person who was the guardian at the time of recruitment (uncle/aunt, brother/sister, grand parents, or a person who is not a family member).

## 2.4 INSTRUMENTS DEVELOPED AND USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

Three types of survey methods were used to describe and analyse the involvement of children in armed conflict in Central Africa: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Each of them was meant to collect a specific kind of information.

Questionnaires were used to obtain standardized information of a qualitative nature that made it possible to establish correlations between variables and comparisons between the different survey sites and countries of the sub-region. Specific questions were asked to each of the six categories of respondents included in the survey. Hence, a set of six questionnaires was prepared:

- one for children who are members of armed groups;
- one for released children;
- one for children who have never belonged to an armed group;

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<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this report, this category will be referred to as “released children” and includes all former child soldiers whether they were actually released, demobilized or had escaped from the armed group.

- one for parents who have a child who is a member of an armed group;
- one for parents who have a child who was released from an armed group;
- one for parents with no child recruited.

Each questionnaire is structured chronologically and traces the child’s history from the time prior to recruitment until the present day and includes his/her future prospects. The questionnaires are divided into the following sections:

- **Antecedents:** events prior to recruitment that could have an influence on the enrolment of the child in the armed group;
- **Recruitment:** The reasons and circumstances of the child’s recruitment as well as those of others linked to him/her—family members or persons belonging to the same village or neighbourhood;
- **Characteristics of the armed group** to which the child belonged;
- **Occupation in the armed group:** Military activities, training, tasks or missions assigned to the child;
- **Living conditions in the armed group;**
- **Release from the group:** the circumstances leading to the child leaving the group;
- **Present situation and prospects:** the child’s means of living, social relations, health status since leaving the armed group and his/her aspirations and prospects.

The details of these sections vary according to the category of the child respondent.<sup>25</sup> To facilitate the task of the research teams, Fafo prepared a Manual for administering the questionnaires.

The *semi-structured interviews* and the *focus group discussions* allowed the research teams to get deeper insights into particular themes that came to light through the questionnaires. They enabled them to take into account certain specificities of a person, an armed group or a situation, that could not be covered by the questionnaire. The information gathered through these interviews and discussions has been used to develop the case studies presented here.

Nine interview guides with relevant themes were prepared, one for each of the six categories of respondents listed above as well as for three additional categories:

- Intermediaries who allowed or facilitated the recruitment of a child by an armed group;
- Representatives of armed groups; and
- Resource persons such as personnel of rehabilitation centres.

There are no guides for the focus group discussions since the topics covered were similar to those of the semi-structured interviews. As with the questionnaires, a Manual for conducting interviews was prepared by Fafo and made available to the research teams.

Table 3 shows the number of questionnaires, interviews and discussions that were planned for the Rapid Assessment survey in the framework of the programme.

Table 3: Planned sample covering five sites per country

	Questionnaires	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions
Child member of an armed group	40	15	5
Released child	40	15	5
Child never recruited	20	10	5
Parent of a child member of an armed group	30	10	5
Parent of a released child	30	10	5
Parent with no child recruited	15	10	5
Intermediary		5	
Representative of an armed group		5	
Resource person		5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>40</b>

<sup>25</sup> The questionnaires in modular form are in the Appendix to this report. All the instruments of research are available on demand from ILO/IPEC.

## 2.5 TRAINING OF CONSULTANTS AND PREPARATION FOR FIELD WORK

The ILO structures in the region (Multi-disciplinary Team for Central Africa based in Yaoundé, Cameroon and the ILO Area Office in Kinshasa, DRC) were instrumental in identifying seven national consultants: one for Burundi, two for the Congo, three for the DRC and one for Rwanda. These persons, as well as two ILO officials from Yaoundé and Kinshasa in charge of programmes in the region, attended a training workshop on qualitative research methods and the use of the survey instruments held in Yaoundé from February 4 to 8, 2002. The training consisted of theoretical inputs and simulations of the survey. After this, the consultants in turn trained five researchers in each country and then supervised and participated personally in the surveys. Given the size of the DRC and the fact that rebel groups occupy the eastern part of it, two studies were conducted there: one in the surroundings of the capital, Kinshasa and another around the city of Goma.

Before starting fieldwork, the consultants had been instructed to evaluate the conditions of security in the selected sites. They also had to contact the local authorities and, in certain cases, concerned military officials, directors of rehabilitation centres, etc. All the necessary authorizations had to be obtained before the survey began in order to guarantee the security of the researchers and respondents. Obtaining these often turned out to be difficult.

## 2.6 SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS AND CHOICE OF SITES

### 2.6.1 Selection of respondents

Contrary to a classical, quantitative survey, the respondents selected in this case cannot be considered representative of the entire population of children involved in armed conflict. Yet, in selecting them, every effort was made to take into account the diversity of individual, family and social situations present within the population. Two fundamental criteria, particularly for the category of children who had been released from an armed group, were the sex and age of the respondents. Researchers were instructed to seek to balance these two criteria in making their selection.

As mentioned above, the survey was to collect information from 175 persons in all, spread equally over five selected sites per country. However, the difficulties encountered while doing the fieldwork,

imposed a revision of the numbers of respondents per category originally planned. The tables below recapitulate the number of respondents per country and per category that actually responded through each type of survey instrument.

## NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS PER COUNTRY

Table 4: Burundi

	Questionnaires	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions
Child member of an armed group	23	7	3
Released child	26	11	3
Child never recruited	13	6	3
Parent of a child member of an armed group	14	4	2
Parent of a released child	11	3	2
Parent with no child recruited	9	5	3
Intermediary		0	
Representative of an armed group		1	
Resource person		10	
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>16</b>

Table 5: Congo

	Questionnaires	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions
Child member of an armed group			
Released child	40	20	
Child never recruited	20	7	4
Parent of a child member of an armed group			
Parent of a released child	29	6	
Parent with no child recruited	15	5	2
Intermediary		0	
Representative of an armed group		5	
Resource person		5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 6: DRC

	Questionnaires		Semi-structured interviews		Focus group discussions	
	Kinshasa	Goma	Kinshasa	Goma	Kinshasa	Goma
Child member of an armed group	43	40	12	16	4	5
Released child	36	40	0	14	4	5
Child never recruited	21	20	10	10	5	5
Parent of a child member of an armed group	37	30	8	11	4	5
Parent of a released child	23	30	7	10	3	5
Parent with no child recruited	16	15	12	10	5	5
Intermediary			0	3		
Representative of an armed group			5	5		
Resource person			12	20	0	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>40</b>

## NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS PER COUNTRY

Table 7: Rwanda

	Questionnaires	Semi-structured interviews	Focus group discussions
Child member of an armed group	0	0	0
Released child	22	9	4
Child never recruited	18	9	3
Parent of a child member of an armed group	0	0	0
Parent of a released child	6	5	9
Parent with no child recruited	11	8	2
Intermediary		0	
Representative of an armed group		0	
Resource person		0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 8: Recapitulation

	Burundi	Congo	DRC		Rwanda	Total
			Kinshasa	Goma		
Questionnaires	96	104	176	175	57	<b>608</b>
Semi-Structured Interviews	47	48	66	99	31	<b>291</b>
Focus Group Discussions	16	6	25	40	18	<b>105</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>159</b>

Table 9: Child respondents to the questionnaire (by sex)

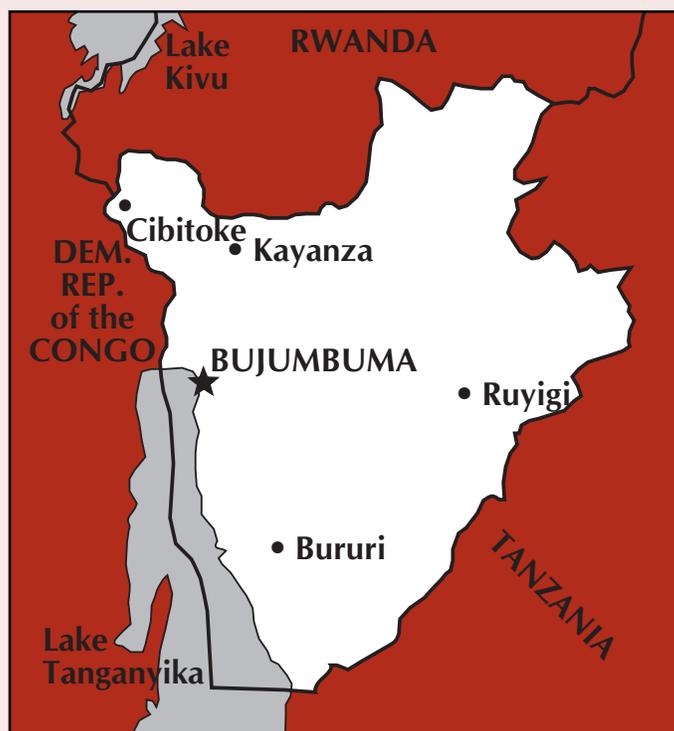
	Total number	Sex	
		Boys	Girls
Burundi	62	58	4
Congo	60	60	0
DRC	200	180	20
Rwanda	40	40	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>24</b>

## 2.6.2 Choice of Sites

### 2.6.2.1 Burundi

Table 10: Sites selected for the Rapid Assessment survey in Burundi

Name of site	Reasons for choice	Remarks
Bururi	Is situated in the combat zone. The inquiry in the Commune of Rumonge revealed it to be the first commune using the « <i>gardiens de la paix</i> »	
Cibitoke	Is situated in the combat zone. Has several children recruited, demobilized or acting as « <i>gardiens de la paix</i> » Inquiries conducted in the Communes of Buganda (on the border with the DRC) and Rugombo.	
Kayanza	Is situated in the combat zone. Inquiries conducted in the Communes of Muruta and Matongo. Several children recruited: Largest number (2000) and most active « <i>gardiens de la paix</i> » in the country.	
Ruyigi	Province bordering Tanzania, vulnerable to rebel incursions.	Was chosen to replace Gitega where the necessary authorization was received too late to conduct the survey.



Map 2: Burundi

## 2.6.2.2 Congo



Map 3: Congo

Table 11: Sites selected for the Rapid Assessment survey in Congo

Name of site	Reasons for choice	Remarks
<b>Brazzaville</b>	Locality in which there were armed conflicts. Security conditions acceptable.	A complementary inquiry was conducted here to replace the one planned in the Pool region where there was a fresh upsurge in hostilities.
<b>Dolisie</b>	Locality in which there were armed conflicts. Security conditions acceptable.	
<b>Nkayi</b>	Locality in which there were armed conflicts. Security conditions acceptable.	
<b>Owando</b>	Locality in which there were armed conflicts. Security conditions acceptable.	

## 2.6.2.3 DRC

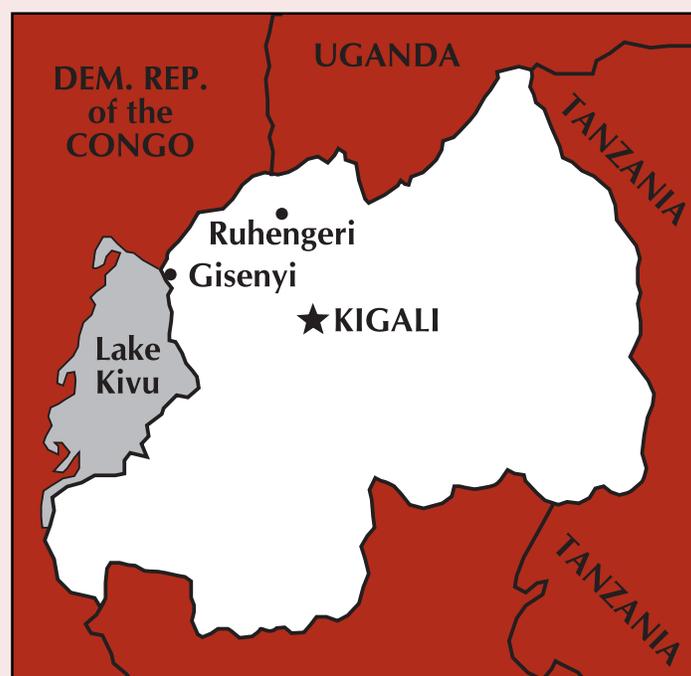
Table 12 : Sites selected for the Rapid Assessment survey in DRC

Name of site	Reasons for choice	Remarks
<b>Kinshasa</b>	In 1997, the first child soldiers 'kadogos' recruited by the AFDL in the east of the country entered Kinshasa. Many were demobilized. Kinshasa was the place where the 2nd Congolese war began: about 5,000 adolescents were recruited after the appeal for mobilization announced on the radio in August 1998.	The inquiry was conducted here in place of Kitona, where no former child soldiers were found and Lubumbashi where the commander of the region refused the authorization necessary for the researchers to meet the soldiers.
<b>Mbandaka</b>	The Province of <i>Equateur</i> is most affected by the war and the north of it is occupied by rebel groups. The present front line is situated at 100 km from the city. This incites the government to deploy troops in which there are children under 18 on this front.	
<b>Kananga</b>	Kananga is situated in the Province of East Kasai of which a part is under the control of the rebels. The Officers' Training School is situated here and the region is rich in diamond ore.	
<b>Goma</b>	Goma has been the centre of conflict between ethnic groups since 1993 and is known since then for massive recruitment of children. The first official decree on the demobilization of child soldiers from the rebel group, <i>Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie</i> (RCD) was issued from the camp of Mushaki.	
<b>Kalemie</b>	The 'muleliste' rebellion started in this region and caused the recruitment of many children. The war of 1996 also began here.	
<b>Bukavu</b>	Bukavu was the first city conquered by the AFDL. Many conflicts have taken place in this region.	
<b>Kalehe-Kabare-Bunyakiri-Walikale</b>	The airport of Kavumu has been used as a recruitment and training centre for many child soldiers.	



Map 4: DRC

## 2.6.2.4 Rwanda



Map 5: Rwanda

Table 13: Sites selected for the Rapid Assessment survey in Rwanda

Name of site	Reasons for choice	Remarks
<b>Rubirizi</b> (City of Kigali)	Students of the Institute for Agronomy and Animal Husbandry (ISAE) were chosen because they had participated in the armed group (FPR) «Inkotanyi», which was later called the Rwandese Defence Force (RDF). Some are of Rwandan origin while others are foreigners. They were recruited while in secondary school.	This site was proposed by the National Commission for Demobilisation and Reintegration.
<b>Rugunga</b> (City of Kigali)	Students of the secondary school here were recruited while they were still in primary school. Some are of Rwandan origin while others are foreigners.	
<b>Gikondo</b> (City of Kigali)	Young people from Gikondo participated in combat outside the country and have had experiences that are different from those who combated within the country's borders.	This site was proposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and by the National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration.
<b>Mutobo</b> (Ruhengeri)	The demobilization Centre of Mutobo is of interest because the young people here represent different ideological tendencies. Some come from armed groups combating in DRC while others come from rebel groups active within the country. Some children have fought in both types of groups.	This centre was chosen because of the diversity of young people that it caters to.
<b>Mutura</b> (Gisenyi)	This Province has given asylum to former child soldiers of different armed groups that operated from DRC to combat the present regime in Rwanda. After having been captured and trained in re-education centres, they were reintegrated in their places of origin.	This site was chosen to ensure the geographical and qualitative diversity of the survey.

## 2.7 DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

### 2.7.1 Contextual and logistical difficulties

The logistics of the surveys were complicated by difficulties in transport and in taking the necessary security measures. This is why, in the West **DRC** for instance, the surveys only took place in the big cities. In **Burundi** and the **Congo**, there were violent outbursts in the sites selected causing delays since activities there had to be suspended.

As far as the administrative aspects are concerned, cooperation with the national and local authorities was satisfactory, in general, although there were some delays in obtaining the necessary authorizations. **Rwanda** is a case in point where the authorizations were delivered only in November 2002. Collaboration with the armed forces was satisfactory on the whole. There was some mistrust in **Burundi** about how the results of the inquiry would be used and scepticism in the **DRC** about the usefulness of a survey since several studies had been conducted in the region and had not resulted in any follow-up action.

### 2.7.2 Methodological difficulties

The consultants had to confront several obstacles:

- The *categories of respondents* included in the initial plan seemed pertinent. However, it was not possible to identify intermediaries anywhere. Indeed, the information gathered concerning the recruitment of children by armed groups contains no evidence of third persons playing a significant role;
  - The *selection of respondents* was very difficult in all the countries particularly for certain categories and in certain sites. In **Burundi**, it was not possible to contact children who were still members of the national army nor those who belong to rebel groups. Hence, all the children interviewed here in the category "child member of an armed group" belonged to the paramilitary forces ("*gardiens de la paix*"). In the **Congo** and the **DRC**, the consultants reported that the children released from armed groups could not be approached. Whether they had deserted or been released, these children were afraid of being traced by their former
- group or by an enemy group and arrested or punished. Given the risks that they are exposed to, every possible precaution was taken to ensure that the respondents remain anonymous.<sup>26</sup>
  - In order to protect the children from reprisals and guarantee their security, the researchers did not systematically try to *identify the armed group*, to which the child belonged, except in **Rwanda** where this would not cause any problems. Hence, it was not possible to compare information and make recommendations specific to different armed groups. All the same, the testimonies concerning the armed groups, revealed two important facts: in some countries the children easily switch from one armed group to another either because of opportunism or because they are forced to do so. When they have escaped from a rebel group, they are often re-utilised by the militia or para-military groups in order to break their old allegiance. Secondly, there is a significant difference in the treatment received by those who are members of rebel groups as compared to the regular armed forces—living conditions are much harder in rebel groups and the relationships with the adult soldiers more violent.
  - In all the sites, although it was generally acknowledged that *girls* were used by armed groups in the region (a fact confirmed by the replies given by the boys), very few girls could be identified by the researchers through their networks. This could be because the girls suffer even greater stigmatization than boys and prefer to 'be forgotten'. It was therefore not possible to probe the situation of girls belonging to armed groups. Despite this, a case study has been compiled on the basis of the information available.
  - Lastly, the *length of the questionnaire*, specially the one used for released children that required a whole hour to administer, was a source of difficulty. Consultants reported that the children interviewed showed signs of fatigue and were uneasy when asked certain questions concerning the composition of the armed group, the missions accomplished during

<sup>26</sup>All the names of parents and children cited in this report in the testimonies and case studies are fictive so as to guarantee confidentiality.

combat, extortions, drug consumption, whether they kept their arms after leaving the group, etc. Either due to lack of concentration or due to intentional distortion of facts, the truth of the replies received is doubtful and certain contradictions surfaced during the analysis of data. These contradictions were also a rich source of information.

Despite the perturbed context, a hostile environment and the difficulties encountered, the survey was completed in all the countries. The work done by the consultants and research teams in the field yielded precious information about the situation of child soldiers. Some of this confirms known tendencies, while some is new and unexpected.



## CASE STUDY #1:

Young girls in armed groups:  
Intimate relations or none at all

It is widely acknowledged that armed groups recruit young girls. Their lives are quite different from that of the boys in the group, although they are sometimes recruited and trained together. The conditions during training are extremely hard and some girls cannot tolerate the harsh treatment. They are then often forced to become 'partners' of adult men and, at the same time, take care of all the domestic chores in the group, like cooking and washing up. They are sometimes used as spies and have to hang around near villages to detect the possible presence of enemy groups. The difference in the treatment they receive makes it quite difficult for them to relate to the boys in the group. Adolescent girls are often pregnant when they leave the group and find themselves all alone, banished by their families, the communities to which they belong and also by the armed group. They are ashamed of their past and wish to hide it. This makes it even more difficult for them to contact rehabilitation centres for help.

**The story of a young girl from the DRC:  
Justine is 17 and is now part of a reintegration programme.**

### *Her family is extremely poor*

Justine's family comes from South Kivu. Both her parents are alive but her father is always absent. Her mother tries to feed her eight children with what she earns from the little shop she runs for another owner. Her small income is just about enough to feed the family. Justine says that for all their other needs (clothes, toiletries, etc.) the children have to manage on their own. Justine is the only child who has been to school. She does quite well and at 14, is in the second year of secondary school.

### *She becomes pregnant at 14*

In the absence of the father and with the mother's long working hours, the children are left to themselves. Justine goes out a lot, meets men and finds herself pregnant one day. She refuses to say whether her pregnancy is the result of rape, a relationship to which she consented or if she was a victim of prostitution. She is ashamed and hides her pregnancy until the last minute. She delivers her baby alone in a field and abandons it there. It is found dead the next day. The inquiry conducted in the village reveals that she is the mother and she is put in jail.



### *Once out of prison she has no choice but to enroll*

When the troops of the AFDL enter the city, all the prisoners are freed. Justine has nowhere to go and joins the armed group. She is given military training during nine months. She finds the military drill beyond her physical capacity and suffers a lot. She does not get enough to eat, sleeps badly and is constantly afraid. She sees that the girls who are partners of the commanders receive much better treatment. They have better living quarters and are exempted from military exercises. She, in turn, becomes the bed partner of a chief. At the same time she has some administrative responsibilities and is engaged in distributing supplies. This lasts for two years. At the age of 16, she delivers a baby girl.

### *She is released but has no place to go with her baby*

She is now 17. She has been demobilized but finds herself without any income. She cannot go back to her village and life in the street is impossible with her child. A shelter for child soldiers receives her and informs her of the possibility of doing an apprenticeship. However, since there are no arrangements for taking care of her child, she cannot take up vocational training.

### *Her future is bleak*

At 17, without a profession, Justine sees no future for herself. Sometimes she thinks that the best thing to do would be to return to the armed group. She is convinced that no man will want to marry her if he knows her past. She is desperate and wonders how she will bring up her little girl.

### *Reflections on Justine's story*

Justine is socially marginalized ever since her first pregnancy at 14. Her alienation is the result of the cumulative effects of individual and social behaviour that maintain women in a position of inferiority. The father of the family does not take any responsibility and leaves it to his wife to shoulder the burden alone of educating their eight children. Justine does not have the means to control her fertility and falls pregnant too soon. There is no social service to which she can turn for help. She is rejected by society. Her enrolment in the armed group, which seemed to her an opportunity to be integrated into a "community", is only a stopgap solution. After demobilization she finds herself completely on her own. The usual rehabilitation programmes for ex-combatants are not adapted to the needs of adolescent girls, and even less to those of young mothers. The time spent with the armed group accentuates her marginalization and makes it impossible for her to return to her family. In order to succeed in integrating herself both economically and socially, Justine has to get rid of a double stigma: that of having been a member of an armed group and that of being an unwed mother. This is the fate of many girls released from armed groups.

# The use of children in armed conflict in Central Africa: from recruitment to release

## 3.

### 3.1 THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

#### 3.1.1 Children thrust into destitution

The four studies indicate the extent to which armed conflict, whether regional or national, upturns traditional social structures. Families are dispersed and displaced, most people lose their means of living, and schools close down or deteriorate. Children are idle, destitute and bewildered by the violence they witness. A combination of ideological discourse and rumours create conditions that instigate them to take arms. Everything contributes to them becoming easy prey for the recruiters of the different armed groups that are confronting each other.

In the four countries surveyed, one finds the following factors that put children at risk of military recruitment:

- **The economy in ruins**

Many families have fled from where they live and have, as a result, lost their sources of income. This is particularly true for peasants, who lose their means of subsistence when they leave their land.

In all the countries, hundreds of families, particularly those in small, provincial towns, are suddenly without any means of earning a living. In many of them, the father is either dead or absent and this increases their insecurity. Food shortages are a direct result of being in or near a conflict zone and even where there is food, the poor do not have access to it.

The proportion of children in school falls drastically during war. In **Burundi**, it dropped from 29 per cent in 1993 to 19 per cent in 1999. In the **DRC**, it is estimated that the allocation for education in the national budget has been reduced from 15.1 per cent to 1.4 per cent between 1972 and 1990.<sup>27</sup> In the **Congo**, although, according to official statistics, 80 per cent of school-age children are in school, not even half of the children interviewed were attending school at the time of recruitment.

The decrease or absence of income of parents combined with a massive fall in school attendance forces children to look for other means of satisfying their needs.

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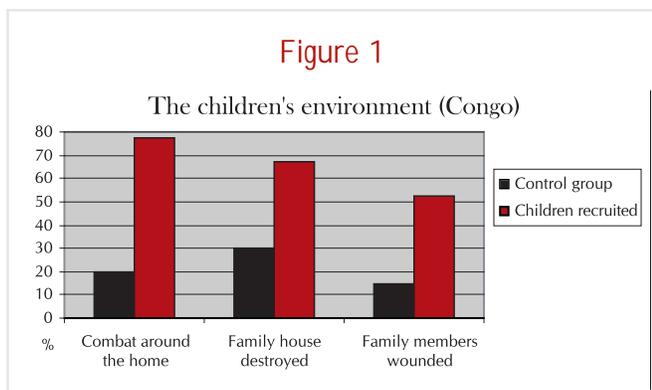
<sup>27</sup>J.P. Peemans: *Crise de la modernisation et pratiques populaires au Zaïre et en Afrique*, avant-propos de Benoît Verhage (coll. Zaire-Histoire et Société, Paris/Montréal : L'Harmattan, 1997).

## • Where violence and fear prevail

The presence of arms generates violence everywhere. The war takes place not just on the front line but even within homes. Children are the first witnesses of atrocities committed on their loved ones.

The proximity of the combat zone combined with the rumours that circulate about possible dangers creates a climate of fear. Many of the testimonies of children reveal the feelings of extreme insecurity they experience.

The comparison between the environments of those that were enrolled with that of the others is revealing. A child who grows up near a combat zone and whose family is directly affected by the war is much more likely to be enrolled than others.



## • Ideological propaganda

The conflicts described in the four national reports are civil wars. Groups confront each other for political, economic or ethnic reasons. In order to justify their combat and win people over to their side, these groups launch propaganda campaigns targeting the population. They paint a terrifying picture of the danger the enemy represents, calling for resistance and the need to protect one's kin. Enrolment in the armed group becomes a moral duty to one's community and those that refuse to take up arms are easily labelled as traitors. It becomes extremely difficult not to enrol when subjected to such intense social pressure.

This propaganda and appeals for mobilization are relayed either by the mass media (like the appeal on national radio in the **DRC** in August 1998) or through the grapevine.

## • Complete disruption of the family cell

Even more than the statistics, the testimonies received during the semi-structured interviews show the extent to which families are disrupted by armed conflict.

Many families have run away from their homes and their land to escape the conflict. In refugee camps, for instance, the rhythm of life and the occupations of every member of the family are different to what they are used to: no fields to cultivate, no work for the adults, no school for the children. As a result of this rupture with the normal family environment, relations between parents and children become strained and the testimonies indicate a loss of parental authority.

Very often it is the death or departure of the father or big brother that disrupts the family, leaving the mother on her own to shoulder both the material and moral responsibility for the children.

*"My youngest son quit school very early, when he was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He then started smoking grass and moving around with the 'dandies'." When asked how she reacted to his delinquency, the mother replied: "At my age, what can I do? You know that children today have taken over the role of adults. I tried to speak to him several times, but it didn't help. It is he who commands at home." Of the eight children in the family, he was the only one who enrolled.*

–Veronique, 60 years, mother of a former child soldier, Brazzaville, April 2002.

There are other cases in which parents and children find themselves separated by hundreds of kilometres and children have no contact at all any more with the family. In conflict zones, a large proportion of children are by themselves and have to fend for survival on their own.

### 3.1.2 Conflicts that last: the need of fresh combatants

The four countries concerned have been confronted with civil war for many years. The **DRC** has been at war, practically without respite, since the middle of the nineties. In **Burundi**, there has not been lasting peace in the whole country since 1993 and in the **Congo**, each political party created its own militia in 1993. The armed conflicts of 1993, 1997, 1998/1999 and 2000/2002 happened in quick succession and moved from one region of the country to another.

The longer conflicts last, the greater the risk of recruiting soldiers that are younger and younger. Indeed, the

“stock” of adult men diminishes and there is a need to dig into the “reserves” that are available and abundant. Thus, even if children under 18 are not specifically sought after by the military, recruiters will have a tendency to bend procedures to recruit minors, when the opportunity arises, in order to swell their ranks.

“The army does recruit children. Because we don’t have enough soldiers, recruitment takes place twice a year and, until the necessary strength is reached, all those who come forward are enlisted, whatever their age may be.”

–Burundi, a soldier who wishes to remain anonymous, May 2002.

The recruiters interviewed during the survey gave the following reasons for recruiting children:

- Children are daring because they are unaware of death. In the name of this unawareness, adults thrust children into the most dangerous situations.
- They are **docile** and can be **manipulated**.

“They obey orders to the letter.”

–Bernard, recruitment agent, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

- They are **competent**

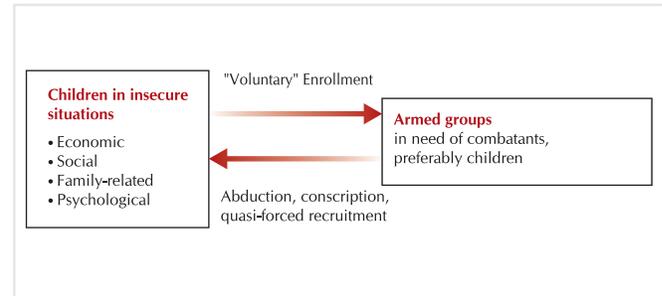
“They are more effective for difficult and delicate missions like laying mines, acting as scouts or intelligence agents.”

–Justin, representative of an armed group, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

- They are **tough** and **dynamic**.
- Their labour is **cheap**. In **Burundi**, 94 per cent of the young soldiers interviewed had received no remuneration from the group for which they worked.
- They are **efficient**. In **Burundi**, the young guardians of the peace (*‘gardiens de la paix’*) were found so successful in the Province of Citiboke that the system was applied to the whole country.

All these arguments put forward by recruiters can be easily refuted: the children’s ‘courage’ is often the result

of physical and moral doping (See Section 3.5.5). Their ‘docility’ is easily obtained thanks to the numerous, cruel punishments meted out to those who disobey (See Section 3.5.3). The so-called toughness, competence and efficiency are part of the flattery with which the leaders of armed groups keep a hold on the young, alternating humiliation and compliments. As for the low cost of their labour, this is simply due to promises that are not kept. Recruiters promise children that they will pay them the same as adults and then they fail to do so (See Section 3.5.9).

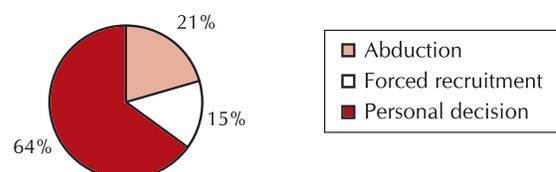


### 3.1.3 Destitute children and armed groups nearby

One finds, on the one hand, children who are desperately seeking a means of survival, and, on the other, armed groups nearby in need of combatants. This situation, combined with the prevailing social pressure, creates a sort of “magnetic field” that draws the two groups together and leads to a number of youths asking to be enrolled. In some of the sites surveyed, these “volunteers” represent 64 per cent of the child soldiers who are members of armed groups. However, all enrolments are not so “natural” and 36 per cent of the children interviewed say they were recruited by force into the armed group (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Mode of recruitment in the four countries  
(According to young members of armed groups)



## 3.2 RECRUITMENT

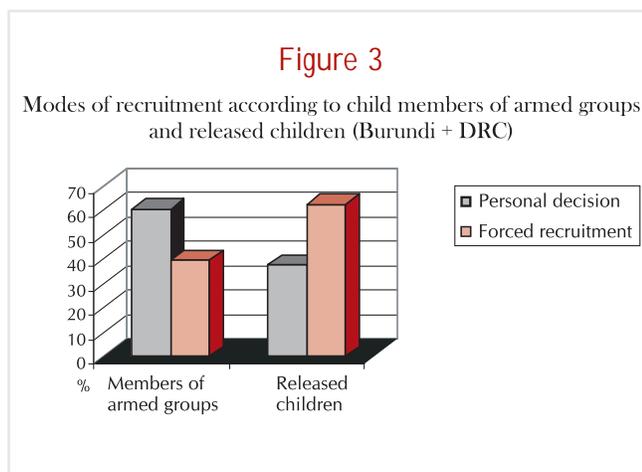
On the basis of the results of the survey, three types of recruitment can be differentiated:

- **Abduction** refers to situations in which children have been taken forcibly or under threat of arms;
- **Forced recruitment** applies to cases in which the child did not have a choice. This could be because of moral pressure or the obligation to enlist;
- A **personal decision** whereby the child took the initiative to become a member of the armed group.

In all four countries, the information gathered from young members of armed groups indicates approximately the same distribution among the three types of recruitment.

Obviously the large proportions of children who have personally decided to enrol make it seem that enrolment is mainly voluntary. The research puts this in question. Firstly, the boundaries between these categories of enrolment are blurred. Secondly, when seemingly personal initiatives are analysed, it becomes clear that they were taken under duress and in ignorance of the consequences.

This ambiguity concerning the voluntary nature of the decision is reflected in the difference of opinion between children who were still members of armed groups at the time of inquiry and those who had already left them. In Figure 3, abductions and forced recruitment have been grouped together and compared with recruitment on the basis of a personal decision.



The difference in the replies to this question according to whether the person interviewed was still a member of an armed group or not merits analysis. How is it that youths do not say the same thing once they have left the armed group? We can only make certain hypotheses that need to be verified:

- Those that have left the armed group are those who were unhappy there. They are probably those who were forced to join. In other words, those who take the initiative to join an armed group are less likely to leave it.
- Once they have left the armed group, they realize how difficult it was to live in it and cannot acknowledge, even to themselves, that they entered on their own initiative. While still a member of the group, they say they joined on their own initiative, but once they have taken their distance from it, they can only say the contrary.
- Despite all the precautions taken during the survey, the testimonies show that there is always fear of reprisal. Hence, a child who is still a member of an armed group does not dare to say that he/she was recruited by force.
- Finally, it may also be that children are proud to say that they chose this difficult occupation on their own, a pride that disappears once they have left the group and realize that they were forced into it.

### 3.2.1 Abduction

Nearly 21 per cent of children involved in armed conflict say that they were abducted. According to their testimonies, armed groups generally abduct at times when there are no adults or very few adults around. There are cases of both individual children being abducted and of groups of them being taken simultaneously.

*" I was enrolled when I was 16 and was attending school. One day, during class hours, a vehicle carrying armed rebels drew up and took away all the pupils. All those between 15 and 25 years of age were arrested and driven to Dogo. On the way there the soldiers taught us to manipulate weapons. Two weeks later we were sent to the front. "*

–Ngoy, child member of an armed group, DRC, Mbandaka, May 2002.

"It was while we were fleeing the combat zone that I was captured with other children by an armed group on the escape route. They tied us up and blindfolded us with black kerchiefs. I was nine years old."

–Patrice, 14 years, former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

"We had fled the conflict that was raging in Brazzaville and taken refuge in the countryside. I had gone to visit my father who was in another place. While returning from there, I was captured and forced to join a religious armed group."

–Lucien, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Bacongo, April 2002.

"I was returning from school when army troops raided our village. Mum and Dad had already left the house. I joined other people who were running away. En route, I met armed militiamen. I told them that I was only nine and was alone. They then took me to their chief who, after a ceremony, took me under his protection. That's how I became a member of their group."

–Bernard, 14 years, former child soldier, Congo, April 2002.

A detailed description of the initial period in the armed group will be given in Section 3.4. We can already say here that children who are recruited after abduction are treated more brutally, exposed to more violence and sent more rapidly to the front line than the others.

### 3.2.2 Forced recruitment sometimes accompanied by threats

Forced recruitment is practised in all four countries by rebel groups as well as by national armies.

In the examples given below, the threats are directed to the child and his/her family.

"Rebels came to the house to recruit me and warned me of dire consequences if I refused to follow them. I accepted, knowing that even if I escaped death at their hands, the army soldiers would kill me anyway."

–Donat, former child soldier, Burundi, May 2002.

"Families that did not let their children go were considered to be traitors and risked reprisal."

–Group discussion with former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, June 2002.

Official conscription of minors does not exist in any of the four countries. However, in certain regions, there is such pressure by military authorities for youths to join the ranks that it can be considered forced recruitment.

In the **DRC**, almost two-thirds of those released, say, in retrospect, that their recruitment was in fact tantamount to conscription, while almost none of those who are still members of armed groups talk of forced recruitment.

In **Burundi**, the recruitment of young '*gardiens de la paix*' was done by the local administration in collaboration with the police force. Any boy who was physically fit and who did not go to school or have a regular job was to be recruited.

"We did not have a choice. We had to report to the authorities for enrolment with the other youths. If we refused to enrol, there were sanctions. We had to pay fines and sometimes, even had to go to prison."

–Cyprien, 20 years, young '*gardien de la paix*', Burundi, Kayanza, April 2002.

Other testimonies show that it was possible to escape compulsory recruitment by paying the recruiters.

### 3.2.3 Children's motivations

The testimonies given by children who have been members of armed groups show that there are multiple reasons for wanting to join and that their decisions are prompted by a combination of them. They will be reviewed one by one in this section, but one must bear in mind the interactions between them.

The desire to satisfy material needs and the desire to leave the family are often linked to poor living conditions in the family. Parents of former child soldiers in the **DRC** express this inter-relationship:

"When one cannot cater to the needs of one's children, it becomes difficult to control them and then many of them enrol themselves."

–Discussion with a group of parents of former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.



In other cases, there is a cumulative effect of several reasons, as in the following testimony: the announcement on the radio resurrects an old dream of one who knows that the chances of finding a paid job are small since he is unskilled. The call to join the army then becomes a rare job opportunity.

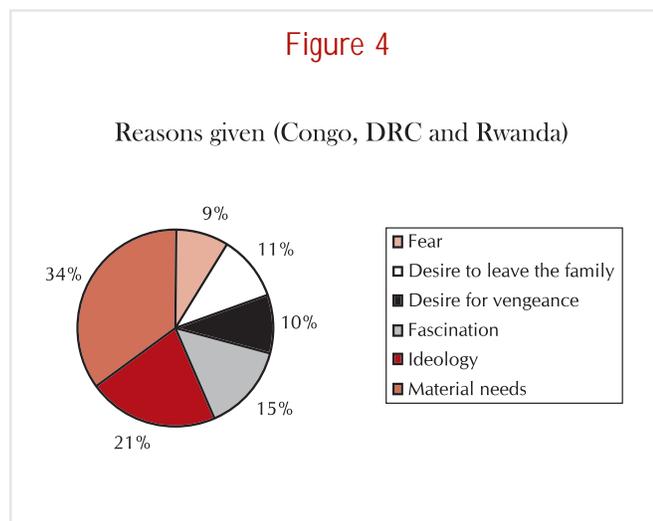
*"I had always dreamed of joining the army or owning a small shop. When I heard the announcement on the radio in Kananga that called for volunteers, knowing that I did not have any qualifications for other*

*occupations, I reported to the commander to be enrolled."*

–Paul, former child soldier, DRC, Kananga, May 2002.

An analysis of the reasons given by the children in the different surveys (Figure 4) shows their relative importance.

A large proportion of young persons refer to the material deprivation they were in before joining the armed group. They often mention the word "survival". Besides, almost all of them talk about their enrolment in the armed group as if they had chosen an occupation like any other.



### 3.2.3.1 Destitution

Of the 34 per cent that justify their choice for material reasons, half of them say that it was for their immediate survival while the other half sees in enrolment a long-term strategy for earning a livelihood.

*"During the war in 1998-99, the whole family was dispersed and I was left alone. To be able to survive, I had to join a group of 'Cocoyes'."*<sup>28</sup>

–Lucien, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Troops loyal to democratically elected President Lissouba who fought the *Cobra* militia in 1997.

*"I joined the militia because I thought I could get paid work after the war. I knew I was risking my life, but I had no other choice. My mother, a farmer, was finding it hard to feed us. While other youths joined the group for ideological reasons, I joined in order to have a job."*

–Sylvestre, 18 years, former child soldier, 5<sup>th</sup> child of a fatherless family of nine, Congo, Owando, May 2002.

In the **DRC**, many youths were attracted by the promise of the army to pay US\$ 100 to every new recruit.

*"My father had left the house many years ago and, one day, my mother disappeared too. It was my grandmother that took me in. But she did not have the means to look after me. I started working as a porter but could not earn enough to pay for my studies. Hence, when I heard that the army was recruiting against payment, I joined, in the hope of a better life."*

–Kanku, 17 years, former child soldier, DRC, Kasai, April 2002.

With a view to understanding the economic conditions of young persons prior to enrolment, two indicators used in the survey can be analysed: the family ties of the child and the occupation of the head of the household.

The large proportion of youths living away from their families at the time of recruitment is reflected in the

high percentage of those who say they joined the armed group to survive. In the **DRC**, and the **Congo**, 45 per cent were separated from their parents at the time of recruitment. They were in a situation of economic distress, having to fend for themselves for food and shelter. Several children testify to this. They fled their villages after combat that proved fatal for their relatives, and wandered about alone, hiding themselves in the surrounding area. In these circumstances, the enrolment in the armed group came as a relief to them.

*"Ever since my mother and brothers had died in fighting in the village, I wandered about in the bush. It was difficult to find food. When the FPR passed near my hiding place, I ran towards them so that they would take me with them."*

–Juvénal, former child soldier, Rwanda, Rubirizi, December 2002

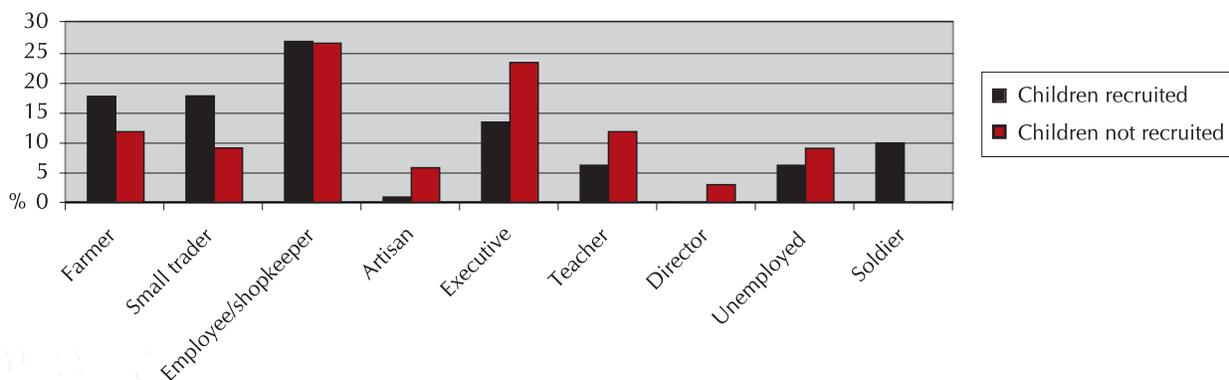
A child who lives alone is also more exposed to contact with armed groups and more vulnerable to direct recruitment.

To highlight the effect of the economic situation of the family at the time of recruitment, Figure 5 compares the occupation of parents of those recruited with those of the control group.

The differences are slight but one can deduce that children who enrolled come from families in which the head of the household has less job security (farmer, small trader). The difference is more significant for occupations that ensure a regular and, in some cases,

Figure 5

### Occupations of the parents (DRC and Congo)



higher income—teacher, executive, and director. Almost 40 per cent of children who were not recruited come from families in which the head has one of these occupations as against 20 per cent for children who were recruited. Lastly, it is noteworthy that 10 per cent of children recruited had a father in the armed forces, whereas this was not the case for any of the children of the control group.

### 3.2.3.2 Fascination for the army

For 15 per cent of the children interviewed, life in the army is attractive. In a number of testimonies, one finds evidence of the strong fascination for armed groups because of the prestige of the uniform, the thrill of having a gun or because of the social status attached to the profession.

*“The army fascinated me and I was full of admiration for my father and his army friends.”*

—Anatole, 18 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

This attraction is reinforced by the promise of a good income, particularly for those who have not pursued their studies.

### 3.2.3.3 A feeling of exclusion

A little more than one child in ten (11 per cent) says that he/she joined the armed group in order to leave the family. It is striking that in many cases, the child soldier is the only child in the family that enrolled. In the **Congo**, for instance, 75 per cent of parents of child soldiers say that only one of their children joined an armed group. There are two spheres from which the child can feel excluded: the family and the school.

Exclusion from the family is often because of the isolation or violence that the child suffers in the home, sometimes after a parent has remarried. The child then seeks every opportunity to leave the family and enrolment in an armed group is seen as an escape. It generally takes place either immediately after he/she has left the house or after having been a street child for some time.

*“After the death of my mother, I lived with my father and his second wife. She treated me badly and her children who lived with us had no respect for me. Every time something was missing, my stepbrothers or their mother accused me of taking it and my father would beat me. My stepmother kept repeating that I was a*

*sorcerer and the other family members did not speak to me anymore. So I decided to leave and go and live with other kids in a hair dressing salon that remained open all night.” That’s how he became a street child and then a child soldier.*

—Kasereka, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

Failure at school makes children feel excluded. The interviews conducted in the **DRC** confirm this. Although most children were attending school prior to their recruitment (68.4 per cent), many of them had repeated their class. More than half the children who were attending school were a year behind and one-third of those who were older than 14 were still in primary school. Failure at school is a bad experience for the child and makes him/her seek a change.

In cases where children go directly from the family into the armed group, they most often join without informing the family.

### 3.2.3.4 Ideological reasons

Ideological reasons are rarely cited as such (21 per cent), but the testimonies show that they are significant. The pressure that adult soldiers put on the youths who are likely to join their ranks is often based on ideology.

In the **DRC**, 21 per cent said that they enrolled in order to liberate the country. Enrolment is presented as a moral duty and a service to the community.

*“Our parents told us that we were going to defend a noble cause.”*

—Group discussion with former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, June 2002.

In the case of **Burundi**, the ethnic conflict underlies the tension between the different factions and hence one cannot exclude ideological reasons for recruitment of the young. Yet, very few mention it as a reason for joining an armed group. The following testimony explicitly refers to ideological reasons:

*“For a long time, I had wanted to join the regular army to break the myth that people of my ethnic origin would not be accepted in the army.”*

—Celestin, 25 years, former child soldier, Burundi, Rumonge, May 2002.

## CASE STUDY NO. 2

Work is at the core of the enrolment of children.

Work or the absence of it, marks the lives of child soldiers from the time they are recruited to the time they are released.

### The story of a child from the Congo: Augustin is 17 and participates in a reintegration programme

*At the age of 8, Augustin leaves school because the family is too poor*

Augustin's father dies when he is 8. His mother is unemployed and cannot pay his school fees, so he leaves school while in the second grade. The mother refers to him as a "dead weight" because he does not work. Despite this, he refuses to get involved in the conflicts of 1993 and 1997. He is just eight years old in 1993 and twelve in 1997 and armed groups hold no attraction for him.

*At 14, he looks for work desperately*

Augustin and his mother had to leave their town during the war. They come back home in 1997 and Augustin hopes to find work. Unfortunately, the conflicts have shattered the economy and jobs are scarce. He finds nothing.

*Another conflict flares up and Augustin tries to enrol*

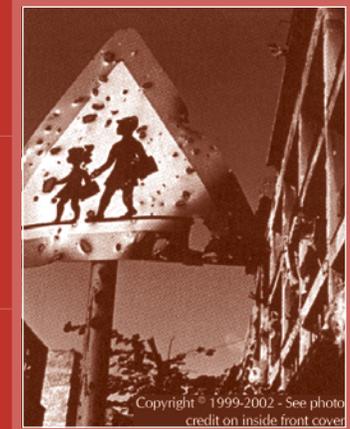
When the war begins again in 1999, Augustin is still looking for a job to earn his living and support his mother. He begins to think that enrolment in an armed group will be a source of livelihood. He asks his friends to let him know when the different factions recruit. There is no ideological dimension to his desire to enrol.

*Augustin sees his enrolment as a first step towards being permanently commissioned*

Before enrolling himself, Augustin obtains a promise of a permanent post in the army after the war. He presents his enrolment in this light to his mother who accepts his departure as a way of improving their prospects. She too sees in his enrolment the promise of a stable future with a regular income.

*He considers the first months as an apprenticeship of his future profession*

He suffers when sent into combat. Many of his friends are wounded. Yet, he remains enthusiastic because he is training for the future. He puts his present ordeal in the perspective of the future they have promised him in the army.



### *He finds life very hard but keeps going, thinking of his future work*

Life is very hard for Augustin and he does things that he would never have thought of doing: he takes drugs, loots and on two occasions, commits rape. Many young soldiers cannot bear this and some of them run away. But he stays until the end of the war.

### *When the war is over, Augustin is not incorporated into the army and returns to his mother*

It is a tremendous disappointment for him and his mother. Augustin has been able to collect a few things that he brings home but his mother knows that they have been looted from others and does not wish to keep goods that were dishonestly acquired. Tension mounts between them.

### *He leaves his mother, settles alone in town and becomes a small trader*

He finds life at home unbearable and rents a room in town. He invests all his savings in a small business. He is alone in this, has no support from his family and no help from outside.

### *He makes a loss and goes back to his army habits*

Without expert advice or material help, he cannot keep his business going and has to stop. He has lost all that he had. He is idle and has no money. The downward spiral begins: he starts drinking again, as he did when in the army, he says. He also starts taking drugs. He's ashamed of himself and doesn't dare to go and see his mother anymore. He withdraws more and more into himself.

### *The reintegration programme for ex-combatants contacts him and offers him vocational training*

He wants to do some technical training because it is his only hope of taking care of his mother. His aspirations are the same as three years earlier. What he wants is an occupation that will yield an income for both of them. In 1999, he had hoped that the army would offer him such a job. He is disappointed that they did not keep their promise. He has no other choice but to place his trust in the programme that offers him this opportunity.

### *Reflections on Augustin's case*

In Augustin's case, three years of suffering in the armed group brought him back to his point of departure: a job hunt.

It is because of the unemployment of his parents that he enters this spiral. If he had received help when his father died, he could have continued his studies.

Again, when he was in search of a job in 1999, if there had been an alternative to enrolment as a means of livelihood, he would not have enlisted. The only prospect of a job was a promise of future employment in the army. For lack of anything better, he accepted the offer.

Today, the reintegration programme proposes technical training that seems to suit him. He hopes to have found the means to satisfy his family's needs.

Children who used to be members of rebel groups in Burundi talk about “awareness raising campaigns” organized all over the hills.

“ On each hill, one person was given the responsibility of giving talks. All the young Hutus had to attend. He told us that the group wanted to recruit us to avenge our families that were decimated in 1972. They wanted to defeat the army and make a Hutu army of it. They wanted to take revenge on the soldiers who ill-treat our villagers. They would ensure our protection and survival, for we were at risk of being massacred by the Tutsi army.”

Another child added: “ We were impressed by his teachings and we all wanted to enrol. Only those who had very strict parents did not follow him, because their parents forbade them to.”

–Group discussion with former child soldiers, 15 to 22 years, Burundi, Rumonge, May 2002.

In **Rwanda**, some child soldiers related how propaganda campaigns incited them to enrol.

“ Before that, I knew I was living in a foreign country, but it did not bother me. I could not understand why Rwandans were fighting other Rwandans. Then, while listening to the radio, I suddenly understood that we did not have the right to live in Rwanda. That made me want to fight for this right. That’s why I joined an armed group.”

–Charles, former child soldier, Rwanda, Rugunga, December 2002.

### 3.2.3.5 Fear

In **Burundi**, the survey shows that many of the youths living in the hills constantly felt that they were in danger. Enrolment in an armed group was considered the lesser of two evils and, sometimes, even a form of protection. One finds this fear and the need for protection that accompanies it in all the cases of enrolment with rebel groups. People are convinced that the only way to be sure of not being attacked by rebels is to belong to them.

Another situation in which fear motivates voluntary enrolment is that of youths who have left an armed

group. They are terribly afraid of being found and treated as traitors. Enrolling in another group is seen as a protection, at least for some time.

### 3.2.3.6 Desire for vengeance

Very many children have witnessed atrocities committed on their relatives. Their testimonies indicate that such incidents were turning points in their lives and that they were not the same after them. The psychological shock of the scenes of horror they saw together with the disruption of the family that results (death of the father or big brother, flight, etc.), leaves the child destitute. The testimonies reveal that voluntary enrolment motivated by the desire to avenge one’s family takes place both with children who had thought about enrolling earlier as well as those who never had.

“ During the first war of 1993, those that enrolled were youths who had been mobilized by the politicians in power at the time. I had absolutely no admiration for these youths. When my elder brother died, I changed my mind. I enrolled voluntarily.”

–Nzuzi, 14 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

The second testimony presented here is that of a child who had never thought of enrolling before his family became a victim of atrocities. From what he says, one sees that the shock of the aggression lasts forever whereas the decision to join an armed group is taken in a few seconds.

“ I’m 17 now. I had a quiet life until the day it turned into a nightmare. It was during the 1999 conflict. The regular army made a raid on our village. People were terrified and began fleeing into the forest. We were about to leave when two soldiers entered our house. I was with my father and mother, my big brother and my sister who was 17 at the time. They started threatening us and demanded money from my father. He did not have any. My mother handed over 15,000 CFA Francs she had with her. But that was not enough and they threatened to kill my brother. My father and mother begged them to leave him alone, but they brandished their arms and decided to rape my sister. My father intervened and was shot to death. They also shot at my brother. There was blood everywhere. I

was petrified and couldn't move from where I was. They raped my mother in front of us. When they had finished, they ordered us to leave immediately (...). As soon as we had found refuge in the forest, I asked my neighbours to look after my family. I had just decided to join a rebel group because I had to avenge my family at any price. I joined a group of kids who were in the same situation. I was 14 years old then."

–Valentin, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Dolisie, May 2002.

A child who enrolls after such a shock is ready to do anything, at least for a certain time. He is an ideal recruit for an armed group because he is willing to do whatever is asked of him. The same child continues:

"I killed those whom I considered to be my enemies. I had no remorse because the image of my parents was always before me and the atrocities they had suffered gave me courage. I never missed a fight."

–Valentin, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Dolisie, May 2002.

### 3.2.4 A catalytic context

In addition to the reasons that the youths gave as their motivation for joining an armed group, there are two factors that influence their decision, either consciously or unconsciously: firstly, mixing with armed groups and, secondly, the attitude of their parents. These factors can play such an important role in some cases that the child's environment leads him/her to enrol even if he/she did not really have the desire to do so earlier.

#### 3.2.4.1 Living in the neighbourhood of an armed group

Among all the factors that influence the child's decision to join, mixing with members of an armed group seems the most important. This was not specifically included in the questionnaire, but an analysis of the testimonies reveals that a large number of children decided to join an armed group after being in contact with its members. Being in their company enhances the aura that young soldiers have for children. Besides, in many cases, children are gradually invited to participate in certain aspects of army life and once they get a taste of a world that attracts them, they want to be a part of it and ask to

be enrolled. In this respect, one can consider that armed groups actually seduce children.

"It was during the different encounters I had with my military friends that I took the decision to become a member of an armed group."

–Samuel, former child soldier, Congo, Owando, June 2002.

In **Burundi**, a similar process can be seen with the '*doriyas*' who work for the army. Most of these children live in or around camps for displaced persons. They no longer go to school, either for security reasons or because they lack the financial means. They are constantly in the company of military personnel who guard the camps. They often share their meals, since the children do not have enough food at home, and do small jobs for them in exchange, like cooking and washing up. Gradually, they are initiated into the manipulation of arms and start accompanying adult soldiers on military operations. They then become porters of arms or ammunition or serve as spies. They are sometimes called upon to kill prisoners or to transport them to the capital of the province. It is after this period of acclimatization, that certain young '*doriyas*' ask to be enrolled in the regular army.

The following example from the **Congo** illustrates the same process by which the child gradually integrates with the armed group.

"Since there was nothing to eat in the house, I started stealing in Poto-Poto. We often used to raid shops and pillage abandoned houses. After some time I stopped returning home because the adults in the group started giving me missions to accomplish as a scout in the enemy camp. Simultaneously, they taught me to shoot, especially with a PMK."

–François, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

Admiration for young persons who are armed is obviously the reason behind certain enrolments.

"I got into the armed group thanks to Davy, a 'big brother' from the neighbourhood. He used to stroll around the neighbourhood with a gun, even before the war began. He would pick out the youths who

were not in favour of the regime and who were ready to take up arms. I wanted to be like Davy."

–Didier, 17 years, child member of an armed group, Congo, Brazzaville, May 2002.

There are children who enrol voluntarily under the influence of a group although they had no desire to do so initially. There are others, like the child in the following testimony, who are forced to collaborate with soldiers to start with and then join voluntarily.

"I used to sleep in an empty building. Soldiers who were patrolling would open the door at night, demand money for cigarettes from us and force us to follow them while they patrolled. They would release us only the next morning. Finally, we got used to them and we asked them to take us for military training. The next day they took us to the training camp in Lubumbashi."

–Kalala, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

### 3.2.4.2 The family can cause the child's enrolment

The attitude of the family circle is decisive in concretizing the child's desire to enrol, either because they encourage the child to enrol or because they are indifferent.

The survey shows that what distinguishes those who enrol from those who don't is that they have relatives who belong to an armed group. In the **Congo**, 57 per cent of youth enrolled have a father or brother who belongs to an armed group, whereas this is the case for only 27 per cent in the control group. In some cases, the father or older brother is the one who directly instigates the child to join.

"It's my father who told me of the message transmitted on the radio and of the possibility of enrolling in an armed group."

–Pierre, former child soldier, DRC, Kananga, May 2002.

In the **Congo**, other children reported that a family member put their names on a list of candidates for recruitment although they themselves did not want to.

In **Rwanda**, several parents of former child soldiers proudly talk about how they instigated their children to enrol in the FPR.

"We hope wholeheartedly that they go to participate in the liberation of our country."

"We hope that the love for the country, of which we have spoken about with him so often, has played a big role in his decision to go."

–Group discussion, parents of former child soldiers, Rwanda, Rubirizi, December 2002.

Other testimonies of children as well as of parents reveal the extent to which the absence of authority, particularly paternal authority, plays a crucial role in the child's enrolment. The child who has no one with whom to discuss his desire to enrol lets himself drift towards the armed groups. Parents of children who enrolled often say that their child was "impossible" and "uncontrollable" even before enrolment.

### 3.2.5 Age at the time of recruitment

In many cases of underage recruitment, it seems that the law concerning the minimum age for recruitment is known but consciously violated.

In response to the question: "What must a child do to be recruited?" a child member of an armed group in the Congo said: "Have a birth certificate, have passport photos, be tall enough, be in good health. Generally, they don't pay attention to all this. What's important is the desire to join the army and engage in combat."

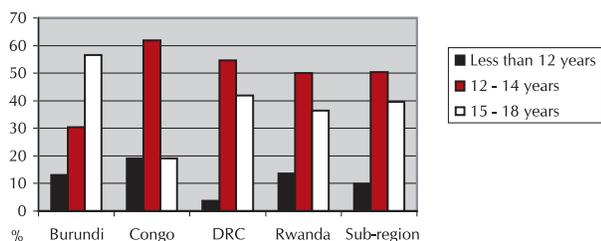
–Etienne, 17 years, member of an armed group, Congo, Brazzaville, May 2002.

Rules are easily circumvented during the selection process for entrance into armed groups.

Figure 6, representing information contained in the testimonies gathered during the survey, shows the extent of the non-application of laws: in the four countries together, 60 per cent of recruited children interviewed were less than 15 years and 10 per cent less than 12 years at the time of recruitment into an armed group.

Figure 6

Age at the time of recruitment



In addition, one-third of those who were members of armed groups in the **Congo** say that children under 12 were recruited along with them. This proportion goes up to 50 per cent for those who say that children less than 15 were recruited at the same time.

Whether the age of the child to be recruited is considered or not, depends on the circumstances in which the recruitment takes place:

1. In cases of forced recruitment or abduction

Recruiters do not pay heed to the age of the children they abduct. Often, a whole group of children is abducted. Among the children surveyed, most cases of very young recruitment were for rebel groups.

2. In cases of voluntary enrollment

- Sometimes the law is knowingly violated. In **Burundi** for instance, the survey shows that recruiters were aware of the law on minimum age, but that some of them helped the children to circumvent it. Minors succeeded in enlisting in the national army after getting false identity papers with the help of the military and the local administration.
- The absence of identity papers is a major cause of violation of the law during enrolment. Children report to the recruiter without any papers and declare that they are adults.
- In some cases, the recruiters are reluctant, but the children themselves insist. In one instance, in the **DRC**, a child went to the extent of offering money to the recruiter, who wanted to refuse him because he was too young, to make him change his mind.

These cases indicate a change in attitude among armed groups due to international pressure felt after the ratification of ILO Convention 182 and the Optional Protocol to the CRC. Armed groups are now aware that it is wrong to recruit minors but find ways to do so all the same.

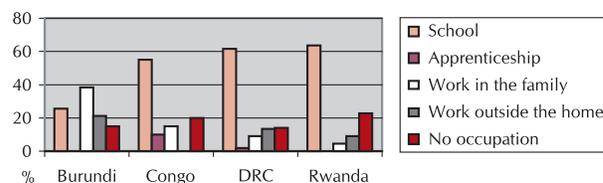
### 3.2.6 Child's occupation at the time of recruitment

One cannot draw conclusions concerning the vulnerability of the child to recruitment only on the basis of what the child was engaged in at the time. As discussed earlier, it is the whole environment in which he/she lives (failure in school, difficult relationships, idleness) that influences his/her choice.

The situation differs a great deal from one country to another and the activity in which children are engaged seems to be a reflection of the local situation rather than a characteristic of children liable to be recruited. In **Burundi**, more than 60 per cent of children recruited were working children (39 per cent with their families and 22 per cent outside the home), while in the **DRC**, **Rwanda** and the **Congo** the majority were in school (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Children's occupation at the time of recruitment



### 3.2.7 Risk of being re-recruited

The testimonies and statistics of the survey show that many youths successively belonged to several armed groups, in some cases, even to opposing factions. In the study conducted in Eastern **DRC**, 60 per cent of children who are at present members of an armed group have belonged to one or two other such groups in the past. The re-recruitment takes place under pressure from the local authorities or because the youth has no other alternative.

Return to the family or the village sometimes becomes impossible, even if it is the wish of those directly concerned, because of harassment by the local authorities. This is particularly true for children who have left the regular army, and who return to a village in which the local politicians are not in favour of the policy of demobilization.

“ I was demobilized from the camp of Kapalata, in Kisangani, and returned to my native village. Unfortunately, I had to leave again after three months. From the day I returned to the day I left, we didn't have a moment's peace. I was hunted down by the chief of the army post in the village who wanted to force me to reintegrate with the army. Neither my parents nor I were safe. Hence, I was obliged to leave the house again. Now, I am in a transit centre. It's lasted for two years now and I'm waiting for my harasser to be out of power to be able to return home. ”

–Kibo, former child soldier, DRC.

In **Burundi**, one learns from the testimonies that, quasi-systematically, children released from rebel groups are forced to enrol as *'gardiens de la paix'*.

“ When I ran away from the rebel group and returned home, the whole family was in a panic. They were afraid of being suspected of collaboration with the rebels. My parents took me to report to the administrative authority and were pacified. But I was obliged to serve as a *'gardien de la paix'*. ”

–Alphonse, 16 years, former child soldier, Burundi, Rumonge, May 2002.

The lack of employment opportunities instigates youths to return to armed groups, especially if, during recruitment, they are promised a regular salary.

“ After leaving the rebel group, I had been working for two months as a salesman for someone but he never gave me the money he owed me. I had a wife. I had to find a way of earning. So I decided to join the regular army because I had been told that I would receive a salary every month. ”

–Sébastien, 18 years, member of an armed group, DRC, Equateur, March 2002.

Going from one rebel group to another seems common among former child soldiers in **Rwanda**. In fact, they gradually discover the different groups active in the conflict through their own involvement in it and can decide to quit one group to join another.

“ While I was a refugee in Shabunda, I was forced to join the group of “Combattants”. We were fighting against the Mai-mai and the “Banyamulenge”. The Congolese told me that there were lots of Rwandans among the Mai-mai. So I joined this group. I remained in it until I realized that we had lost a lot of ground whereas the “Abacengezi” were re-arming to attack Rwanda. I then thought that we had better chances of winning with them, so I joined the ‘Abacengezi’. ”

–Augustin, former child soldier, Rwanda, Kigali, December 2002.

### 3.3 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VULNERABILITY

Where forced recruitment or abduction is concerned, these factors do not play a role since all children are equally vulnerable. However, it is important to understand why, in a given context, certain children ask to be integrated into an armed group. We list below situations that are likely to encourage the enrolment of minors:

- **Basic material needs not fulfilled**

Because children are in search of a solution to improve their living conditions and they believe that they will be fed and housed, and even paid, if they join an armed group.

- **Out-of-school prematurely** (due to poor performance or high cost) and the idleness that follows

- Because a child left to him/herself will mix with older persons who are likely to influence him/her;
- Because, as is the case in **Burundi**, certain recruitment policies specifically target out-of-school children.

- **Low level of education**

Because armed groups are seen as the only career opportunity for those who are not qualified.

- **Premature entry into the labour market**

Because the child thinks that it will be easier to earn his/her living by being enrolled.

- **Inexistent or conflictual family relations**

- Because the child is looking for all possible ways of escaping a situation in which he/she is alienated;
- Because there is no opposition from the family when he/she expresses the desire to enrol.

- **Mixing with members of armed groups**

Because young members of armed groups give the illusion of power.

- **Proximity of the conflict zone**

Because the child will have personally witnessed atrocities and wishes to get involved in the conflict to protect or avenge his/her relatives.

- **Previous experience of an armed group**

Because, when confronted with the difficulties of reintegration, the child is tempted to return to a situation that he/she is familiar with and where he/she will be accepted.

### 3.4 THE ARRIVAL IN THE ARMED GROUP

The child's arrival in the armed group is marked by a series of events of which the order and the importance vary according to the group in question:

- Handing over of equipment
- Military training
- Ideological instruction or indoctrination
- Vexations or initiation
- Invulnerability rites

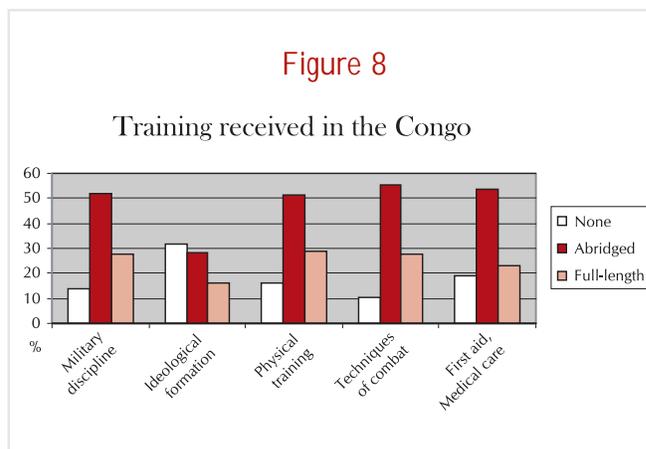
For children who join the armed group after having fled the combat zone, the arrival in the group can be a relief.

**"My family had just been massacred. I joined the armed group to be saved. As soon as I arrived I felt alive again. They were my new family."**

–Joseph, former child soldier, Rwanda, Rubirizi, December 2002.

For others, their testimonies show how terrifying their arrival in the armed group was, irrespective of whether they were enrolled by force or voluntarily. The training period can last from a few days to a few months depending on the group. It is accompanied by hard, physical exercises, the purpose of which is to increase the endurance of the children.

In the **Congo**, 34 released children were asked about the training they had received on arrival in the group. Their replies are represented in Figure 8.



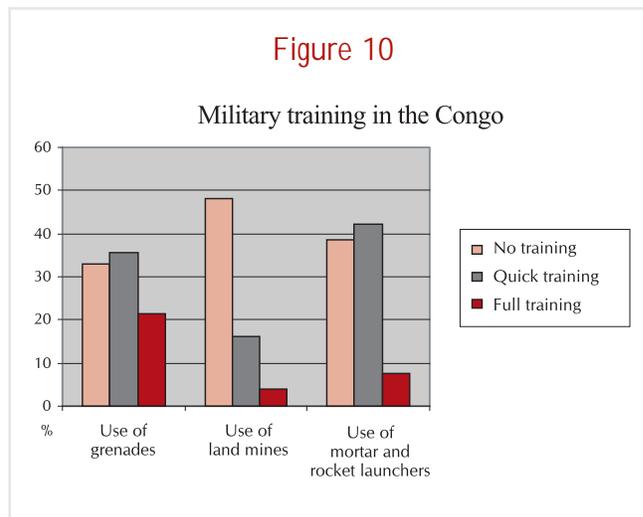
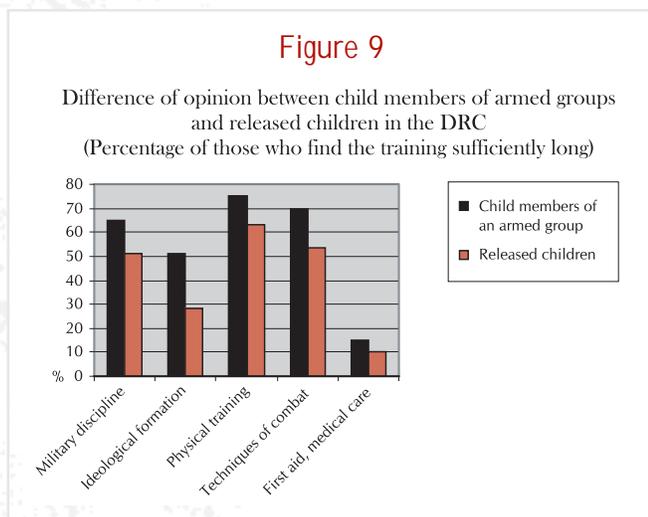
The majority of the children interviewed think that the training received in all aspects was too short. While almost all the children recruited participate directly in combat, only one out of four thinks that the training received was sufficiently long. This lack of training makes the children even more vulnerable.

This was confirmed by a military officer in Burundi:

**"Children are not sufficiently trained and we lose many of them in combat."**

–Cassien, military officer, Burundi, May 2002.

Figure 9 illustrates the difference between what children who are still members of armed groups claim and what those who have left say. More of the children who are still members of armed groups in the **DRC** (between 10 per cent and 20 per cent) say that the training they received was full-length compared to those who are no longer child soldiers. This reveals the mind-set of child soldiers: they wish to assume responsibility for a situation that they claim to have chosen freely. Former child soldiers admit that their recruitment was under pressure and they are more critical of the training they received.



### 3.4.1 Handing over of equipment

A majority of child soldiers are sent to the front line and participate in combat but very few of them are equipped and hence protected. In the **Congo** for example, less than 15 per cent of the children interviewed had received a pair of military shoes. This means that the remaining 85 per cent undertake long marches and engage in combat wearing the shoes with which they arrived in the camp, if they had any at all! In the **DRC**, the young recruits receive their uniform, a gun and a cartridge of ammunition at the end of the training period as a sign of becoming a full-fledged member of the group.

### 3.4.2 Military training

The training is sometimes held in a foreign country and this perturbs the child recruits even more. Many of the youths interviewed in Goma (**DRC**) had been taken to Angola for 9 to 11 months of training. Physical training is always given to increase the endurance of the children. Long marches are organized, and, in certain armed groups in the DRC, new recruits are deprived of food for two to four days during training to learn to tolerate hunger.

In the **Congo**, military training includes learning how to use different types of arms.

In the rebel groups in **Burundi**, young recruits attend sessions during which the code of conduct and the internal rules of the group are explained. It is during these sessions that they are informed about the sanctions imposed on those who violate the rules of the group.

There is a rite that marks the end of the training and their acceptance as full-fledged members of the group.

In DRC, on the last day of training, recruits receive a certificate formalizing their entry into the group, their uniforms, a weapon and a cartridge of ammunition.

### 3.4.3 Ideological instruction

*"Immediately after recruitment, the indoctrination sessions started and they were regular. They made us all the more determined to go on to the end."*

–Philippe, 15 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

Indoctrination sessions seem to be frequent in rebel groups. They are generally based on considerations of ethnic and regional origin and are about the injustices of which the group has been a victim. The aim is to convince the youths of the legitimacy of the actions of the group and of the need to wipe out the opposing faction. The ideological discourse is meant not only to fan the hatred of the enemy but also to reinforce the obedience of the children. In **Burundi**, groups of '*gardiens de la paix*' have to take an oath at the end of their practical and ideological training. One of the commanders of an armed group quoted the text of the oath:

*"I swear before the commanders of the army and the circle of wise men that I will do all the tasks entrusted to me, according to the rule."*

–Justin, head of a team of 450 '*gardiens de la paix*', Burundi, Kayanza, May 2002.

Part of the indoctrination of the children aims to undermine the value of human life so that they lose all their scruples about killing.

*“During the training we were taught to disregard the value of human life and to respect only our commander. For us, killing someone did not mean anything.”*

–Group discussion, child members of an armed group, DRC, Equateur, April 2002.

### 3.4.4 Vexations or initiation rites

There are many testimonies of the atrocities committed on children on arrival. These are either suffered by them or committed by them under threat from the recruiters. In both cases, the aim is to make the child lose all normal values of civilian life.

A representative of an armed group testifies to this:

*“They are brutalized on purpose so that they become aggressive and ruthless before the enemy.”*

–Jacques, representative of an armed group, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

This terrible avowal on the part of an adult illustrates the purpose of using violence against child soldiers. The methods used are described by the children.

*“During our training we received harsh treatment at the hands of our trainers. The smallest mistake was punished by inhuman torture. To add to this, there was malnourishment and the general insanitary conditions of the camp.”*

–Group discussion with former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, June 2002.

The first rite, common to all the groups, is shaving the head.

*“The day I arrived in the camp, I was shaved like all the other boys who had been recruited. The instructors told us to go to sleep and after ten minutes*

*they woke us up and asked what we had dreamed of. I said that I had dreamed that I was playing ball in the street. I was beaten. A friend replied that he dreamed he was fighting in the war. He was not beaten. They could ask us to invent a story and if the story did not fit in with the army, they would ask a soldier or another child to beat us.”*

–Bombeto, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

Some groups choose to expose children to the heat of combat as early as possible.

*“The day after our training was over, we were sent to fight. It was a real descent into hell.”*

–Philippe, 15 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

The violence can also be symbolic. In **Burundi**, in one of the rebel groups, children must hand over their identity cards to the “elders” on arrival. These are then burnt before them. This highly symbolic gesture represents the loss of one’s individuality, of one’s citizenship, of one’s past. Once the child’s identity is lost, he/she becomes the property of the armed group in which he/she is “reborn”. In many cases, the children are subjected to unwarranted violence that combines the moral conditioning with physical brutality.

### 3.4.5 Rites that confer invulnerability

These rites are meant to make children even more daring by making them believe that they are magically protected from the risks of combat. Three testimonies from the **DRC** describe in some detail the rites young recruits go through day after day, which succeed in convincing them of their invulnerability.

*“At the end of two weeks, we really felt invincible, invulnerable and even immortal.”*

–Group discussion with former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, June 2002.

Some of these rites are inoffensive like going around a fire, sharing a special drink with other members of the

group, listening to a voice behind a bush, etc. Others can be painful or even dangerous like tattooing the body with hot irons.

**“ Every day at midnight all the recruits would stand around a big fire in groups of 50. We wore palm leaves as our initiation dress. The master of ceremonies said words that the group had to repeat after him. ”**

–Group discussion with former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, June 2002.

Prayer and invocation ceremonies are organized to make children believe that they will be protected.

**“ I stayed there for two months, conditioned by prayer ceremonies. I changed a lot during that period. When we were attacked I was no longer afraid of gunshots. We were extremely lucky because no one was killed in our group. We were told that we were invincible and protected by mystic powers. Well, I was not afraid anymore. I must add that they used to put drugs in our food. ”**

–Philippe, 15 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

In this as well as other testimonies, one sees how rites and drugs are combined to make the children lose all sense of reality. Some of these rites are repeated during the whole period spent in the armed group, especially before engaging in combat.

### 3.5 LIFE IN THE ARMED GROUP

#### 3.5.1 Living conditions

In just a few words, an officer emphasizes the harsh living conditions that child soldiers have to put up with.

**“ In general, the life of a Congolese soldier is already hard. That of a child soldier is worse. ”**

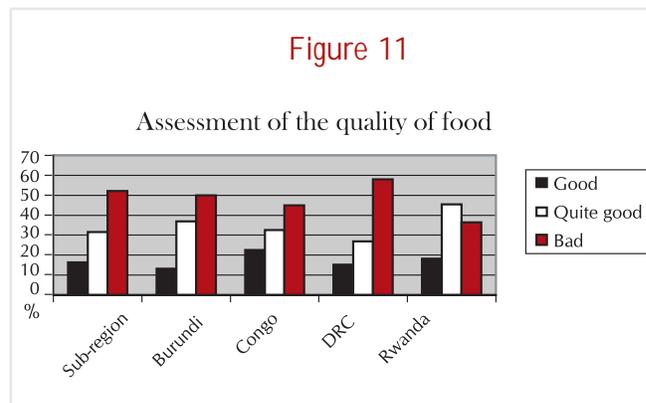
–Cassien, army officer, DRC.

More than half the children interviewed rate the quality of both the food and lodging as bad. Concerning the food, these statistics take on even more meaning when

they are seen in the light of the testimonies in which children say that they were obliged to either loot or beg to get food.

**“ The food was bad and the meals irregular; we ate once in three days. When we stole cattle, the adults got the best pieces while the children had to be content with the bones. ”**

–Patrice, young ‘gardien de la paix’, former member of the rebellion, Burundi, May 2002.



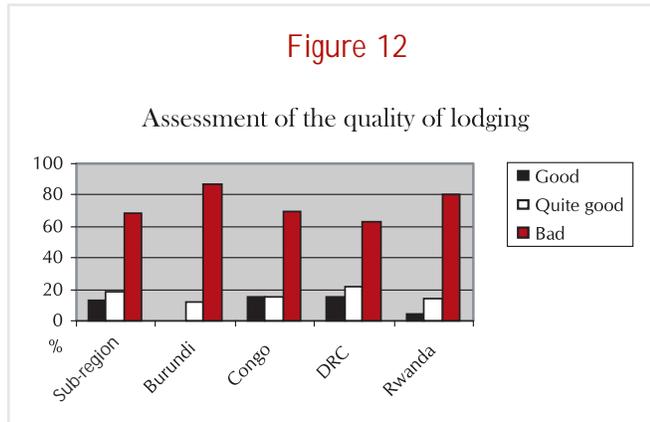
When asked about lodging, the children talk mainly about their sleeping conditions. Testimonies mention a chronic lack of sleep mainly because they were often on the move at night. This is particularly true of **Burundi**, where 88 per cent of respondents rate the lodging as bad. When on the move, children have to sleep in the open or in abandoned houses and get very little rest.

**“ We did not sleep enough. The bedding was no good and we often slept on mats spread on the ground. We went to bed at 11.30 p.m. and were woken up at 3 in the morning. ”**

–Théodule, 16 years, member of an armed group, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

In most of the armed groups, about 80 per cent of the youth say that their living conditions were similar to those of adults. This does not contradict what the officer from the **DRC** quoted above says because, even if the conditions were objectively similar, children’s needs of sleep and food are greater. Hence, they feel the deprivation of them more than adults do. Besides, for over 60 per cent of them, the living conditions were worse than what they had before enrolment. Since more than one-third of those who enrolled voluntarily did so

in the hope of improving their life style, one can imagine how disappointed and disillusioned they were to find that, in the armed group, their basic needs were far from being fulfilled.



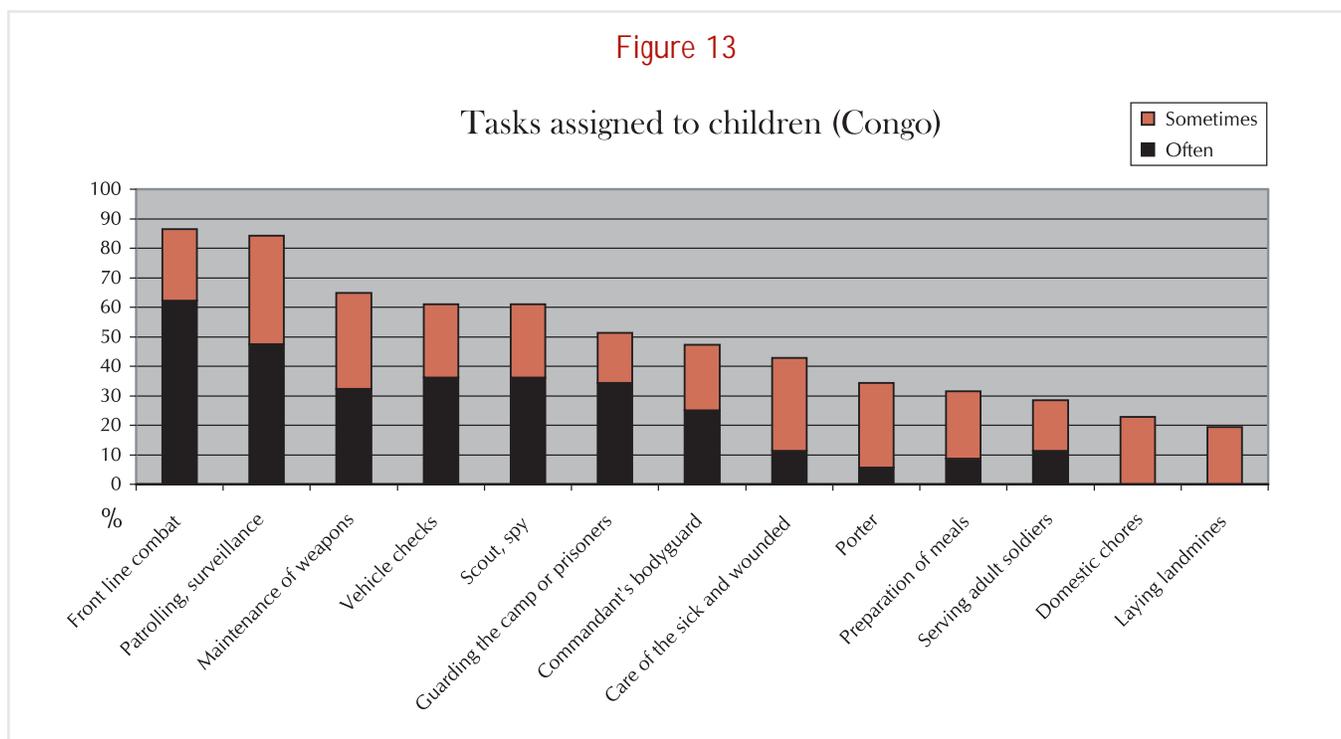
### 3.5.2 Tasks assigned to children

Children in the armed groups undertake the same tasks as the adults. During combat, they are sent to the front. There, given the poor training and equipment that they usually receive, they are exposed to all the dangers. Figure 13, based on information received from former members of armed groups in the **Congo**, shows the variety of tasks assigned to them. This information was corroborated by testimonies received from **Burundi** and the **DRC**.

Children enrolled in armed groups are really combatants. Engaging in combat is one of the most common tasks since 87 per cent of youth declare that they were often or sometimes sent to the front. Being a bodyguard is also dangerous and one knows the mortal danger that the 20 per cent of children who were made to lay landmines were exposed to.

Testimonies from **Burundi**, also show the danger to which children are exposed. While preparing an attack, the children act as lookouts for the enemy and signal their position. Once the enemy is located, some children are sent to the front to hold them back while others help to break camp. During combat, porters of ammunition are placed among the troops to provide fresh supplies to the soldiers. They find themselves in the front or the rear. Besides doing this, they also have to serve as spies and to transport the wounded and the dead. They are the ones who chant war cries to frighten the enemy. After the attack, they are sometimes ordered to kill those taken prisoner or to escort them to the capital of the province.

The '*gardiens de la paix*' work mostly at night; they are on guard duty and must counter possible attacks from rebel groups. For most of these youths, this work is done after a day of labour in the fields with their families.



In the **DRC** as well, testimonies reveal that during combat child soldiers had to do the same tasks as adults: launch rockets and grenades or fire machine-guns.

Child soldiers are continuously terrified and often think of death.

*" No pleasant moments: in the camp we were expecting to be attacked at any time and when we were on the front line we did not know if we would return. "*

–Gérard, former child soldier, Burundi, May 2002.

*" During combat, I used to say to myself that I was a tree. That way I was less afraid of dying. "*

–Michel, former child soldier, Rwanda, Kigali, December 2002.

*" In Kindu, the commander took us to show us the positions of the rebels. We were 10 scouts, all children. He placed us right up front. The rebels spotted us and launched rockets. Four of my friends died right beside me. "*

–Samuel, 17 years, member of an armed group, Bandudu, DRC, April 2002.

Reports from the **DRC**, reveal that another task specifically reserved for children is to guard the fetishes. Children as young as six were abducted for this. Too young to have had sexual relations these children were considered to be pure enough for this ritual role.

### 3.5.3 Punishments

Throughout their stay with the armed group, children are constantly punished. Corporal punishment or privations are often used to punish a child for disobeying an order but can also be inflicted without any reason.

*" We were often whipped for having made a small mistake or for clumsiness. "*

–Bombeto, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002

Children describe humiliating forms of punishment such as having to sit in a hole filled with garbage for 24 hours or having to roll in mud and then not being allowed to change their soiled clothes for several days.

In **Burundi**, children say that punishment such as beatings, burns, military exercises, being bound hand and foot, being tied to a tree and swung, etc. were frequent. In case of grave faults, they would bind the child's hands and legs and throw him/her into a river.

In all four countries, child soldiers say they were deprived of food, beaten and imprisoned as punishment. Punishment is generally inflicted by adult soldiers. In certain armed groups, however, children are forced to punish themselves or to inflict punishment on a fellow child soldier thus causing mental anguish in addition to the physical pain.

*" One day I was "disciplined", that is beaten because I refused to beat a friend who was punished. So the instructor ordered my friend to "discipline" me. He had to give me fifty hard whip lashes on my bottom. I held a grudge against my "torturer" for two weeks after that. Then I forgot about it. "*

–Lucien, 16 years, former child soldier, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

*" If two children started fighting among themselves, the punishment was to go on fighting until one of them could no longer get back on his feet. "*

–Katembo, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

### 3.5.4 Rites, fetishes and other myths of invulnerability

The rites conferring invulnerability, practised during the period of training, continue afterwards especially while preparing for combat. They are meant to persuade children that they are invulnerable and can risk everything during combat.

*" We used to wear amulets to be invincible "*

–Marc, 17 years, former child soldier, Dolisie, May 2002.

*" I was afraid of nothing and I felt I was invincible thanks to the grigri that I wore. Even when others were wounded, I always returned to the camp unhurt. "*

–Arsène, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Dolisie, May 2002.

“Early in the morning (before combat) the military chaplain would say prayers and bless the troops in order to protect them.”

–Flavien, child member of an armed group, Burundi, May 2002.

These rites prolong the effects of the initiation.

“In order not to break the pact that was concluded during initiation, we (Mai-mai) had to respect certain rules during combat: not to steal, not to touch women, not to have coins in our pockets, not to eat meat unless it was grilled, never to eat pumpkin, never to run away from the enemy or turn our backs to it, shout with triumph every time we won a battle, etc.”

–Group discussion with former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, June 2002.

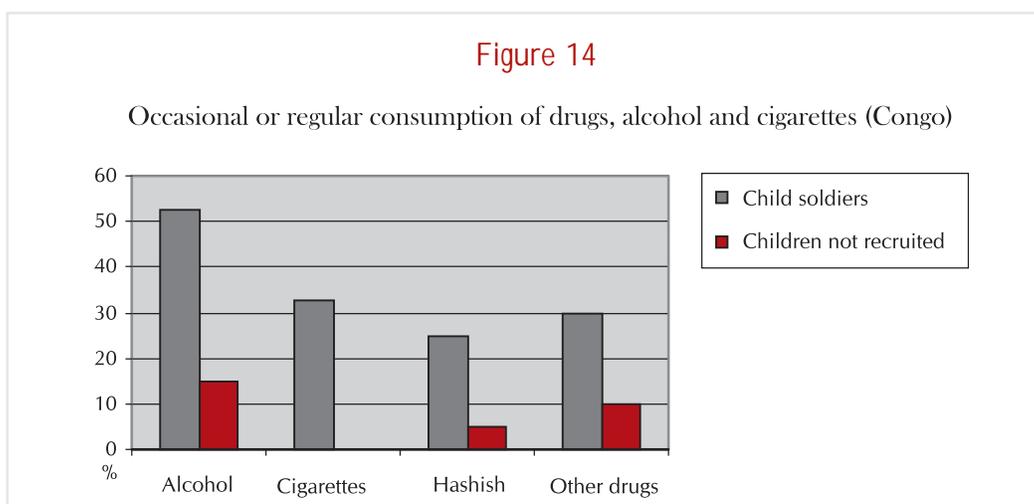
It is interesting to note how the instructors manipulate the children by casually mixing commands for combat such as “do not flee before the enemy” with simple fetishist do’s and don’ts such as “do not keep coins in your pockets”. The beliefs propagated by the instructors are effective for, in case of defeat if one of them is wounded, the children blame themselves for not having respected the rites of protection.

### 3.5.5 Drug and alcohol consumption

The adults in the group provide drugs and alcohol to the children to keep a hold on them and to make them less aware of danger. Besides cigarettes, they are also given cannabis and other drugs made of a mixture of coffee, gunpowder, herbs and papaya leaves.



The contrast between child soldiers and those who have never been recruited as far as the consumption of narcotic substances is concerned is striking. Many more child soldiers are in the habit of drinking, smoking and taking drugs regularly or occasionally than children who have never been recruited, as illustrated by the information from the Congo (Figure 14).

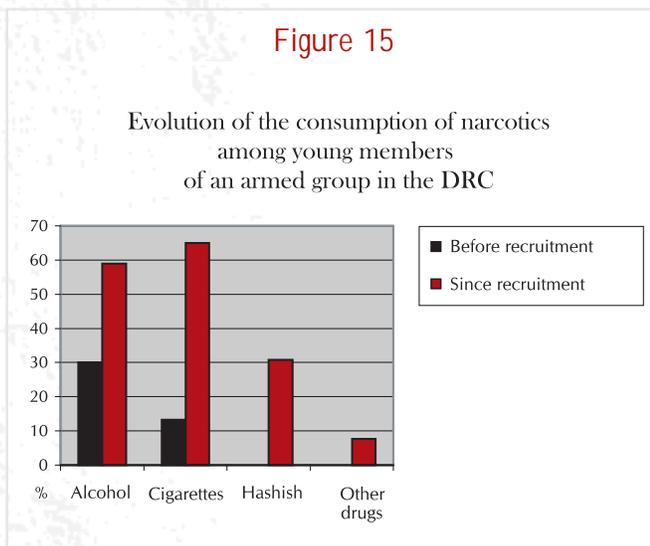


Child soldiers are aware that drugs make them lose their will-power and their principles of what is right and wrong.

**“ Under the effect of drugs, I once raped one or two women and I regret it. ”**

–Marc, 17 years, former child soldier,  
Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

Another illustration of major changes in behaviour brought about by living with an armed group (Figure 15) is the sharp increase in the consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and other narcotic substances among the young recruits.



### 3.5.6 Diseases and wounds

Given the lack of training, inadequate equipment and poor nutrition that child soldiers receive, it is to be expected that a number of them are wounded or sick during their involvement with an armed group. In all four countries, about 40 per cent of child soldiers were wounded in combat and more than 50 per cent were ill. Only half of them received any treatment and when they did it was very basic—42.5 per cent of the children interviewed in the **DRC** rated the medical treatment received as bad. Several testimonies reveal that during combat, the seriously wounded were killed if they could not be transported, so as to avoid them giving information to the enemy.

**“ Those who were seriously wounded that we could not evacuate were finished off to avoid them being arrested and interrogated by the enemy. ”**

–Patrice, young ‘*gardien de la paix*’, former member of the rebellion, Burundi, May 2002.

**“ I participated in several combats. The last time, my friend was badly wounded. I wanted to help him but an officer prevented me from doing so. Since I insisted, he shot me in the thigh. As for my friend, he died. ”**

–Lucien, 17 years, former child soldier,  
Congo, Bacongo, April 2002.

A shocking incident was the epidemic of cholera in the **DRC**. A former instructor from the camp of Kalapata reports that a few hundred child soldiers living in the camp died, largely due to the very poor sanitation on the camp.

A former member of the rebellion in **Burundi**, said that the nurses took care of the adults better than of the children. On the other hand, it was also in Burundi that the young ‘*gardiens de la paix*’, faced with the indifference of the adults, took the initiative of creating a solidarity fund to help each other in case of difficulty.

### 3.5.7 The behaviour of the adults

Here, more than in the responses to other questions, one must take into account the taboos and the law of silence that surrounds the life of children in armed groups. More than 70 per cent of the children interviewed in the **DRC** said they were reluctant to speak about life in the armed group. The following testimony illustrates this:

**“ There are many things that we decided not to tell you and others that we will never say ”**

–Bernard, child member of an armed group,  
DRC, Goma, May 2002.

And a few minutes later, the same child tells of cases of sodomy, prostitution and rape.

From what the children describe, adults in the armed groups commit all sorts of crimes in their presence: pillage, theft, rape, torture and assassinations. Every second child said that soldiers of their group raped women. In the **Congo**, four out of five children interviewed said that soldiers of their unit tortured and killed civilians. The trauma of the crimes they have witnessed leaves its trace in the anxiety they live with and the nightmares they continue to have after they are released.

Sometimes the children are themselves victims of such acts. Among the children interviewed in the **Congo**, 30 per cent said that the adults robbed them of their money

or other belongings. And, then there is this testimony of a youth from the **DRC**:

*“Adult soldiers could rape the little boys. For instance, a soldier could order you to follow him into the bush to fetch wood. There he would rape you and tell you that if you denounced him, he would kill you.”*

–Katembo, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

### 3.5.8 Contacts with the family

Permission for child soldiers to visit their families varied from group to group and from one period to another. In general, group leaders only allowed those children to go home on visits who seemed motivated enough to return to the camp afterwards. In **Burundi**, for instance, only those who volunteered got permission to go home. Those enrolled by force were never allowed to do so. The *'gardiens de la paix'* were a special case because they continued to live in their homes.

Similarly, in the **DRC**, no permission was given during the training period. The instructors probably thought that the risk of the young recruits taking advantage of home visits to leave the army was too great. However, once they became full-fledged soldiers, some of them visited their parents regularly.

For others, the feasibility of home visits depended on the cost, the distance and the security in the region that he/she had to travel through.

### 3.5.9 Payment of salary and giving of rewards

Many of those who enrolled voluntarily did so in the hope of receiving a regular salary. However, this was the case for very few children, about 10 per cent only, depending on the country. In **Burundi**, 94 per cent and in the **DRC**, 85 per cent never received any remuneration. In the **DRC**, where they were promised US\$100 for enrolling, payment depended on the group concerned: in Eastern DRC 90 per cent of the young recruits never received any money whereas in the west, 70 per cent received payment at least sometimes. However, the testimonies show that this payment was very irregular and many youths remained in the army waiting for the promised sum.

Children who receive no remuneration have to find ways of getting the money they need. They resort to trading, selling of objects looted, small jobs, imposing

a war tax on the population, etc. These sorts of activities were carried out by 67 per cent of the children in the **Congo**, 40 per cent in **Burundi** and 30 per cent in the **DRC**.

Very, very few children received any kind of reward in recognition of their work. The only instances of this that were reported were speeches of congratulations or being given a new gun. Although rewards were few, they were very important to the youths and kept them ambivalent about the armed group.

*“We were about 200 in the group all together of which 50 of us were children. I was the only one (among the children) to go to the front. I wasn't afraid and that's why my commander made me his bodyguard. One day there were violent combats and I stayed on until the end. As a reward for my courage, my commander gave me a new gun.”*

–Noël, 14 years, former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

*“After four days of fighting many soldiers of our platoon had been killed or taken prisoner. Only ten of us had escaped death. The able carried the wounded to Imese where they were treated. When we arrived at the camp, the chiefs welcomed us. Since I was the one who recounted the battle, I received congratulations and encouragement. I was popular with the chiefs and that's why I was made the bodyguard of the commander. That's how I was put in charge of executions because I was no longer afraid.”*

–Mondo, child member of an armed group, DRC, Isiro, April 2002.

### 3.5.10 The atmosphere in the armed group

This is one of the paradoxes of this study: despite the terrible living conditions, despite the horrors to which the children were subjected or which they witnessed, despite the danger of death being omnipresent, the majority of the children interviewed considered the atmosphere in the group good or even very good. Their relations with adults as well as those with other children were considered good. There are however, some

nuances in their judgement, depending on the group to which they belonged. How can one explain this? Part of the explanation lies in the context that the child left behind when he/she joined the group: bad relations in the family, poverty, idleness, fear and permanent insecurity. By joining the armed group, the children feel that they have found a new family. The rites they have gone through together, the danger confronted side by side, the praise received from the chief (playing the role of the father) and the elders (big brothers) all contribute to making the child feel part of a community. This is what a number of testimonies indicate.

However, even though children say that the relations with the adults and with the other children were good, it does not mean that they liked being there. They differentiate between times of combat and when it was calm.

**" In the armed group I got to know many people and I made some friends. "**

–Jean, 17 years, former child soldier,  
Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

**" The atmosphere was bad on days when we had to fight because we were afraid of being wounded or killed. We were very brave but were still afraid. And for me, the days when we didn't have to engage in combat, it was good. I was like a bourgeois in peace. "**

–Luc, 17 years, former child soldier,  
Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

## 3.6 DEPARTURE FROM THE ARMED GROUP

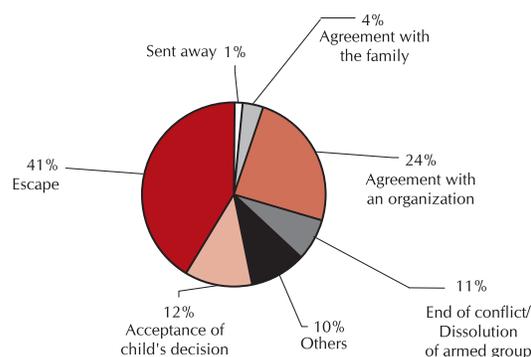
### 3.6.1 Modes of departure

More than 50 per cent of former child soldiers had left the group on their own initiative. The large majority of them had to escape, consciously taking enormous risks. The others were able to negotiate their departure with their chiefs (Figure 16). In the **DRC** and in **Rwanda**, about one-third of the children said they were released thanks to the intervention of third parties—parents, relatives or various organizations. In Kinshasa, where organizations are working to demobilize children, this

percentage goes up to 61 per cent. In both cases, it concerns demobilization from the regular national army that is encouraged by the government.

Figure 16

Modes of departure from armed groups in the four countries



In **Rwanda**, the youths who were members of the FPR were demobilized from 1995 onwards by a decision of the government or on request from parents. However, child soldiers from rebel groups could get away only by escaping or being captured when the group to which they belonged was defeated.

In **Burundi**, children who have left rebel groups testify that failed attempts to escape are punished with death. Those who escaped took advantage of moves, confrontations or pillaging by their group to distance themselves from the others and disappear. They say that most of the children would like to leave the armed group but stay on because they do not know the way home or because they are afraid of being attacked on the way back. In the case of the *'gardiens de la paix'* they are afraid of being suspected of complicity with the rebels if they leave the group.

**" Leaving the group is difficult to envisage. Some youths who are fed up run away to the capital in search of a job. "**

–Fidèle, head of the young *'gardiens de la paix'*, Burundi, May 2002.

In the **DRC**, most of the children interviewed expressed a desire to leave the army but the officers only let go of children who are sick, wounded or incompetent.

"I want to leave the army. I have already been wounded four times. They don't have any pity. We hardly recover and we are sent to the front line again. We don't get proper treatment. The last time I was wounded, my chiefs refused to grant me the period of rest that the doctor prescribed. The only way out at present is desertion, but the risk of being chased, caught and severely punished is very great. They are the masters here. And then, escape to go where?"

–Butembo, child member of an armed group, DRC, Kasai Oriental, June 2002.

### 3.6.2 Reasons for wanting to leave

The impression of having been cheated by the armed group is often at the root of the desire to leave. This deception is often due to material reasons—poor living conditions, non-payment of promised salary, etc.

"I did not get any salary although the armed group had promised to give each of us, daily, the equivalent of the price of a beer and a skewer of meat plus 120 FBU (12 US cents). We demanded our money every day but the chiefs of the armed group always tried to calm the combatants by saying that soon it would all be paid. We were frustrated and dissatisfied because the conflict benefited the chiefs at the expense of the combatants. This made me quit the armed group."

–Modeste, former child soldier, Burundi, May 2002.

For those children who enrolled in the hope of a permanent job, the deception is even greater. They realize that the conditions are far from what they were promised and decide to put an end to their "career" in the armed group.

"Oh! It's difficult. What suffering! When I joined the armed group I thought I had found a job. I fought but got nothing in return."

–Joseph, former child soldier, Congo, Owando, June 2002.

For others, the deception is linked to a feeling of shame that makes them want to leave.

"When we were not on patrol, it was difficult to find anything to eat. We had to beg for money and food from the civilians to the extent of making ourselves look ridiculous. Because of this impossible situation, I decided to escape."

–Laurent, former child soldier, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

Sometimes a child suddenly realizes the acute danger of staying in the armed group and decides to quit.

"When we had finished our training, a fellow soldier dared to demand the 100\$ that they had promised us. The chiefs decided that he should be killed for this. They didn't do it themselves; they ordered another soldier, his friend, to kill him. This made me afraid. I thought to myself that I too might be killed for no reason. The following week, I seized the opportunity of a long march and didn't come back to the camp."

–Kajolni, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

Lastly, after having seen one of their group wounded or killed, they realize that the talk of the power of the fetishes and their invulnerability is a pack of lies and they decide to leave, despite the risk of getting caught.

The testimony of a youth who is still enrolled indicates how one can be torn between escaping or staying on:

"I would like to escape or run away but I'm afraid of being arrested. I have killed too much and I don't know how to repent for it. I have mistreated and abused the population so much that I wonder how they will accept my return." Then a few minutes later he says: "Actually, it's because I raped someone that I was beaten by the inhabitants until I lost consciousness. They delivered me to the armed group. Since then my life has been one long suffering."

–Flavien, child member of an armed group, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

The regular army of the **DRC**, is an exception...children do not want to leave it until they have received the money that was promised to them when they were recruited.

### 3.6.3 After leaving the armed group

Whether they leave voluntarily or not, the children are generally young when they leave and find themselves destitute, afraid and distraught.

#### 3.6.3.1 The age when leaving the armed group

Since children are recruited very young (See Section 3.2.5) many of them are still minors when they leave the armed group.

Table 14 shows the ages at which children leave armed groups in **Burundi**, the **DRC** and the **Congo**.

Table 14

AGE WHEN LEAVING THE ARMED GROUP	
11-14 years	30%
15-18 years	63%
More than 18 years	7%

Prospects of reintegration vary according to the age. Nearly a third of the children are less than 15 years old and require special attention: they were recruited when they were very young, have had very little schooling, have served in an army even before adolescence and are therefore likely to be physically and morally impaired. Besides, they are still at an age when schooling is compulsory.

For those who are between 15 and 18 when released, almost two-thirds of the sample interviewed wish to have vocational training rather than return to school. This is mainly because of the discrepancy with other children of their age.

As for those who are more than 18, they express the needs of young adults and have to be treated as such.

#### 3.6.3.2 The matrimonial situation

Between 10 and 20 per cent of the former child soldiers interviewed are now married or living with a partner. A similar proportion of them say they are parents.

Whether the couples were formed while they were in the armed group or afterwards, reintegration programmes must take their current situation into account.

#### 3.6.3.3 Material destitution

The large majority of youths leave the armed groups with little or no resources. Only one-third of them had a little money or food with them when they left. One can imagine the plight of these youths, running away, not knowing exactly where they are nor which way to go, afraid of being caught by the members of their group or falling into the hands of the enemy and being badly in need of food. Sometimes they have absolutely nothing with them.

*"I took advantage of a march to avoid returning to the camp. I removed my army uniform and buried it. I was barefoot and all I had was the underwear and shirt I was wearing under my uniform."*

–Kajolni, former child soldier, DRC, Lubumbashi, April 2002.

#### 3.6.3.4 Fear

In all the testimonies of youths who have quit an armed group, fear is omnipresent. They are afraid of being caught, afraid of being accused of complicity with the enemy, afraid of being ill-treated or even killed when they return to the village.

In **Burundi**, before deciding to escape, the youths start by "sounding" the mentality in the neighbourhood to ensure that they will not be ill-treated when they return. This fear is justified.

*"When the boy arrived at his house, the father delivered him to the army. Since then, he hasn't been seen again."*

–Modeste, parent of a released child, Burundi, May 2002.

The parents of children who return are afraid of being accused by other families and try to protect themselves by taking the child to report to the administrative authority. This "formalizing" of the child's return is generally reassuring for the child and helps him/her to be accepted by the community.

In the **DRC**, children who have committed crimes during their stay with the armed groups are afraid of being arrested and judged by the military authorities.

Besides, those who have escaped are afraid of being punished as deserters. These fears explain why youths are reluctant to register with organizations that offer services for ex-combatants.

### 3.6.3.5 The difficulty of finding a place to live

In their state of destitution, physically weak and haunted by the fear of being caught, children have to find a place to live, or a temporary refuge.

In **Burundi**, as mentioned earlier, the children take precautions before returning home to make sure they will be well received. They go first to other members of the family or present themselves to a communal administration on the way back as repatriates and ask for help to return to their places of origin. In the **Congo**, there are only a little more than half that return to the place where they lived before their recruitment and a quarter who find refuge with family members outside their place of origin. The others are taken in by an organization or find themselves in the street.

In some cases, parents of very young children who have been released take back the child but choose to hide his/her situation from their neighbours. This attitude is not in the child's interest as it prevents him/her from benefiting from any of the rehabilitation programmes.

Those who don't return to their families are condemned to live in the street unless an organization comes to their help.

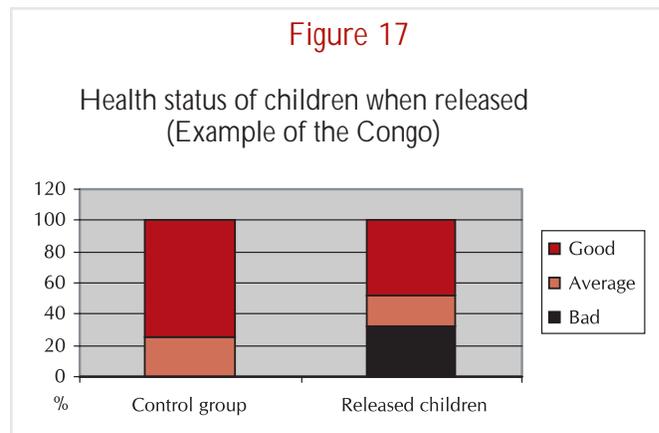
*" If my father and mother were still alive, I would have returned home. Now that I have no family I have no choice but to wander about. Many of my brothers died during the war. "*

–Joël, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

The situation in the **DRC** is different because more than half the children enrolled in Kinshasa have been taken out of the army by a governmental or non-governmental organization that takes charge of them after their release.

### 3.6.4 The health status of children released

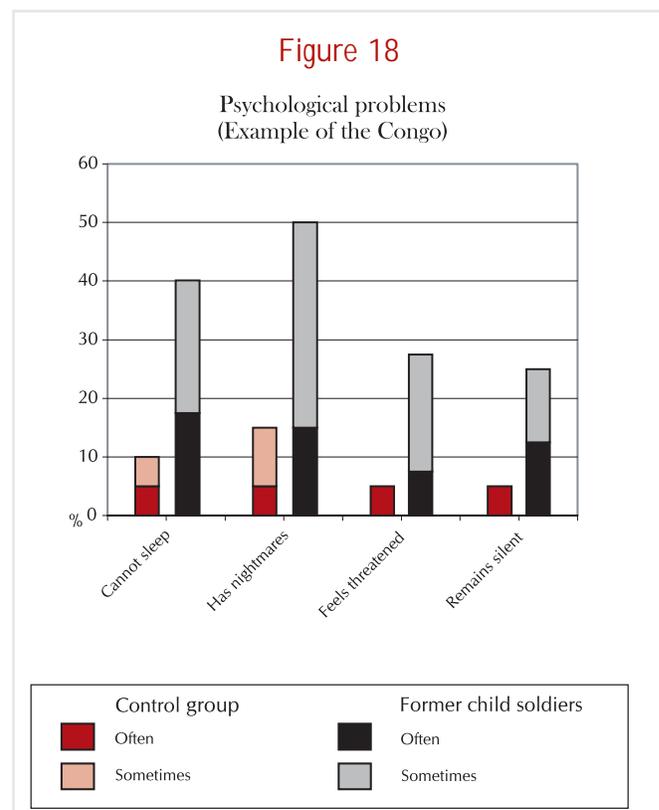
As expected, former child soldiers suffer from both physical and psychological ill health. A simple comparison with the control group of children who were never recruited brings to light the difference (Figure 17).



Not one of the children in the control group rates his/her health as bad, whereas this is the case for 22 per cent of the children released.

The survey did not include questions about the type of diseases the children suffer from, but it is probable that a significant proportion of them are HIV-positive. They could have been contaminated by the sexual relations they were submitted to by the adults in the group, or by the prostitutes with whom they had contacts through the group, or again by the practice of scarification with a razor blade.

Responses to questions related to the psychological state of the youths also reveal significant differences (Figure 18).



*"During the battle, I killed someone who was going to shoot at me. At the time I didn't feel any remorse, but since the end of the war, I relive the scene all the time and I have nightmares about it."*

–Lucien, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Bacongo, April 2002.

*"I was returning from a visit when I was captured and enrolled by force along with others. Our first contact with the group was horrible. Before taking us away with them, they started by killing two persons of our group of civilians who were accused of belonging to the enemy camp. I was witness to other executions and to torture. It upsets me a lot and makes me very anxious. These scenes come back to me again and again. It's difficult for me to sleep because I keep hearing the cries of those who were killed."*

–Salomon, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

The psychological problems of former child soldiers are characterized by the acute anxiety that causes insomnia and frequent nightmares. It also makes it difficult for them to relate to others, because the other person is seen as a threat. They therefore have a tendency to withdraw and isolate themselves.

One can observe the extent of the disastrous effects of life in the armed group on the physical and mental health of former child soldiers. But beyond the observable behaviour, is all that remains unsaid, all the suffering that is repressed.

*"When I ask my child to tell me about his life in the Kabira, he bursts into tears and cannot say a thing."*

–François, 38 years, father of a former child soldier, Kayanza, Burundi, May 2002.

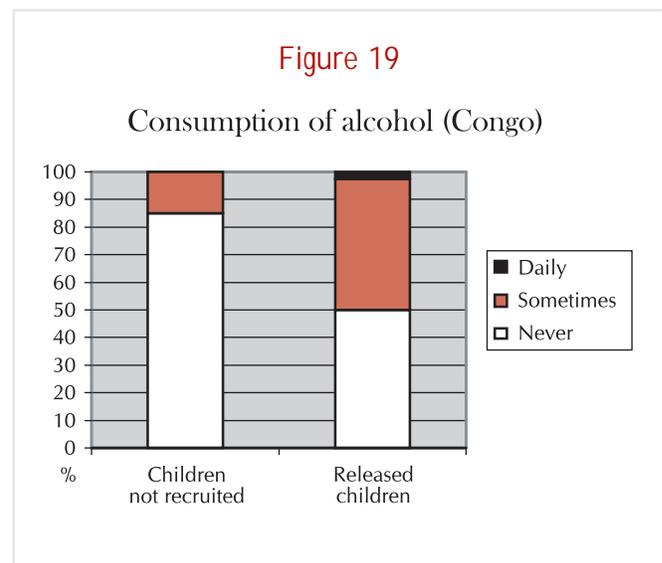
Another parent of a former child soldier talks about the mutism of his child since his return from the armed group.

*"Before his recruitment, he was full of fun, he joked a lot. But since his return, he's not the same. He has*

*become very passive, almost never talks. He just keeps silent."*

–Félicien, parent of a former child soldier, Rwanda, Rubirizi, December 2002.

Young persons tend to keep the habits acquired during their stay with the armed group, particularly as far as the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and drugs is concerned. They consume less than when they were in the armed group but much more than children who were never recruited, as Figure 19 depicting the example from the **Congo** shows.



In this respect, the information from **Rwanda** is of interest. Former child soldiers from there say that they do not consume alcohol or drugs. They also seem to have less psychological problems than those from other countries. The consumption of narcotics was strictly prohibited in the ranks of the FPR and the children in the rebel groups did not have the means to procure them. They did not consume any of these substances during their stay in the armed group and this is reflected in their behaviour years after their release. As far as the psychological difficulties are concerned, since these youths were demobilized many years ago, this could explain the difference and would lead us to conclude that rehabilitation programmes are effective in the long run. This hypothesis will need to be tested with programmes recently established in other countries.

### 3.6.5 How are child soldiers perceived?

#### 3.6.5.1 Their perception of themselves

Some of the testimonies give a glimpse of how children who have been members of an armed group perceive themselves. One notes a divergence between the perceptions of children who are still members of an armed group and those that have left, similar to that pertaining to the mode of recruitment. The responses of children who are still active in the armed groups show a certain pride. They are passionate about what they do and feel that they have contributed to the victories of their group.

**"We think that it is thanks to us that Kabila's regime came to power."**

–Discussion with a group of child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, April 2002.

In stark contrast to this are the testimonies of children who have been demobilized. They are discouraged and lack confidence in themselves because, they say, they don't know how to do anything else besides fight. This negative attitude must be taken into account when planning their reintegration with them.

An additional difficulty is that of facing up to other members of the community whom they know are hostile to them, as expressed by a young girl who was released.

**"I hide my past as a soldier. I'm 16 and the mother of a little girl. I don't want her to know either. Because I feel that people have a bad opinion of soldiers and it's worse if one is a girl."**

–Kavira, former child soldier, DRC, Kinshasa, April 2002.

The following testimony is typical of those that were demobilized against their will. They consider themselves failures. The attraction of army life, which they cited as a reason for their enrolment, remains very strong.

**"I'm ashamed because many of my friends are now in the army and I am not. People in the neighbourhood make fun of me and that hurts. When hostilities ended, I was not able to remain in the armed group because they said I was too young. I was 12 in**

**1997. Today, I see the friends with whom I was. They wear army uniform. I've remained just like this."**

–Matthieu, 17 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

#### 3.6.5.2 The perception of the adults in the community

In all four countries, the opinion of the parents of children who were never recruited is the same: 82.5 per cent of parents interviewed consider child soldiers to be a danger to the population. At the same time, these children are also perceived as victims by 71 per cent. These somewhat contradictory perceptions are reflected in the responses to whether child soldiers are guilty: half say they are not guilty, 40 per cent say they are and 10 per cent do not have an opinion.

When asked to describe the potential danger that these children represent, 80 per cent of parents with no child recruited in the **DRC** and the **Congo** say that these children have certainly or possibly ransacked houses, tortured and killed civilians, executed prisoners and raped women and young girls. They subtly suggest that if they have already committed crimes like these in the past they are capable of committing them again.

**"Child soldiers are a danger to society because they are afraid of nothing, not even of death. They are the bandits of tomorrow."**

- Cyprien, parent with no child recruited, Burundi, Citiboke, May 2002.

**"Being jobless, child soldiers will not hesitate to commit crimes. They have acquired cold blood."**

–Discussion with a group of parents of former child soldiers, Burundi, May 2002.

**"Children who have already killed and who do not repent for it are dangerous for society. Indeed, one witnesses the bad behaviour of these children in the different neighbourhoods. They can't accept being contradicted and for the slightest problem they resort to using arms."**

–Hippolyte, 60 years, parent of a child not recruited, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

In **Burundi**, both categories of parents, those whose children were not recruited and those whose children were, make a clear distinction between enrolment in the regular army or the '*gardiens de la paix*', on the one hand, and in rebel groups, on the other. According to them, children enrolled in the army or the '*gardiens de la paix*' are useful to the community and are not dangerous since they enrolled because of poverty and to render a service to the community. In contrast, those who joined rebel groups were either poor children enrolled by force, or young people who enlisted for ideological reasons and are, in the opinion of the adults, dangerous to the community. In both cases, the adults want former child soldiers to be disarmed. If this is done, the population seems ready to accept them back as they mainly consider them to be victims.

In **Rwanda**, one finds the same nuances in the attitude of the adults according to the armed group to which the children belonged: the former members of the FPR are well accepted, whereas those who were in rebel groups inspire fear and mistrust. Two factors may contribute to this difference: firstly, the members of the FPR were demobilized long ago, in 1995. The villagers have gradually learned to live with them and have realized that they are not dangerous; secondly, some of the rebel groups to which children belonged are still active in the **DRC** and, even if the children have left the group long ago, they are still suspected of complicity with the rebels.

Parents of former child soldiers have attitudes similar to the other adults in the community but with a tinge of bitterness.

*"Whenever a theft or murder is committed in the neighbourhood, the first to be suspected are the former child soldiers. Those who deserted are hunted, arrested and tortured. To escape their lot, several of them have decided to reintegrate with the army."*

–Group discussion with parents of former child soldiers, DRC, Kisangani, May 2002.

### 3.6.5.3 Perception of other children

Children do not seem to have as precise an idea as the adults of the danger that former child soldiers represent but their judgement of them is more severe. In the **Congo** and the **DRC**, children who have never been recruited say, less often than adults, that they are sure

that those recruited have pillaged houses and killed civilians. In **Burundi**, on the other hand, whereas only 22 per cent of the adults whose children were not recruited declare child soldiers guilty of pillage and other crimes, the number of children who find them guilty is double that.

Fewer children than adults consider former child soldiers victims. This is perhaps due to their ignorance about the causes and modes of recruitment and to the negative image of these children communicated by the adults. Indeed, 80 per cent of adults do not want their children to mix with former child soldiers. And the children themselves who have not been members of armed groups are wary of them and do not befriend former child soldiers.

*"We're on good terms but we don't mix with them."*

*"We are prudent because a person who has been in the army is very sensitive and when he sees others content, he gets angry."*

*"They want to show that they are no different from us but we are afraid of them."*

–Group discussion with children not recruited, Rwanda, Rugunga, December 2002.

The words used by this child who was never recruited are more severe than those of the adults.

*"The crimes committed by child soldiers are devastating and dramatic. (...) Children who have fought have no respect for anything. They kill each other for just a tin of sardines! They are demons and they need to be taught to live like human beings. For this, it is necessary to create special institutions capable of "deprogramming" them so that they can be socialized. Otherwise, it will be a disaster."*

–Jonathan, 17 years, child not recruited, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

If nothing is undertaken to facilitate dialogue, the alienation of children who have been in combat will worsen, placing them once more in a situation of vulnerability vis-à-vis armed groups or other delinquents.

### 3.6.6 Reintegration with the family and the community

As described earlier, children leave the armed group, full of fear and without any resources. They need to find a refuge that provides safety and takes care of their material needs.

In **Burundi**, children who leave rebel groups return to their families as soon as they are sure that they will be accepted back. They return to civilian life when immersed in their families. The parents make sure that the child is accepted by the community and, particularly, by the administrative authorities by reporting the return of the child. There are examples of interaction between former members of rebel groups and children who were never recruited. Former child soldiers tell children of their age about what they have experienced in the armed groups and dissuade them from joining. As far as the *'gardiens de la paix'* are concerned, there is no question of reintegration since they never left their families.

In the **Congo**, half the former child soldiers are now living with the same persons and in the same place as they were before their recruitment. They are mostly those who were without parents or living away from them. Of the 21 children who were living with at least one parent, only three have returned. This has further increased the difference with the control group that existed before recruitment (Table 15).

Apparently, relations between parents and children do not change much after the child returns: those who

had good relations before continue to have them, and those who had conflictual relations remain incompatible and do not see much of their parents. Out of 18 parents of former child soldiers who were interviewed, 12 say that their relations are the same, 5 say they have deteriorated and one thinks they have improved.

*"For a long time now, my relations with my parents aren't good. They divorced and I was entrusted to my father. When there were problems, he wanted to send me to my mother's but she did not agree. Finally, I landed in the street. That's where I met and joined the armed group. Since leaving the group, I live in a rehabilitation centre because no one wants me."*

–Alain, 13 years, former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

In some cases, the stay with the armed group has distanced the child from his/her parents.

*"At the end of the war, I joined my mother. I had a little money and some belongings. My mother didn't want them in the house because I had got them by looting. Things became difficult between us and I went to live alone in a rented room."*

–Paul, 16 years, former child soldier, Congo, Nkayi, May 2002.

Table 15

Living with...	Child not recruited	Situation before recruitment of former child soldiers	Situation after return of former child soldiers
Father and mother	9	9	1
Father only	2	5	1
Mother only	4	7	1
Without father or mother	5	19	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

Parents who did not have much authority over their children before recruitment had still less afterwards.

*“ Before the war, my son used to be unruly but since the end of the war he has become bad. In the house, he is the master and the others don’t have a say. He does whatever he likes. What can I do with a child who behaves like a lion? I’m there, I look on. ”*

–Jacqueline, 57 years, parent of a former child soldier, Congo, Brazzaville, April 2002.

Those who are away from their families have to find a means of subsistence: most do this on their own, some with the help of friends or other family members and some through an association.

### 3.6.7 Socio-economic reintegration

The statistics presented below are those of the **Congo**. However, the testimonies received from the three other countries confirm that in the absence of assistance from outside the family, children find themselves idle, being neither in school nor at work.

#### 3.6.7.1 The present level of schooling

Only 15 per cent of the former child soldiers interviewed in the **Congo** had been to school in the three months prior to the survey. This explains why their academic level was about the same as before recruitment. 45 per cent of them have not completed primary school.

#### 3.6.7.2 Vocational training

Only 10 per cent of the youth had taken vocational training in the three months prior to the survey. Yet, 35 per cent of them wish to learn a trade. Without financial support from an organization or an association, it seems impossible for young people, cut off from their families, to assume the costs of such training.

#### 3.6.7.3 Current occupation

With very little formal schooling and without vocational training, it is not surprising that former child soldiers are unemployed. The only offer that they have received is to reintegrate with the regular armed forces.

The youths, for whom it is too late to go back to school, who don’t have the money to take vocational training and who are without qualifications for work, are completely idle. They are potential victims of all the worst forms of child labour.

### 3.6.8 Aspirations of the children and their parents

Whatever their age, both the testimonies and the statistics show that the priority for the young is to have a means of earning their living. This concern is expressed more by children than by the parents who tend to give priority to training.

In **Burundi**, 80 per cent of former child soldiers wish to start a business or learn a trade whereas only 40 per cent of parents wish this for their children. On the other hand, more than 40 per cent of parents would like their child to have schooling or vocational training whereas only 20 per cent of children want this.

Apart from the desire to earn money quickly, the fact that only a small proportion of children wish to return to school is certainly due to two reasons: firstly, many of them performed poorly in school before they were recruited and found that the armed group provided an escape from school. Secondly, they have been away from school during all the time that they were involved in armed conflict. The gap between them and those who continued their schooling is great both as far as their level of learning is concerned as well as in the maturity they acquired by living in the armed group.

As in the **Congo**, where 20 per cent of the youth would have preferred to stay in the armed group rather than be demobilized, this is true for a certain number in all the other countries as well, as they would still have been employed.

In the **DRC**, 15 per cent of former child soldiers and 41 per cent of those who are members of armed groups say that they would like a career in the army if they were guaranteed a regular salary. They are the same ones who demand that, since the army deprived them of education by enrolling them when they were too young, it should now offer them vocational training.



## CASE STUDY NO. 3

### The father-son relationship plays a vital role in the enrolment of the child

The behaviour and quality of relations of parents, particularly fathers, towards their children, can either be the cause of or a rampart against the enrolment of children. Between these two extremes, a whole range of parental influence exists.

#### Parallel presentations of four case histories:

*Alain, Bastien, Clement and Damien are between 14 and 16 years old when there is an appeal for new recruits.*

Table 16

What were the relations between father and son before recruitment?			
Alain lives at home with his father, his brothers and sisters. His mother was killed by troops loyal to the president. Relations between Alain and his father are very good. They often talk and the father shares his son's hatred for the President and their desire for vengeance.	Bastien is the son of the first wife of his father and his relationship with his stepmother is strained. He ran away from school and started smoking hashish. His father often tells him that he's good for nothing and that the only place that would accept him is the army. His father actually means to say that he needs to be disciplined.	Clément is the youngest of seven children, of which three still live at home. He is the only one in conflict with his parents. The father says that he cannot get him to obey and that his friends have a bad influence on him. But he doesn't try to talk about it with his son.	Damien lives with both his parents. The whole family often talks about various subjects, particularly about the causes of the conflict and the consequences of the war.
Who is the first to be informed about the appeal for recruitment?			
It is the father who hears that the opposition forces have appealed for new recruits and thinks that, at last, the time has come to avenge the murder of his wife.	It is Bastien who informs his father that volunteers are being recruited, young ones too.	Clément hears about the possibility of being enrolled. For two weeks, he goes to meet and talk with the recruiters every evening.	When the father hears that a campaign to mobilize children has begun, he immediately sits down for a long time with his son and talks to him about it.
Is there dialogue between father and son about possible enrollment of the child?			
The father explains to Alain that he too can be enrolled and both of them go off together to enlist.	The father had so often said to Bastien that he should go into the army that, when his son talks about his desire to enroll, he does not want to contradict himself. His friends, who also have children, criticize him but he thinks that the army will discipline his son and teach him a profession.	Clément does not want to draw his parents' attention to the appeal and says nothing about his contacts with the recruiters. Since he no longer goes to school, his parents never know his whereabouts and are not worried about his absence. A neighbour informs them that their son has enrolled.	He refutes one-by-one all the arguments of the recruiters and tells Damien that he is willing to assume all the consequences of refusing to let his son join.

### Do father and son stay in touch during the stay with the armed group?

Alain and his father are separated as soon as hostilities begin. They are not on the same front. The father has no news of his son.	During the three months of training that was held not far from home, Bastien comes back now and then to see his father. But afterwards, he sends no news. The neighbours say that he was sent to the front.	There is no contact between Clément and his father during the whole period when Clément is fighting on the front. His father says that he thinks he is dead.	It was not just a one-time discussion but a continuous dialogue to ensure that Damien is not tempted by the promises or intimidated by the threats of the recruiters.
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### How is the child received when he returns?

The father thinks that his son should stay on the front line as long as the president is not overthrown. But when he returns he welcomes him with respect, for he says: "Like all the other child soldiers, Alain was brave and deserves a reward."	Six months later, Bastien comes back very ill and says that he and his companions can stay home until the groups arrive from the countryside. His father believes him at first and looks after him. But then he finds out that his son has run away from the army. As soon as Bastien realizes that his father knows that he deserted, he leaves the house. Since then he wanders around in the street and avoids all contact with his home. His father says he does terrible things: "He steals, loots and rapes. He is really good for nothing."	Clément resurfaces in the area and a neighbour informs his father that he is in town. One day he comes back to his family but his father says that he is more violent than ever. "How can one talk to or impose one's authority on a child who walks around the house with a gun?" says the father.	
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### *Reflections on the four cases of Alain, Bastien, Clément and Damien*

The situation of each child and of each family is unique. The only thing in common between the four of them is that the tone and quality of the relationship between father and son remains the same before and after recruitment.

Alain's father uses his son to quench his thirst for vengeance. He talks as if Alain is an extension of himself. He is directly responsible for the enrolment of his son, who although technically a "volunteer", is only a victim of the violence of adults.

In the second case, the child enrolls for want of an alternative that is acceptable to his father. One can surmise that Bastien hoped that by enrolling he would get a good reputation and gain the esteem of his father. But the harsh reality of the army makes him run away and his return home only makes his relationship with his father worse.

The story of Clément is one of non-communication. There is no dialogue at all, either before, during, or after his enrolment.

Finally, in the case of Damien, the dialogue between father and son turns out to be the best prevention. The father had spoken about the dangers of war before the campaign for recruitment began and hence, it was only natural that they discussed it again when his son was directly concerned.

In these four case histories, we have focused only on the relationship between father and son. Yet, the mothers are not absent and in many cases, they are alone in assuming the responsibility for the survival of the family. Nevertheless, the testimonies do not often refer to the attitude of the mother at the time of enrolment. Hence, the relationship with the mother has not been considered in this case study.

# Demobilization and reintegration programmes

## 4

The reintegration of former child soldiers into civilian life after they have been demobilized from armed groups is too complex for just one programme or one actor to facilitate the whole process. The programmes described here, country by country, deal with certain aspects of reintegration and leave out other aspects. The scale and budgets of the different programmes vary and the intention here is not to rank them in anyway. In Table 17 certain characteristics of the different programmes are presented so as to bring out common features. Details of these and other programmes, their budgets and action plans are described in the national reports. The comments that follow attempt to weigh the relative importance of the different aspects that the programme deals with and identify possible gaps. To place them in context, the table also recapitulates the actors involved in different components of programmes of reintegration. It is hoped that this review of existing programmes will contribute towards the elaboration of the future sub-regional strategy for action.

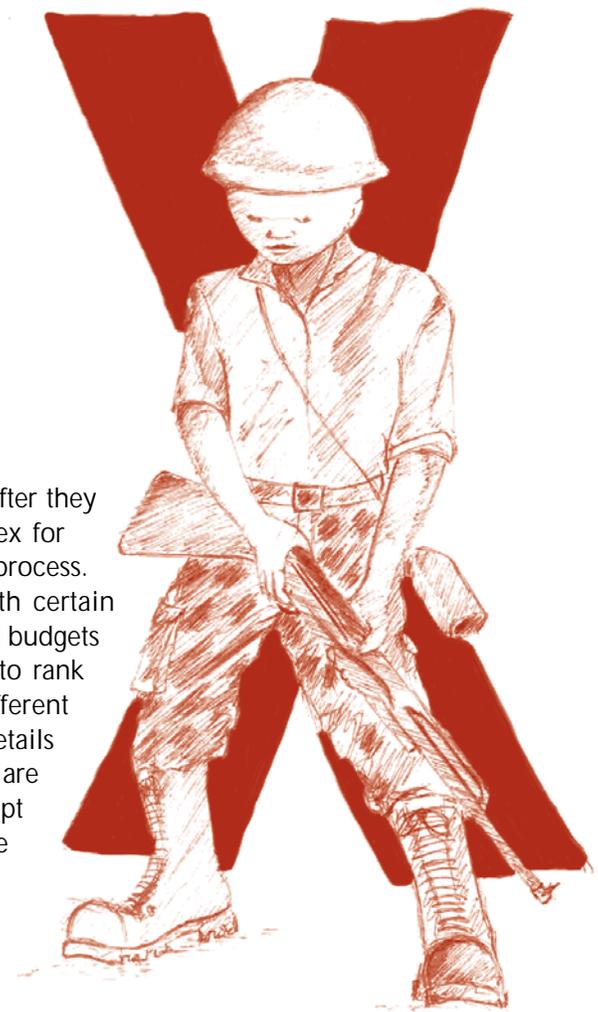
### 4.1 THE TARGET POPULATION

Most of the projects listed are not exclusively dealing with former child soldiers. Their target groups are larger.

- Some are meant for all demobilized combatants. Examples of this are the National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration of ex-combatants in **Rwanda** or IOM's programme in the **Congo** in which those under the age of 20 represent only 8 per cent of the beneficiaries.
- Others, such as the ICCB project in the **DRC**, address the needs of vulnerable children in general. Former child soldiers are only a small part of these.
- Vocational training institutions are open to anyone wishing to learn a trade and many of them cater to adults as well as children.

### 4.2 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

In 2001, the **DRC** launched a programme for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers, coordinated by the National Bureau for Demobilization and Reintegration (BUNADER). This programme started with a trial phase involving 300 children and was then extended to the whole country. By the end of 2002, 1,000 child soldiers had been demobilized. All the concerned ministries, the international organizations present in the **DRC** and NGOs with relevant expertise are involved in this programme. This multi-stakeholder involvement contributes



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Table 17: Main national programmes of reintegration of former child soldiers

	Burundi	Congo	DRC	Rwanda
<b>Demobilization</b>	Government/UNICEF	High Commission for Reintegration of ex-combatants	Ministry of Defence and BUNADER	National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration
<b>Disarmament</b>	Government	IOM	Ministry of Defence	Government/UNICEF
<b>Lodging</b>	OPDE "Maison Shalom", FVS	<i>Espace Jarrot</i>	BUNADER-CTO with financial and technical support of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oxfam, Quebec for rehabilitation</li> <li>• ADA for administration</li> <li>• CHEFI for lodging girls during vocational training</li> </ul>	Government: Ministry of Local Administration, Social Affairs and Information (MINALOC)
<b>Counselling</b>	TPO	Traumatized Children Project of the Department of Social Action, started with funding by UNICEF	BUNADER-CTO with technical support of Save the Children, the ICCB and social workers from the Ministry of Social Affairs	Save the Children, UK
<b>Education and vocational training</b>	Ministry of Handicrafts and adult literacy OPDE OXFAM, Quebec	IOM <i>Espace Jarrot</i> <i>Aide à l'enfance</i> Dom Bosco Technical Institute	UNICEF funding for the CTO and for schooling Ministry of Education for formal schooling ICCB for civic instruction in the CTO ILO/WB in partnership with the training centres: INPP and CFAR Action for health care of deprived children (AASD) Service for follow-up, education and protection of street children (OSEPER)	Government: MINALOC
<b>Support for start-up of micro-projects</b>	Government NGOs: Africaine and Terre des Hommes	High Commission IOM	ILOWB: activities in progress	
<b>Return to families</b>	Government/UNICEF ICRC	ICRC <i>Espace Jarrot</i>	ICRC	MINALOC Save the Children, UK ICRC

towards a coherent and targeted approach and has enabled the programme to cover the whole country. When children are demobilized they are first taken charge of by a Transit and Orientation Centre (CTO) that facilitates the transition from army to civilian life. During their stay there, the children are guided in planning for their future. Once the period of transition is over, they return to their families with the help of the ICRC. Their socio-economic reintegration there is organized through a project jointly established by the government, the ILO and the World Bank that provides three months training to the children.

In **Burundi**, a demobilization programme that was developed in partnership with UNICEF began at the end of 2002. The project aims to demobilize and disarm 90 per cent of the children belonging to the armed forces and 70 per cent of those with rebel groups, within one year. Wherever possible, the demobilized children will be returned to their families and alternative arrangements made for the others. The programme provides for education and vocational training for all the demobilized children.

Besides, the Burundian government has developed a programme for the economic and social reintegration of youth. This programme, that requires updating, is part of the effort to alleviate poverty and is also a means of implementing the peace process. It aims to strengthen the capacity of the beneficiaries for socio-economic integration through a package of technical interventions including vocational training, employment creation, the development of micro, small and medium enterprises, the promotion of cooperatives, health, social protection and access to appropriate financial means. It comes under the different ministries concerned with employment and the socio-professional integration of youth, namely, the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, the Ministry of Handicrafts, Technical Education and Adult Literacy, among others, as a part of their sectoral policies.

In the **Congo**, the High Commission for the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants is in charge of the government programme that aims to identify and disarm ex-combatants and offer them financial and technical support to start small projects funded by the World Bank. The financial aid allotted for these projects, which may be undertaken either individually or collectively, amounts to US\$ 368 per person. This programme, initially only for adults, now has a component designed for children.

In **Rwanda**, the responsibility for the demobilization of all combatants, both adults and children, and their return to civilian life, is attributed to the National Commission for Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants. It is a long process beginning with the release of combatants by armed groups, their transfer to demobilization centres for adults and education centres for children, followed by their return to their families. The Commission facilitates their reintegration into society by providing assistance for adults to launch economic activities, helping children to reintegrate formal schooling or vocational training centres and by providing psychosocial counselling for those with special problems.

### 4.3 DISARMAMENT AND REPURCHASE OF ARMS

The only country in which there is a policy of giving money or financing a project in exchange for surrendering arms is in the **Congo**. Ex-combatants receive US\$ 375 in exchange for their arms to finance an income-generating activity. This measure has enabled a large quantity of arms to be recovered but the beneficiaries did not receive enough technical support for launching a small business. When money was directly given in exchange for arms without help for the creation of a micro-enterprise, there were cases of abuse of the system: people brought in arms without abandoning the armed group. In the other countries, the reports reveal that a large number of weapons circulate long after the conflict is officially over.

### 4.4 AN ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

An understanding of the existing situation is a necessary prerequisite for any action of a certain scale. These studies consist of a general analysis of the situation of child soldiers that is relevant for different regions and probably even different countries. However, they must also have a part that is specific to the region so as to target local needs. Few programmes start with this phase of analysis. The difficulties encountered by certain projects can sometimes be attributed to a lack of understanding of the situation of former child soldiers in a given context. For example, in the **DRC**, a programme of reuniting with the family failed simply because it did not take into account the fact that a

monetary incentive for demobilization was promised but never paid.

#### 4.5 PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING

This is certainly one of the most important elements in the reintegration of child soldiers, but also the most difficult. In the **Congo**, the counselling programme has two components: firstly, the training of adults capable of treating psychological trauma of children and, secondly, the counselling of children who are affected. The UNICEF programme in the country has specialized in this field with a view to providing psychosocial help to as many children as possible. They have developed a system of training in trauma counselling with a multiplier effect: clinical psychologists have trained other professionals such as social workers, doctors, school inspectors, teachers and members of religious orders in trauma counselling. This method not only increases the number of skilled persons available but also diversifies possible contact points between the traumatized child and potential sources of help. It has proved effective in strengthening national capacity.

#### 4.6 TRAINING IN NON-VIOLENT METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Non-violent methods of resolving conflicts are useful not only in prevention of war but also in the rehabilitation of former child soldiers. The testimonies of parents and resource persons indicate the difficulties that many young people who have lived in armed groups have in relating to others. After months and sometimes years during which force and violence were the only possible responses when challenged, these children find it very difficult to have a dialogue with others. In the **DRC**, the CTOs incorporate this dimension into the children's education prior to their training and reintegration into an occupation or into the family.

#### 4.7 REUNITING WITH THE FAMILY

Section 3.6.6 of this report shows the difficulties that both the child soldier and his/her family have in reuniting and living together again. Despite this, many children and parents express the desire to reunite and in the **Congo** and the **DRC**, the ICRC organizes the reunification. Their work does not stop at locating the

family of the child but includes the psychological and material preparation for the return of the child. In the **DRC**, it is interesting to note the involvement of the whole family in the economic activities of the youth facilitated by Save the Children. The whole family learns techniques related to, for instance, rabbit keeping.

Few of the programmes described include preparation and long-term follow-up. The programme of the ICRC encountered opposition from youths who did not wish to return to their families without first having received the monetary incentive for demobilization that had been promised to them. In **Rwanda**, several agencies are involved in the programme of reuniting families: the ICRC locates the families, Save the Children, UK prepares them and their communities to receive the children and the local authorities facilitate the return of the children.

#### 4.8 AWARENESS RAISING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In **Burundi**, communities that are to receive child soldiers receive help through a government programme managed in partnership with UNICEF. The project of the *"Equipe Inter-agences reinsertion"* undertakes rural development projects that include income-generating activities, skill training and the strengthening of local capacity. The study in the four countries indicates the economic difficulties that the families of child soldiers face.

#### 4.9 RECEPTION CENTRES

Few of the programmes offer to take charge of former child soldiers completely. The example of the CTO is unique in proposing an interval between life in the armed group and civilian life that serves as a sort of retreat. During this period, all the aspects of the child's life are taken into account by one team of professionals: health, psychological trauma, training and preparation for return. One sees, however, the difficulties that the CTOs encounter in wishing to take care of former child soldiers who have in fact become adults during their stay in the armed group. These relate to the management of money and the fact that the youths are now heads of families. While they were in the armed group, the youths managed the little money they had by themselves. In the centres, however, everything is planned for them and they can handle money only

under the supervision of the social workers. This “step backwards” poses a lot of problems. Secondly, a certain number of former child soldiers are married or have children. This is particularly tragic in the case of girls, many of whom are pregnant or have babies when they leave the armed group. The centres included in this study do not cater to the needs of couples and young parents.

In **Rwanda**, former child soldiers who return from abroad are first housed for a few days in demobilization centres along with adults, before they are transferred to reception centres reserved for children, where they can stay for three months.

#### 4.10 LITERACY

At the time of recruitment, most of the children enrolled had very little schooling. It is therefore not surprising to find that when they leave the armed group many of them do not know how to read and write anymore. Training programmes have had to take this into account and provide literacy before the children can be taught a trade, since basic knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic, is a necessary prerequisite for all vocational training.

#### 4.11 SCHOOLING

Few programmes for young demobilized combatants propose their reintegration into school. It is true that very few children express the desire to return to school given the long period that they have been away and their urgent need to earn money. **Rwanda**, has designed an education programme for former child soldiers that includes literacy and lessons in national history as well as civic instruction.

#### 4.12 VOCATIONAL TRAINING

This is a component that is found most frequently in the programmes described in the four countries. It responds to the need of youths to learn a trade, in order to be financially independent when they return to civilian life. Different kinds of training are offered, most of them being technical or agricultural. It appears, however, that there is often a discrepancy between the aspirations of the youths and the training offered. When they leave an armed group, a large majority of children wish to start a small business, but training in this field is rare. Individual children complain of not having

received the training that corresponds to their aspirations or to the needs of the community where they wish to live.

#### 4.13 FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO PROJECTS

Those wishing to start an income-generating activity receive aid in kind, such as in rabbit keeping in the **DRC**, or a grant, as in the case of the US\$ 100 given to youths in the **Congo**, or a loan. In most of the programmes, support to income-generating activities is limited to financial aid. Technical, commercial and financial support seem indispensable for the success of these projects in the long-term.

#### 4.14 DURATION OF HELP

In all the projects, the duration is found to be too short. Vocational training generally lasts for three months, a period that is insufficient to learn a trade. The psychosocial counselling of traumatized children and their families should be done over a long period of time. The cost of longer interventions would be higher of course, but their effectiveness would also improve.

Despite the large number of programmes in place, only a minority of former child soldiers benefit from them. Many of them only cater to some of the needs of the children because the programme for former child soldiers is often added on to other activities that the agency was undertaking previously. The members of the staff of the projects are deeply concerned about the lack of funds that prevents them from implementing all the activities they consider necessary.



# Proposals for action 5.

The recruitment of children by armed groups should not be considered inevitable. Even in the most endemic conflicts, all vulnerable children are not recruited. In analyzing the experiences of the children from the time prior to recruitment until their release, we have identified the circumstances that lead to their enrolment. The proposals for prevention presented here are based on this analysis.

Several rehabilitation programmes already exist and we have presented some of them briefly. By reviewing their successes and limitations, and taking into account the experiences of the children before recruitment and during their involvement in armed groups, we have developed the following recommendations for programmes that will give former child soldiers the possibility of building their future in a sustainable manner.

## 5.1 PROPOSALS FOR PREVENTIVE MEASURES

### 5.1.1 Action involving the families

#### 5.1.1.1 Help vulnerable families to increase their incomes

Many of the children said that they enrolled because they no longer wanted to be a burden to their parents who were too poor to afford adequate living conditions for them. It is probable that if there had been no war at the time, these children would have left the house to find work or would have become street children, and thus potential victims of other worst forms of child labour. In situations of armed conflict, the children see enrolment as a means of escaping from the poverty of the family and fulfilling their material needs. Hence, support to families whose children are at risk of enrolment is part of a more general approach that reduces the vulnerability of children to all the worst forms of labour.

Families must be identified at the local level and the aid offered must be appropriate to their specific needs. The types of interventions range from provision of scholarships for orphans or for children with invalid parents, institutional care for children whose families cannot look after them, loans for parents who need to expand their economic activities, training for parents whose occupations require technical skills that they do not yet have, etc.

Helping the poorest to increase their incomes would reduce the number of children leaving their families in search of means of survival.

#### 5.1.1.2 Offer counselling to families

In the case of youths who leave their family because they are not accepted or understood, the decision is usually the result of a long period of conflict with their parents. For children who have strained relations with their families, enrolment is just a means of escape from parental authority.

Families who find their children going “astray” and who are not able to communicate with them or warn them of the consequences of their acts, must know whom they can go to for help, before the contact with the child is broken. Such help must be locally available and requires therefore a network of persons who are trained in counselling. Traditional, local structures already in place should be made use of for counselling parents and children who are in such situations.

### 5.1.1.3 Make parents aware of the danger of enrolment of children

The study shows that certain parents were the direct cause of the enrolment of their child whereas others were able to prevent enrolment by firmly opposing the child's wish.

For parents to be the first rampart against the enrolment of children, information and awareness raising campaigns are necessary. These campaigns should inform the public that the recruitment of minors is banned, make them aware of the dangers it involves for the child, and the negative consequences it has for society. They can take various forms:

- Information to the general public through posters and radio programmes;
- Information and debate in all the networks of civil society—religious gatherings, political groups, trade unions, neighbourhood associations, etc. The message will be better received by parents if it comes from a group to which they belong;
- Information by teachers at meetings with parents. Teachers can inform all parents and, since they know the children individually, can also devote particular attention to certain families “at risk”.

## 5.1.2 Action involving children

### 5.1.2.1 Teaching non-violent methods of conflict resolution

The conflicts under consideration that have led to the recruitment of children by armed groups have political or ethnic roots. For the children as well as the adults caught in the turmoil of such violence, armed conflict seems the only way of resolving differences. This is particularly true for young persons who witness atrocities against their loved ones and who enrol to take revenge. It is also the case for youth who enrol to defend a cause or to fight injustice of which they are victims. Education in the non-violent resolution of conflict permits one to express disagreement or opposition without resorting to violence. It opens the way for dialogue and negotiation and helps establish the preconditions for the democratic functioning of the whole group. These methods can be taught and practised in all the places where youth come together: schools, youth movements, clubs, etc. The youth wings of political parties are particularly appropriate for spreading these methods.

### 5.1.2.2 Demystify the idea that armed groups are employers like any other

The testimonies show that children perceive armed groups positively: they think that they enable one to have a high standard of living, and they know that to enter these groups one does not require any special qualifications. They refer to their enrolment as finding work and think of it as a means of improving their standard of living.

Information campaigns specifically for youth in conflict zones must let them know that it is not a form of work like any other, that it is prohibited for minors and that children are often exploited by the adults and submitted to grave abuse. The sharing of experience by former child soldiers during these campaigns would make the message more credible and strong. Obviously, such participation is possible only if the former child soldiers volunteer to do this and if it does not put them in danger.

### 5.1.2.3 Use the school as a means of prevention

The school can play a crucial role in prevention:

- **By reducing failure in school and preventing drop-out**

An important cause of enrolment is failure and consequent abandon of schooling. Children who have dropped out are idle and come under the influence of people who instigate them to enrol. Besides, certain recruitment campaigns specifically target out-of-school children. Programmes that aim to reduce failure in school should be a priority for governments. They should mobilize local initiative and be adapted to the local context. Teachers should identify in time the children who are not likely to succeed and arrange to give them the support they need. This can be given by their peers or by other adults in the community. Sometimes it is sufficient to arrange a place and time for children to revise what is done in school in the presence of competent adults.

- **By raising the awareness of children**

Teachers must be trained to inform children about the prohibition of enrolment of minors and the danger it represents. Young persons must be able to discuss freely with responsible adults their desire or that of their companions to enrol. The school can then play the preventive role that families are sometimes unable to assume.

- **By applying principles of non-violence and democracy**

The children in a school belong to families of different ethnic, religious and political groups. It is therefore an ideal place to learn to live together, to respect the rights of minorities, to listen to the other's point of view and to share responsibility. If children share years of democratic functioning in school, it is less likely that they will be tempted to take up arms.

#### 5.1.2.4 Approach street children

Street children are easy prey for recruiters—they need money, they don't have adults to protect them and they meet other young recruits who mirror the illusion of an easy and glorious life in armed groups.

A pro-active policy of meeting street children can counter the propaganda for recruitment by armed groups. The application of such a policy depends on the capacity of social workers and other professionals to reach out to them and on the setting up of infrastructure necessary to provide the multiple services required to respond to their needs.

#### 5.1.3 Via political parties

Political parties often have local sections that relay the ideas and programme of the party. Some have special wings for young activists. At their meetings, the refusal to use children in armed conflict must be clearly announced. Clear policy statements concerning a ban on the use of children in armed conflict that come from the party leadership can be relayed throughout the country through the various branches.

#### 5.1.4 Via potential recruiters

As long as the reasons that young people give for enrolling themselves exist, the last possible obstacle to enrolment is the armed group itself. It is for them to refuse to take children. The information gathered through the survey shows that recruiters are aware of the rules about minimum age for recruitment but sometimes circumvent them. Hence, in addition to informing concerned persons about the law, it is necessary to develop foolproof mechanisms for the enforcement of it.

For national armies one must use the same methods as for other armed groups: namely, information, training, checks and penalties.

In the case of rebel groups, one must first succeed in contacting their leaders and convincing them that the recruitment of minors is harmful to the group. This could be done through charismatic persons in authority that are capable of influencing the recruiters of rebel groups such as traditional chiefs, religious and political leaders, etc.

## 5.2 PROPOSALS FOR DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION

Young persons will leave armed groups if they know that they can do so without danger and that once outside, they can rely on support for a sufficiently long period of time to facilitate their return to civilian life.

### 5.2.1 Encourage armed groups to identify children

Teams made up of representatives of armed groups, NGOs and the government should be set up to identify child combatants still active in armed groups who should be demobilized. This would help to reinforce the credibility of rehabilitation programmes and prepare for reintegration.

### 5.2.2 Create reception centres and safe havens

The testimonies reveal the enormous difficulties that children who wish to leave the armed group encounter. They are afraid of being caught and killed by their own armed group, of being found and killed by the enemy group, of being labelled a traitor by the community on return and sometimes they do not know the way back to their village.

Clearly identifiable reception centres should be created that offer shelter and immediate protection to young persons who leave armed groups. To be effective, it is necessary to multiply these centres in conflict zones, so that during their moves, young people who wish to can reach them.

The success of such measures depends on the trust that people have in these centres. They must be perceived as neutral, and should under no circumstances be used to gather information from the youths about the group they have just left. The security of these places must be ensured.

### 5.2.3 Urge children to leave armed groups

Once such centres exist, campaigns must be carried out to:

- Incite children to ask to be released from the armed group;
- Encourage armed group leaders to send away children by bringing them to these centres;
- Help children who cannot negotiate their liberation to escape.

These campaigns should also make known the facilities for reintegration that exist. The aim is to reach youth who are still members of armed groups, and to let them know that there are alternatives designed to respond to their needs.

### 5.2.4 Disarm them

Disarmament should accompany all the other measures, because it is essential for the child and for the country at war. The idea of giving financial help in exchange for weapons surrendered has proved effective in the **Congo** in avoiding local arms trade. This measure has the triple advantage of encouraging ex-combatants, particularly children, to announce themselves to aid programmes, to offer them training or appropriate help and especially to disarm former members of armed groups. Other members of the community will trust former child soldiers more easily if they know that they are no longer armed.

### 5.2.5 Develop strategies appropriate to their age and experience

For a reintegration programme to succeed, it must take into account the age and past experience of the youth as well as the time spent in the armed group. A youth of 13 or 14 who has spent six months with an armed group does not have the same needs as a young adult of 20 who was recruited at 15. Young girls who are pregnant or already mothers have special needs. Hence it is out of the question to advocate one single model of reintegration for all the youths who leave armed groups. There will be variations around the following common elements of programmes of reintegration:

- Treatment of physical and psychological consequences including programmes of detoxification;

- The choice of a place to live—in an institution, with the family or other relatives, or alone;
- The choice of an activity—an occupation or training for one;
- Material help in setting up a project;
- Psychological and material help to the family of the former child soldier to prepare for return.

The possibilities listed within each element are not mutually exclusive. For example, a young person can first be housed in an institution to get the necessary treatment before joining the family or he/she may go back to school for a certain time before entering an apprenticeship or vocational training.

### 5.2.6 Pay special attention to the problem of AIDS

Since many children will have been victims of sexual abuse while in the armed group, one must take into consideration the risk of HIV infection. Programmes of awareness raising, detection and treatment must be elaborated with the help of specialized agencies such as those of the United Nations—UNAIDS, WHO and UNICEF.

### 5.2.7 Provide quality education adapted to the needs of the child

Whatever form of education the young person chooses (schooling, literacy, vocational training), it must be of a quality that provides the greatest chance of success. This implies that the teachers are trained to receive children with special difficulties. The choice of vocational training should be made according to the local labour market, the economic needs of the region as well as the aptitudes and aspirations of the youth.

For young persons above the age of 18 who were recruited as children by the national army, those in charge should be consulted about the possibility of setting up training programmes within the army. Besides the traditional literacy classes, the army should be able to offer training in health care, mechanics, truck driving, accountancy, secretarial skills, etc. Such programmes would cater to the concerns of young people who do not wish to leave the army because they were enrolled at an age when they should have learned a trade and are now without qualifications.

### 5.2.8 Propose material aid to the young

Almost all the young persons interrogated when they left the armed group say that they wish to earn money rapidly in order to live decently. We have seen the risks of return to the armed groups if they find themselves as destitute as when they joined. It is therefore essential that they receive the help necessary for income-generating activities. This can be in kind, in the form of equipment they require, and/or in cash as grants or loans. In all cases, financial help should be accompanied by suitable technical advice in setting up the economic activity.

### 5.2.9 Centralize the programme without creating a ghetto

It is important that one organization has an overview of the needs of former child soldiers. However, the experiences described earlier show that it is more effective to arrange for them to join existing training centres, at least after a certain time, than to create special institutions for them.

However, the reception centres in which released children spend the first few days or weeks after their release should be exclusively reserved for them. These orientation centres should take charge of them during the transition period from army to civilian life. It is here that doctors, psychologists and social workers can help them to plan their future. On the other hand, there is no reason to create special schools or vocational training centres for them. As soon as the youth has chosen the type of training he/she wishes to receive, he/she should join a group of other young trainees.

It is important to avoid creating ghettos of former child soldiers where there would be chances of violence erupting. At the same time, their special needs must be taken care of.

### 5.2.10 Prepare the community for their return

Even in the best of circumstances where former child soldiers come out of a reintegration programme in good physical and mental health, having learned a trade that is useful and viable, there is no guarantee that their return to civilian life will be successful. Indeed, the prejudices against former child soldiers expressed during the survey (Section 3.6.5) show that communities are not ready to take them back. Adults perceive them as dangerous and guilty of all sorts of atrocities. To add to this there are certain local superstitions concerning the

possible murders that they have committed: "The spirit of the dead person follows you always" says a local proverb.

In the communities where the children come from and which have been affected by conflict, rituals of collective pardon are necessary for reconciliation. Each society, each ethnic group and each village has its own rituals. Hence, one cannot impose a model that is transposed from one sub-culture to another, but one must emphasize the importance of such rituals for a return to peace.

### 5.2.11 Promote reconciliation between children

Given the grave suspicions that children who have not been recruited have about former child soldiers, it is necessary to give them opportunities to meet with each other and counter those prejudices. These children are the adults of tomorrow, who will be parents themselves and perhaps community leaders one day. As with measures of prevention, it is important to develop programmes of education in non-violent conflict resolution in which both children who were never recruited as well as former child soldiers participate. Since the armed groups to which the children belonged often have ethnic or political connotations, the conflicts will be perpetuated from generation to generation unless other ways of resolving differences are adopted.

Promoting dialogue between the young can help to construct more healthy relationships between adults in future. At national level, associations and youth groups must be encouraged to participate in a movement of reconciliation.

### 5.2.12 Help parents to take them back home

In addition to the work done collectively, every family that has had a child involved in armed conflict should be helped in three areas:

- In its relationship with the community, so as not to be held responsible for the choice of the child;
- In its relationship with the youth who returns, to be able to understand his/her reactions and choices;
- Materially, to make the return of the child viable.

If these conditions are not fulfilled, the risks of failure and of re-enrolment of the youth are great. Besides, rumours of such failures and of enrolment with rebel groups of children demobilized from the regular army, would create suspicion in the army and a refusal to continue with the policy of demobilization.

### 5.2.13 Provide for long-term follow-up of former child soldiers

All the elements mentioned (treatment, psychological support, training) need to be sustained over a long period. It is an illusion to think that the emotional and intellectual lacunae of the young persons who have spent years in armed groups can be filled in three months. Intensive care can be offered for a shorter period but should be accompanied by a system of long-term follow-up that enables rapid intervention in case of health or behavioural problems or difficulties in relating to others.

### 5.2.14 Listen to the demands of the youth

This recommendation is not new and reflects the terms of the CRC. However, in the context of reintegration programmes it takes on new significance. The demands of the youth can be very different to what the adults in charge of projects expect. Listening to the young person does not of course mean that one must blindly give in to his/her wishes, but must develop, in consultation with him/her, the best strategy for reintegration.

### 5.2.15 Extend these programmes to vulnerable children and families

In order to avoid giving the impression that the benefits of the programme are only available to former child soldiers, the programme should also offer its services to all children in difficult circumstances, even those who have never been recruited. Children who have never been recruited would not then need to pretend to have been former child soldiers in order to benefit from these programmes.

# Recommendations for a sub-regional plan of action

## 6.

The proposals listed in Section 5 are based on the results of the national surveys and the review of existing programmes in the four countries concerned. National plans of action will be developed taking into consideration these proposals as well as in-country experience, and will supplement the sub-regional strategy below that was adopted at the consultation held in Yaoundé, Cameroon in January 2003.

Priorities for a sub-regional plan of action are presented in three parts: principles that make up the framework for action, the types of programmes to be set up and finally the conditions necessary for the implementation of these programmes.

### 6.1 PRINCIPLES

1. Programmes for children who have been involved in armed conflict should be mainstreamed into general national and sub-regional action plans for child protection.
2. One should avoid creating ghettos for specific types of children but promote their reintegration into society, while giving attention to the special situation of girls who are particularly vulnerable.
3. An integrated approach to the needs of children and their environment should be adopted in order to protect them and satisfy their fundamental needs for health, education and leisure.
4. Coordination and partnership between the different international agencies, active in programmes of prevention of recruitment and reintegration of former child soldiers, should be reinforced.

### 6.2 ACTIONS

1. Conduct supplementary inquiries into certain groups, particularly girls, and into zones that were not sufficiently investigated through this survey (zones controlled by rebel groups, for example).
2. Set up a system of information gathering and monitoring that relays disarmament and demobilization operations with a view to reintegration.
3. Inform governments, military authorities, social partners and civil society in general of the implications and obligations resulting from the ratification of ILO Convention 182, the CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, the Ottawa Convention on landmines and the Convention of Rome.
4. Raise awareness and mobilize parents, teachers, animators and community leaders to adopt attitudes and behaviour vis-à-vis children that prevent recruitment and promote their reintegration.
5. Set up a system of counselling and orientation of children used in armed conflict and of other particularly vulnerable children.
6. Develop means of physical, psychological and moral rehabilitation with a special focus on the problem of AIDS. Propose special programmes for children handicapped by war and for children born in the context of armed groups.

7. Establish training (literacy, basic education, vocational training and civic instruction) for children used in armed conflict and for other children at risk according to the economic potential of the region.
8. Create mechanisms for job placement, support for income-generating activities, for the creation of micro-enterprises and cooperatives, and ensure their sustainability.
9. Strengthen support to families and the community to facilitate the social and economic reintegration of children.

### **6.3 NECESSARY CONDITIONS**

1. Promote the peace process and organize security measures to protect former child soldiers and their relatives.
2. Build local capacity so as to render structures and institutions more efficient and sensitive to needs.
3. Strengthen the capacity of stakeholders—trainers, social partners, community leaders, cooperatives, etc.
4. Organize a sub-regional network of diffusion and exchange of good practices so as to capitalize on experience and improve the efficiency of programmes.

# Conclusion 7

The Rapid Assessment method used for this study has enabled an analysis of the situation and the development of recommendations based on the testimonies and opinions of the various stakeholders concerned with the problem of child soldiers, while keeping the interest of children at heart.

The presentation of the context has helped to understand the political and economic situation of the four countries studied, with a view to comprehending the difficulties that families that live in zones of conflict are confronted with daily. The insecurity, poverty and dispersal of families combine to create a climate suitable for the enrolment of children. Many of them found no other option for survival except to enrol in the hope of earning a living. They lost their childhood and their health in the process.

The testimonies of child soldiers reveal that their life in the armed group is a saga of suffering: inhuman material conditions, physical and moral violence, being exposed to combat, lack of care, protection and affection.

The commanders of armed groups confirmed the presence of young persons in their ranks, knowing that they are wrong to involve them but not always understanding why. They admit that the children they recruit are full-fledged soldiers and that no difference is made between a minor and an adult during combat. This confirms the testimonies of the children.

The parents of child soldiers have shared their feelings of powerlessness due to the lack of viable alternatives for their children and the difficulty in communicating with children drunk with violence.

By putting together these testimonies and listening to what communities and civil society had to say, we have tried to outline the kinds of programmes of prevention and rehabilitation that would be useful, effective and sustainable in stopping the recruitment of child soldiers and enabling their reintegration in the long run. In the present situation, the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers is part of the general process of conflict resolution and construction of peace. It is only in a context of peace and renewed development that most of the solutions proposed can be put into practice and give the expected results. For now, as we have shown, the existing infrastructure of health care, education and other basic services is insufficient and dysfunctional, and the economy as a whole is in crisis. Programmes must take this context into account and be incorporated into a general strategy of reconstruction.

Obviously, the question of child soldiers is part of the larger issue of child labour, and the solutions developed should make sure that children who leave armed groups do not become victims of other worst forms of child labour, because of the lack of real possibilities of social and economic reintegration.

The four countries covered by the study have programmes funded by several donors that aim to reintegrate persons affected by conflict. The actions proposed above for child soldiers must be integrated into this framework and benefit from the synergies with other partners. The ILO, with its experience in vocational training and employment creation, can contribute effectively to the global effort to prevent recruitment and to facilitate the reintegration of former child soldiers.



# Acronyms and Abbreviations

AASD	Action for health and development aid to the poorest (Action d'aide sanitaire et de développement au plus démunis)
AFDL	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo, DRC ( <i>Alliance de forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo</i> )
AP1, AP2	Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions
BUNADER	National Bureau for Demobilization and Reintegration of Combatants, DRC
ILO Convention 182	ILO, Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (No. 182)
CFAR	Redemptorist Centre for Automobile Training, DRC ( <i>Centre de formation en automobile des Redemptoristes</i> )
CHEFI	Shelter and Vocational Training Centre for Marginalized Girls ( <i>Centre d'Hébergement et de Formation aux métiers pour les filles marginalisées</i> )
Congo	Republic of Congo (Congo—Brazzaville)
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
CSC	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
CTO	Transit and Orientation Centre, DRC ( <i>Centre de transit et d'orientation</i> )
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo (Formerly Zaire)
EMAC	ILO Multi-disciplinary Team for Central Africa
FAC	Congolese Armed Forces, DRC ( <i>Forces armées congolaises</i> )
Fafo	Institute for Applied International Studies, Norway
FAR	Rwandese Armed Forces ( <i>Forces armées rwandaises</i> )
FPR	Rwandese Patriotic Front ( <i>Front patriotique rwandais</i> )
FVS	Families Combating AIDS, Burundi ( <i>Familles pour Vaincre le Sida</i> )
ICCB	International Catholic Children's Bureau
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFP/CRISIS	InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction
ILO	International Labour Organization/Office
ILO/IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
INPP	National Institute for Vocational Training ( <i>Institut National de Préparation Professionnelle</i> )
IOM	International Organization for Migrations

ISAE	Institute for Agronomy and Animal Husbandry ( <i>Institut Supérieur d'Agronomie et d'Elevage</i> )
MINALOC	Rwandan Ministry of Local Administration, Social Affairs and Information
OPDE	Humanitarian aid for the protection and development of children in difficulty ( <i>Oeuvre humanitaire pour la protection et le développement de l'enfant en difficulté</i> ), Burundi
OSEPER	Institution for follow-up, education and protection of street children ( <i>Oeuvre de suivi, éducation et protection des enfants des rues</i> ), DRC
RCD	Congolese Rally for Democracy ( <i>Rassemblement Congolais pour la démocratie</i> )
RDF	Rwandese Defence Force ( <i>Force Rwandaise de Défense</i> )
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization, Burundi
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

## FOREIGN TERMS

Doriyas	Child intelligence agents in Burundi (Literally "ear agents" in Kirundi)
Gardiens de la paix	Guardians of the Peace in Burundi. Government sponsored self-defence units made up of out-of-school youth.
Kadogos	Child soldiers in the DRC (Literally "little ones" in Swahili)

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# Appendix: Contents of the questionnaires for children divided into modules

## Child member of an armed group (AG)

### Antecedents

Membership in an AG  
Family members belonging to an AG  
Exposure to combat  
Family affected by combat

### Recruitment

Age, place, home  
Resources  
Occupation of the household head  
Activities of the child  
Circumstances of recruitment  
Reasons for recruitment  
Persons involved  
Other persons recruited

### The Armed Group

Size, composition  
Children, age, sex

### Activities in the armed group

Equipment, training  
Tasks, missions  
Children's specificities

### Daily Life

Food, lodging, health care  
Contact with the outside  
Resources, rewards  
Privations, punishments  
Treatment of children  
Consumption of alcohol and drugs

### Current situation and prospects

Place of residence, household  
Contact / relations with family  
Conditions / aspirations for return  
Health status, resources and activities

## Released child

### Antecedents

Membership in an AG  
Family members belonging to an AG  
Exposure to combat  
Family affected by combat

### Recruitment

Age, place, home  
Resources  
Occupation of the household head  
Activities of the child  
Circumstances of recruitment  
Reasons for recruitment  
Persons involved  
Other persons recruited

### The Armed Group

Size, composition  
Children, age, sex

### Activities in the armed group

Equipment, training  
Tasks, missions  
Children's specificities

### Daily Life

Food, lodging, health care  
Contact with the outside  
Resources, rewards  
Privations, punishments  
Treatment of children  
Consumption of alcohol and drugs

### Departure from the armed group

Circumstances / reasons  
Persons involved

### Current situation and prospects

Place of residence, household  
Contact / relations with family  
Conditions / aspirations for return  
Health status, resources and activities

## Child not recruited

### Antecedents

Membership in an AG  
Family members belonging to an AG  
Exposure to combat  
Family affected by combat

### Recruitment

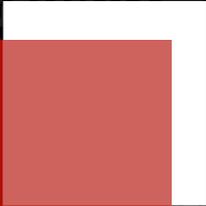
Contacts between the child and the AG  
Attempts at forced recruitment

### Perception / Mixing with child soldiers

Opinions about child soldiers  
Mixing with / having child soldier friends

### Current situation and prospects

Place of residence, household  
Contact / relations with family  
Conditions / aspirations for return  
Health status, resources and activities



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