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Demobilization of Rwandan Child Combatants who Fought in the Great Lakes Region (1996-2003)

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any university

……..

Révérien Interayamahanga

…….day of ……2006

DEDICATION

To my wife Lidvine Umuhoza, and our daughter Revine Jesca Rumuri

ACKNOWLEGDEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the advice, supervision and encouragement of my supervisor Prof. Jacklyn Cock. I am also indebted to Prof. Ran Greenstein who helped me with this work during its early stages. I would also like to thank the University of the Witwatersrand, especially its Sociology Department, for having accepted me as a MA student and for the teachings of a high quality that I benefited from them.

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Last but not least, I owe a great debt of gratitude to all individuals and organisations interviewed for this study.

ACRONYMS

AIDS : Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome

ALIR : Armée de Libération du Rwanda

BBC : British Broadcasting Corporation

CNDH : Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme

CPO : Child Protection Officer

CREER : Centre de Réhabilitation des Enfants Ex-combatants de Ruhengeri

DDR : Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

DDRR : Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation and Reintegration

DRC : Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ex-FAR : ex-Forces Armées Rwandaises

FAR : Forces Armées Rwandaises

FDLR : Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda

FM : Frequency Modulation

HIV : Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HRW : Human Rights Watch

I. : Informant

ICRC : International Committee of the Red Cross

IDRC : International Development Research Centre

IDTR : Identification, Documentation, Tracing and Reunification

ILO : International Labour Organisation

IRC : International Rescue Committee

MDRP : **Multi-country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme**

MIGEFASO : **Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs**

MIGEPROF : **Ministry of Gender and Promotion of the Family**

MINALOC : **Ministry of Local Governance and Social Affairs**

MONUC : **Mission d'Observation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo**

NGO : **Non-Governmental Organisation**

NURC : **National Unity and Reintegration commission**

OAU : **Organisation of African Unity**

PPO : **Provincial Programme Officer** :

R. : **Respondent**

RCD : **Rassamblement Congolais pour la Démocratie**

RDCR : **Rwandan Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission**

RENAMO : **Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana**

RPA : **Rwandese Patriotic Front**

STD : **World Food Programme**

UN : **United Nations**

UNHCR : **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

UNICEF : **United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund**

UNITA : **National Union for the Total Independence of Angola**

VOA : **Voice of America**

VSW : **Vulnerable Support Window**

WFP : **World Food Programme**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate how specific needs of the Rwandan child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region are being addressed in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes. Data collected by the use of semi-structured interviews of demobilised child combatants and key informants revealed that many children were recruited after being orphaned, separated from parents, or because of their search for physical and psychological security which was threatened by war and its immediate effects. Further, it was found that child combatants experienced harsh living conditions in the bush due to both the nature of their work as combatants and their physical and mental immaturity.

As far as the DDR processes are concerned, the study revealed many weaknesses in addressing the specific needs of child combatants at least until January 2004. However, there has been a significant positive shift in dealing with the same needs since then. The absence of female child combatants in the DDR process was noted. This research concludes with a number of recommendations for both future interventions and further research.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research aim

This study aims to analyse the process of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of Rwandan Hutu rebels who fought in the Great Lakes Region, with a focus on child combatants.

1.2. Research question

The central question that this study attempts to address is how are the specific needs of child combatants addressed in the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of the Rwandan Hutu rebels? Given that these three processes take place in a transition from war to peace, prior to answering the central question, the study first tries to investigate the circumstances of children's recruitment and their life as combatants.

1.3. Study context

On 1 October 1990, the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA), the armed branch of the Rwandese Patriotic Front, RPF, (comprising mainly of members of Tutsi ethnic political refugees, since 1959, mostly in the Rwanda neighbouring countries), launched an attack from Uganda. The belligerents undertook a number of peace talks after 12 July, 1992, in Arusha, and signed a Peace Agreement on 4 August, 1993. Nevertheless, while this peace agreement was about to be implemented, the presidential airplane was shot down over Kigali city, on 6 April, 1994 (Nkunzumwami, 1996). Both presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, Juvenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira respectively were killed in the crash. Shortly after the assassination of President Habyarimana, the interim government (formed a day after Habyarimana's assassination) carried out genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group members which claimed about a million lives within a hundred days (MINALOC, 2001).

During the genocide, the RPA relaunched hostilities, defeated the governmental forces and took power in Rwanda. The defeated armed forces, most of political leaders and a

huge number of population (mainly Hutu ethnic group members) fled to neighbouring countries, especially into Zaire (currently the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC), where they started a rebellion against the new government in Rwanda. Many civilians, including children were recruited from the Rwandan refugee camps in the DRC (Prunier, 1997).

At the same time, since 1996, many armed groups were involved in the two successive armed conflicts (respectively referred to as the first and the second war of the Congo) in the DRC. Some, backed by the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, fought against the Government of Kinshasa, while others, also including foreign forces, supported the regular army. Those belligerents recruited many civilians from both Congolese and Hutu refugees including children (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, January 2004; Watchlist, 2004).

In July 1999, the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement was signed between the warring parties which agreed on the withdrawal of all foreign forces, and the disarming of militia and armed groups. The same agreement also required the UN in collaboration with the OAU to constitute, facilitate and deploy an appropriate peacekeeping force in the DRC. This force would ensure the implementation of the Agreement; and taking into account the peculiar situation of the DRC, mandate the peacekeeping force to track down all armed groups in the same country. In September 1999, the UN Security Council created the UN Mission in the DRC, MONUC, and, in February 2000, the United Nations approved the deployment of 5,537 peacekeepers to monitor the implementation of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement. The DDR processes which include both child and adult Rwandan combatants are until now under way (Malan & Porto, 2004; MONUC[1]).

In February 2002, the Inter Congolese Dialogue officially opened in Sun City, South Africa, and in April 2003 a Global and All Inclusive Agreement was signed. Under this Agreement, Joseph Kabila remained President with four Vice-Presidents. Meanwhile, a meeting of African leaders in Abuja agreed to send more peacekeepers to the Congo tasked with disarming mainly the Hutu rebel forces in an attempt to stem the escalating tensions, (*ibid.*). However, a spokesman of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of

[1] http://www.monuc.org/MissionChronologyEn.aspx

Rwanda stated on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), on 2 February 2005, that the FDLR would resist with force any attempt to disarm it.

1.4. Rationale

This research is located in the discipline of sociology because demobilisation and reintegration are essentially social processes. They involve restoring ex-combatants to their communities with altered demilitarised identities. Several reports have confirmed the massive use of child soldiers in many armed conflicts around the globe, both on the side of regular and irregular forces (Human Rights Watch, 2004a; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004; Watchlist, 2004). Many voices have therefore been raised, pleading in general, for the protection of children, and, in particular, the prevention of child enrolment in armed forces, and for their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, if they had taken part in military activities. In the preamble for the *Declaration on the Rights of the Child*, the UN General Assembly (1959) bears in mind that the child, by reason of physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well after birth.

Moreover, in the preamble for the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the UN General Assembly (1989:1) states that,

> "In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance", and recognizes that "the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. The child should therefore fully be prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of ideas proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity".

Similarly, the UN Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions against the use of child combatants and argued that the warlords in different armed conflicts worldwide demobilise all the child combatants they have in their armies (Resolution 1261(1999); Resolution 1314 (2000); Resolution 1379 (2001); Resolution 1460 (2003))

It is in this context that the UN Security Council (1999) calls on States and the United Nations system to facilitate the disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration of children used as soldiers.

Regarding children in armed conflict, the Security Council (1999:2) calls on all parties to armed conflicts "to take special measures to protect children, in particular, girls, from rape and other forms of sexual abuse and gender-based violence in situation of armed conflict and to take into account the special needs of the girl child throughout armed conflicts and their aftermath, including the delivery of humanitarian assistance".

Girl child combatants are particularly taken into account by the Security Council resolution in that it highlights that,

> "The importance of giving consideration to the special needs and particular vulnerabilities of girls affected by armed conflicts, including, *inter alia*, those heading households, orphaned, sexually exploited and used as combatants", and argues that "their human rights, protection and welfare be incorporated in the development of policies and programs including those for prevention, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration" (UN Security Council, 2000:13).

Likewise, MacKay & Mazurana (2001:30) note that in Africa,

> "Girls are among the primary targets of armed forces and armed opposition groups that abduct them and force them to become warriors and sexual and domestic slaves.(…) Because girls typically perform multiple duties, to categorize them as acting within a single role is inaccurate and has numerous policy implications. Constrained notions of girls' roles may contribute to the girls being overlooked for post-conflict demobilization and rehabilitation programs".

The same co-authors observe that male fighters are the nearly exclusive priority for most disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs - thus marginalizing girls.

For the sake of efficient demobilisation and social reintegration, UNICEF (1997) has established a range of "principles and practices" that should be taken into account throughout the whole process. Known as the *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices*, they were adopted in a symposium conducted by the NGO's Working Group on the

Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF, in Cape Town, South Africa, from 27-30 April 1997. These principles and practices are aimed at preventing the recruitment of children and encouraging the demobilization of child combatants and helping them to reintegrate into society (UNICEF, 1997).

For several African countries in conflict, the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of combatants in general, have been launched. Nevertheless, Malan (2000:2) argues that "Considerable research and writing are available on the unique demobilization and reintegration needs of former child combatants. However, there is a dearth of expertise and documented experience in dealing with the combined and unique challenges of disarmament and demobilizing child soldiers, as a specialized dimension and task with peace missions".

As far as Rwanda is concerned, several reports have confirmed that a number of Rwandan children were enrolled in different armed groups in the DRC (Human Rights Watch, 2004a; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, January 2004; Watchlist, 2004; Kingma, 2001). For example Kingma (2001:12) notes that "…the RPA recently captured about 1,800 ALIR troops (including more than 250 child soldiers), who entered Northwest Rwanda from the DRC in the period May-July 2001" The processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-FAR members and *Interahamwe* militiamen fighting in the DRC, including child combatants, is underway now. Nevertheless, "There are few systematic data on the post-conflict reintegration needs from the point of view of the former child combatant and even less which identify these needs in relation to the reasons why children join armed forces or groups in the first place" (Specht, n.d.: 4), and little is known about the attention paid to the child combatants during the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in Rwanda (Peters, Richards, & Vlassenroot, 2003).

It is in a bid to fill this gap that the present study was undertaken, with a focus on Rwandan child combatants recruited by armed groups in the DRC. In addition, the proposed study is relevant in that it could contribute to a clearer awareness and understanding of the phenomenon of child combatants. Moreover, as will be discussed

later, the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants are crucial phases in a broader peacebuilding process, in the transitions from war to peace. As argued by IPA-UNDP (2002:1) “the successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants are crucial to achieving a lasting peace”. Regarding peacebuilding in the Great Lakes Region, it is obvious that sustainable peace and security may remain just a dream if the implementation of DDR programmes ends in failure. This is true because, for example, failure to enable ex-combatants to get capacities and skills relevant for accessing livelihoods may result in their retaking arms and engaging in armed conflict.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Literature review

The processes of disarmament demobilisation and social reintegration of combatants have been a central focus of a number of previous studies. The related experience proved that these processes take different forms due to the nature of conflict or to the socio-cultural, political and economic realities of each country involved. However, according to all study cases referred to in this section, it is obvious that disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration of child combatants remain problematic. Child combatants and the girl child in particular, are given lower consideration in these processes.

2.1.1. The cost of unsuccessful demobilization process

In Mozambique, the successful peace agreement (Rome Accord) was concluded in 1992 and the war between RENAMO and the Mozambican Armed Forces reached an end (Lamb, 1997). Commenting on the demobilization process at the end of this war, Cock, (1994:6) notes,

> "The present situation in Mozambique illustrates the need for demobilization to be promptly effected (…) At present discontented soldiers are a major source of instability in the country. Their discontent relates to the non payment of salaries and delays in the transport home which is guaranteed to them by the law".

Most of the Peace Agreements and UN Peace Keeping Mandates (Mozambique, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Liberia) have failed to address the crucial issue of reintegration. As a result of this, there are many former combatants who have neither found employment nor been given the land or other benefits, as they had been promised. As the issues of landownership and the distribution of resources are often causes of violent conflict, it is crucial to address

the issue of reintegration as soon as possible in the post-conflict situation in order for violence not to return, (Swedish Government)[2].

Alluding to Liberia and Sierra Leone demobilisation process, Ambassador Johnnie Carson mentioned that armed ex-combatants are a volatile and destabilising group who represent a security risk to fragile transitional governments and to economic reconstruction. He argued that for the sake of sustainable security, economic development and a consolidated peace, ex- combatants should be successfully reintegrated; otherwise, they will almost certainly become involved in political or criminal violence[3].

In Mozambique, before rejoining their respective villages, all demobilised combatants were registered and received a civic education including "general information on the peace agreement, counselling and information on civilian life, the reintegration programme and employment and training programme; functional literacy training; and public health and environmental awareness training" (Taju, 1998).

2.1.2. Gender issues in the demobilization process

Most case studies reveal a real gender-based discrimination in these processes. In Mozambique, "Ex-combatants are predominantly men. The dimension of female involvement in the military activities and the number of them was never clear in the process of demobilization and integration" (Taju, 1998:35). In the same vein, McKay & Mazurana (2001) argue that the international community failed to recover the majority of girls given by RENAMO forces to regional leaders, in part because they failed to recognize girls' unique post-war predicaments. This claim was also made by Thompson (1999) cited by Peters *et al.* (2003:17), arguing that "DDR for RENAMO cadres in Mozambique likewise failed to address the reality of girls and women forced to serve as 'wives', cooks, farm labourers and porters for RENAMO".

[2] http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/04/39/66/b61a2f08.pdf
[3] Ambassador Johnnie Carson, Opening remarks, Workshop on Demobilization, Reintegration and Reconciliation of Soldiers and Combatants, Nairobi, March 20, 2001

In the same country, many of the women associated with fighting groups were abducted for sexual services, and did not benefit from DDR when they did not qualify as ex-combatants and did not want to resettle with their "partners." DDR initiatives have failed to acknowledge women combatants. For example, the demobilization programme in the mid-1990s only granted resettlement allowances to men and only men's clothing was issued (Baden, 1997) cited by (Fusato, 2003)[4].

Associated Press cited by Mazurana & McKay (2001:2) notes that in Sierra Leone, "although girls constitute 30 percent of RUF's total forces, of the 1,213 children released by RUF in May 2001, only 15 were girls")**.** In Angola, 8,500 boys were demobilized, no girls, despite the fact that the Angolan armed forces forcibly recruited girls and rebel forces extensively used child soldiers, 30-40 percent of whom were girls (McKay & Mazurana, 2001)

Additionally, women ex-combatants have specific needs relating to children, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV-AIDS, and difficulties obtaining skills to earn a living. However, evidence from different countries such as Namibia, Chad and Nicaragua recount similar experiences for female ex-combatants relating to domestic violence linked to their husbands' sense of insecurity due to unemployment or recent release from the armed forces, (Fusato, 2003). Demobilized women also faced resentment from local people and often downplayed their leadership skills to win acceptance (Fusato, 2003).

A study of ex- combatants in Eritrea revealed that women fighters found reintegration more difficult than their male counterparts, often because during the struggle they experienced relative equality with their fellow fighters. Following the end of hostilities, this equality was questioned (Fusato, 2003). In other cases, demobilization activities did not recognize and build on skills gained by women combatants during the conflicts. For example in Zimbabwe, although women in the armed forces were given considerable informal training as nurses, on demobilization they were often ineligible to qualify for the civilian nursing profession because of their lack of formal training ((Fusato, 2003).

[4] http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/demobilization.jsp

2.1.3. Traditional practices, values, and beliefs in the reintegration process

In Mozambique, due to the wrong doings of some combatants during the hostilities, it was not easy for those concerned to be accepted in their respective communities. In order to be accepted,

> "Some ex-combatants spent a good part of their demobilization money on gifts to village elders. That played an important contribution to being accepted in the village, becoming part of the "social security" … Most ex-soldiers had to undergo cleansing rituals in order to be accepted, and this had an impact both on the acceptance by the community and as well the feelings of the ex-combatant him/herself,"(Mashike, 2000).

These ceremonies and rituals, provided or conducted by the communities especially for the demobilised soldiers settling in rural areas of Mozambique, have been the major avenues to healing (Alden, 2003). They played a key role in civilianising the ex-combatants and to create a sense of community (Taju, 1998).

According to Thompson (1998), this very cultural approach was also used to promote socio-psychological reintegration of traumatised people. As RENAMO had succeeded in destroying people physically and emotionally by requiring combatants to violate their cultural norms, these same norms helped Mozambicans to promote and nurture reintegration of traumatized children. "From 1987 when the first boy soldiers returned from RENAMO territory, Mozambicans decided that Western individualistic psychology had only limited insight to offer for healing. In 1983 and 1984, modern techniques were employed in centres, along side traditional ones, with the traditional proving itself to be more efficient" (Thompson, 1998:3).

Similarly, in some villages of Sierra Leone (Coalition Against the Use of Child Combatants, 2004) and in Uganda (Hardy, 2004), returning ex-child soldiers underwent traditional or religious rites of cleansing their sins, and offering the victims the opportunity to seek reparations in the traditional manner. However, some communities

in Sierra Leone insisted that former girl combatants undergo genital mutilation as part of their reintegration (Coalition Against the Use of Child Combatants (2004).

Further, (McKay & Mazurana, 2004:47) found that in Angola, community-based rituals were performed upon the ex-combatants, arguing that,

> "The performance of these rituals and the politics that precede them transcend the particular individuals concerned and involve the collective body. The family and friends are involved and the ancestral spirits are also implicated in mediating for a good outcome… the rituals are aimed at asking for forgiveness, appeasing the souls of the dead and preventing any future afflictions (retaliations) from the spirits of the dead, and in this way closing the links with that 'bad past".

Obviously, in some societies, cleansing process is a prerequisite for people's reintegration, especially in rural societies, as it washes off the dangerous blood of war which can contaminate the community. Whether this traditional healing mechanism is practiced during the reintegration process of ex-combatants depends upon the cultural or religious beliefs of each concerned society.

2.1.4. Exclusion of child combatants from the DDR programmes

In some cases, not only female child combatants are excluded from the demobilization process, but also male ones. For example, in Angola, in April 2002, a ceasefire was concluded to end the war between UNITA and the government. According to the Luena Memorandum of Understanding, the government forces were to be restructured and UNITA's ones to be demobilized except its 5,000 soldiers who were to integrate with the government forces (IRIN, cited by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004:1). Children had been used extensively during the civil war by both government armed forces and UNITA. As many as 30,000 girls were estimated to have been abducted by fighting forces. An estimated 16,000 children in the forces of both sides required demobilization when the conflict ended (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004:1).

In the same country, during the demobilization exercise, in accordance with the recruitment age, under 18's were not integrated into the armed forces or, therefore, demobilized within the government-run demobilization program. That program was for adults only, including soldiers recruited as children but who were 18 by the time of demobilization (HRW, 2003). "The authorities classified the under 18's as family members and not soldiers, so that the former child soldiers did not get similar assistance to adults", according to a confidential source, cited by Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004)

Studies on the processes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration mainly highlight the marginalization of girl soldiers in the demobilization process, the exclusion of child combatants from the demobilization package, and the enormous challenge for reintegration, especially for children who lost their families or whose families were impoverished by the conflict (MacKay and Mazurana, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2004b)

To the best of my knowledge, no academic research has been conducted in Rwanda so as to document the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the Rwandan Hutu combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region in general, and, particularly child combatants. In Rwanda there is a general lack of research on the position of youth in the present (and former) Rwandan society mainly because of the sensitivity surrounding some groups of children – child soldiers in particular – and the fact that most of the persons working with children and youth are focused on one particular programme (Peters, Richards, & Vlassenroot, 2003).

The current study has therefore attempted to fill this gap by investigating the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the Rwandan former child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region. The above literature review is relevant to the current study in that it raises critical issues in the DDR processes especially those related to specific needs of child combatants, as well as those based on gender. The themes highlighted above are therefore useful to this study in that not only

have they inspired the research questions and interview guide, but also have enlightened the discussion of the findings.

2.2. Theoretical framework

This research focuses on a key issue in transition from war to peace.

2.2.1. Key concept definitions

2.2.1.1. Peacebuilding

The International Development Research Centre, IDRC[5], defines peacebuilding as "the pursuit of policies, programs and initiatives that seek to create the conditions for war-affected societies to transform or manage conflicts without violence in order to address longer-term goals for peaceful co-existence, democratic governance and sustainable socio-economic development". It includes "actions which support political, economic, social and military measures and structures aiming to strengthen and solidify political settlements in order to redress the causes of a conflict" (Aid Workers Network)[6].

As Cock (1999:1) argues, peacebuilding "has four main, interrelated components: demilitarisation, social reconstruction, democratisation and development". Peacebuilding focus goes beyond the conflict symptoms and therefore "negative peace (ending the war) should be the first stage in the process of building positive peace (removing the causes of the war)" (Galtung cited by Cock, 1999:5). This is what Kingma (2000:25) highlights by arguing that "peacebuilding should advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people, and address the roots of conflicts". Kingma adds that "the broad peace-keeping process could indeed be supported by activities such: election monitoring, strengthening and sensitizing a police force, development of activities involving people from various sides in the conflict, psychological counselling, support to human rights advocacy and monitoring groups, etc." (*ibid.)*

Likewise, Boutros Boutros Ghali highlighted the same argument by suggesting that "in order for peacebuilding to be successful, comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures, which will consolidate peace, advance a sense of confidence and well being

[5] www.idrc.ca/en/ev-7010-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html+define+peacebuilding&hl=en
[6](http://www.aidworkers.net/management/military/pso_terminology.html)

and sustain economic reconstruction should be pursued" (Boutros Ghali cited by Lamb,1997:2). This may require both military and civilian involvement. The number of activities or mechanisms is virtually infinite. Peacebuilding mechanisms are virtually infinite and include, among others, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants, monitoring of elections, protection of human rights, reforming or strengthening government capacity, economic and social reform and reconciliation (Boutros Ghali cited by Lamb, 1997:2).

2.2.1.2. Demilitarisation

Demilitarisation is defined by Cock (1999:23-24) as a process which consists in "shifting power and resources away from bloated, capricious, unaccountable and expensive armed forces towards social and economic development". Further, Cock (cited by Lamb, 1997:3) tries to make sense of the concept "demilitarisation" by showing its components: "disarmament, cuts in military spending, conversion of arms industries and the eroding of the ideology which views violence as a legitimate solution to conflict and an effective means for and defending power".

It is important to note however, that the existing literature lacks clarity on the distinction between the concepts of peacebuilding and demilitarization. This situation entails what Lamb (1997:2) terms "analytical confusion", and therefore challenges researchers to fill this gap. Focusing on the African continent, Colletta *et al.* (1996a) argue that demilitarisation is a precondition for reviving civil society, reducing poverty, and sustaining development, and highlight that revitalizing civil society entails the promotion of local associations, community participation, and peer accountability, all of which reduce individual fear, enable collective condemnation of violence, and strengthen local security, (*ibid*.). From the above definitions, one can argue that demilitarisation is a component of and a precondition to sustainable peacebuiliding.

2.2.1.3. Disarmament

According to Odeh and Sullivan[7], disarmament requires that combatants are stripped of their weapons, and DDR programs often utilize a trade-in system, such as weapons for cash. In terms of peacebuilding, Lamb (1997:5) notes that "Disarmament and weapons control is a preliminary step towards demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants". Ashraf highlights that "the separation of the users from the weapons (which is the basic objective of this exercise) can take place at several levels, depending on the situation, quantities, type and logistics" (Ashraf, 2001, Appendex A). Berdals (cited by Lamb, 1997), argues that disarmament, like demobilization and reintegration, is an intensely political process, whose long term and sustainable impact depends on parallel efforts of political and economic reconstruction to resolve the root causes of conflict.

2.2.1.4. Demobilisation

Odeh and Sullivan define demobilization as "the assembly and registration of ex-combatants, orienting former soldiers on the value of the DDR program, and transporting ex-combatants to desired locations at a time that is in synchronization with civilian life, such as a crop and schools" (Odeh and Sullivan, *op.cit*:1).

Defining the concept of demobilisation, Cilliers (1995:5) says that it is "a process through which armed forces of a government and opposition parties shed themselves of excess personnel after a period of conflict. Typically, demobilisation programmes include the provision of some short term social reintegration assistance".

As the same author argues, demobilisation involves the assembly, disarmament, administration and then the discharge of former combatants with a compensation package and/or assistance programme in place. (Cilliers, 1995:5) also notes "the exact cut-off between where demobilization ends and social reintegration begins differs from country to country which tends to lead to a degree of confusion".

While the above definitions focus exclusively on the military personnel, Kingma (2000:26) argues that demobilization "includes the reduction of the size of regular

[7] www..yapi.org/rpchildsoldierrehab.pdf.

military and paramilitary forces, as well as the number of civilian personnel employed by the armed forces". The author brings in the dependents of military personnel as an additional category of people that the demobilisation programme should take into account. This category is obviously important because in most cases, combatants to demobilise are adults with wives and children, and the demobilisation package is likely to be insignificant if it overlooks the latter dependents of combatants to demobilise.

Cock *et al*. (2003:18) define demobilisation as "a planned process by which the number of personnel under arms and in military command structures are significantly reduced. It includes the reduction in size of the regular military, paramilitary forces, as well as rebel groups (sometimes after their integration into new regular armed forces)".

The definitions given by Cock *et al*.(2003) and *Cilliers* (1995) to the concept of demobilisation highlight two important aspects. The first one is that demobilization can involve the regular military, paramilitary as well as the rebel groups' combatants. The second aspect of their definitions is that the purpose of demobilisation is the reduction of the military personnel. Therefore, instead of reflecting a global vision, the two definitions of the concept of demobilisation (Cock *et al.*; Cilliers) have a limited scope in that they are likely to be particularly close to their case studies. For instance, the definition given by Cock *et al*. is exactly related to the demobilisation context of Southern Africa (Mozambique, Namibia, Angola, South Africa, etc.), in general, and South Africa, in particular, where a number of ex-combatants was reduced after creating the new representative national army. It is probably in the same way that Cilliers emphasized the fact that demobilization process involves *"armed forces of a government and opposition parties"*.

However, the scope of the current study goes beyond the extent of the two definitions for two main reasons. The first and main one is that the logic behind the disarmament and demobilization of the Rwandan Hutu combatants in the DRC is not the reduction of military personnel after a fusion of two or more belligerents. The point is rather that these combatants are not only foreigners in the DRC but also threaten Rwandan security and are likely to include some of the Rwandan genocide perpetrators who have to be

prosecuted for their alledged crimes. All these combatants are therefore supposed to be disarmed and demobilized. It is now obvious that it is not a question of reducing the military personnel but the necessity to break them up. The second reason for which my study goes beyond the definitions of Cock *et al*. and Cilliers is that the disarmament and demobilisation processes do not involve two parties as the above authors highlight. The Rwandan Hutu combatants in the DRC are not party to any peace agreement and their disarmament and demobilization does neither involve those of the Rwandan regular forces nor the Congolese ones.

From the above and for the purpose of this study, demobilisation refers to a process which involves the assembly, disarmament, administration and the discharge of all former members of militia and armed groups stated in the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (see p. 2 above).

2.2.1.5. Reintegration and social reintegration

With regard to reintegration, I am fully in agreement with Cock *et al*. (2003) when they argue that it is a process by which former soldiers make the transition from a military life to a civilian one, where ex-combatants and their dependants achieve financial independence through involvement in paid employment or productive activities.

The reintegration of ex-combatants may be at the same time economic, political and social (Ball cited by Mashike, 2000); (Colletta, 1996a). As far as social reintegration is concerned, it is a process through which former soldiers and their dependents consider themselves to be part of, and are accepted by the communities in which they live and society at large (Cock *et al.*, 2003:18; Kingma, 2000: 28). The purpose of social reintegration is to assist with the integration of former combatants into productive civilian life; and this suggests ongoing supportive programmes often lasting several years, of training, support, counselling, and selective intervention (Cilliers, 1995:5). This is the definition that the current study uses.

It is relevant to conclude this conceptual discussion by arguing that the processes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants are not only indicators of

demilitarisation but also of peacebuilding because they are inevitable stages, among others, in transition from war to peace.

2.2.2. Civil-military relations theory

Civil-military relations is defined as "the distribution of power and influence between the armed forces and the civilian authority" (Nathan, 1997:13). Because of the military's capacity for organized violence in societies, civil-military relations are a critical issue. This capacity may be used to fight against external aggression as well as to damage internal political institutions or overthrow them, (Nathan, 1997). In democratic societies, the governing principle is "civil supremacy over armed forces", while in authoritarian states, it is the reverse and armed forces are above the law, (Nathan, 1997).

Owens (2003) raises the central issue of civil-military relations as follows:

> "In order to ensure its security, society delegates the use of force to a subgroup within society. How does society ensure that this subgroup does what it is supposed to do, without turning on society itself? If the military is weakened in order to ensure that it will not turn on society, it may face defeat on the battlefield".

If the military is given everything it needs to ensure that it will prevail on the battlefield, it may be in a position to launch a coup. But even short of a coup, there is always the possibility that the military will simply not obey the civilian authorities" (Owens, 2003:2).

A civil-military relations theory was developed by Samuel Huntington in 1957 during the Cold War opposing the former Soviet Union to the United States. His primary prescriptive contribution was to identify a way for the United States to meet the Soviet threat without giving up civilian control. Huntington called his approach "objective control" of the military by civilians. This objective control simultaneously maximized military effectiveness and efficiency on the one hand and subordination of the military to civilian authority on the other.

The key concept in this approach is military professionalism. This requires a bargain between civilians and soldiers. On the one hand, civil authorities grant a professional officer corps autonomy in the realm of military affairs. On the other, a highly professional officer corps stands ready to carry out the wishes of any civilian group which secures legitimate authority within the state. Huntington (cited by Owens, 2003) contrasted this vision with a worst-case scenario he called "subjective control": the systematic violation of the autonomy necessary for a professional military. Huntington argued that forcing the military to defer to civilians in the military realm would lead to failure on the battlefield.

The military supremacy over the civilian power is not only a threat to political institutions but it may also be a threat to peace in that, in case of a military coup, peace is disturbed and fear prevails among civilians. Moreover, military coups have historically been sources of political frustrations, refugees' afflux and rebellions in many countries. Changing civil-military relations in the transition from war to peace is therefore an essential step in the peacebuilding process. However, in my study, the civil-military relations theory will not be taken into account because the study focus relates to the transition from military to civilian's life- an aspect of the transition from war to peace, rather than civil-military relations.

2.2.3. Human needs theory

Human needs theory was developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a generic or holistic theory of human behaviour (Cunningham, n.d.). Burton (cited by Cunningham (*ibid*.), and Hakvoort, 2002) argues that unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies and unless in every social system there is distributive justice, a sense of control, and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability and conflict are inevitable.

Hakvoort (2002) further states that human participants in conflict situations are struggling in their respective institutional environments at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs - needs such as security, identity, belongingness and love

recognition, and development. They strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs.

In the present study, this theory is used for two reasons. Firstly, the theory helps to investigate the extent to which unmet human needs among children have contributed to their easy recruitment as combatants. Secondly, the human needs' theory is used in this study in a predictive sense i.e. in understanding the likelihood for former child combatants to resume military activities in case that their basic needs are not met. Throughout the study, the emphasis is on the social context. Needs and their satisfaction are socially defined.

2.2.4. Human resources approach

The human resources approach involves both the development and utilisation of human resources. Human resources utilization is the extent to which available human resources are deployed effectively for the maximum achievement of individual, collective, organizational or national objectives (Nubler, 2000:49). Harbison (cited by Nubler (*ibid*.) maintains that the goals of development are the maximum utilisation of human beings in more productive activity and fullest possible development of the skills, knowledge and capacities of the labour force. Nubler (2000:52) established a link between human resources utilization and development, on the one hand, and the reintegration of ex-combatants on the other hand. He argues that human resources utilisation during demobilisation and reintegration refers to the effective deployment of existing skills, qualifications and competences of ex-combatants for the maximum achievement of individual, social, organizational or national goals and objectives of demobilization. He suggests however that effective utilization of those skills, abilities and competences requires supportive policies and complementary measures helping ex-soldiers to make use of skills in civilian life (Nubler, 2000:58). However, most studies on demobilization in Africa suggested that most ex-combatants have very little or no skills and knowledge (ILO, 1995; Klingebiel *et al*., 1995; World bank, 1993) cited by Nubler (2000:52). In case of lack of or of little skills among ex-combatants, Nubler (*idem*, 60-67) maintains that the training of the latter is vital for their successful economic and social integration.

The current study uses this framework to assess the extent to which the demobilisation and reintegration processes of former child combatants involve the development of human resources and meets their needs.

2.2.5. Ethnic identity and ethnic armed conflict

Ethnicity plays a key role in many armed conflict especially in Africa mainly when it comes to access to both economic and political power. There is much literature on ethnic identity and ethnic armed conflict (Enloe, 1973; Horowitz, 1985; Rex & Mason, 1986; Schmidt & Schroeder, 2001). According to Horowitz (1985:7) in general, "ethnic identity is strongly felt, behaviour based on ethnicity is normatively sanctioned, and ethnicity is often accompanied by hostility toward outgroups". In country after country, political parties and trade unions are organised ethnically; and armed forces are frequently factionalised along ethnic lines. Control of the state, and exemption from control by others are among the main goals of ethnic conflict (Horowitz, 1985). In Rwanda, it is commonly argued that political power and access to economic resources have been, since the pre-colonial era, determined by ethnic belonging (Mamdani, 2001; Des Forges, 1999; Nkunzumwami, 1999). However, ethnic affiliations are not the only determinants of human behaviours in all situations. These three authors also highlight that the anti-Tutsi ethnic ideology enforced by the post-colonial government has resulted in the 1990 Rwandan armed conflict and the 1994 genocide.

In this study, an ethnic group and ethnic conflict perspective is used to investigate the role played by the ethnic ideology in the recruitment of the Rwandan children for military purpose, and how the demobilisation and reintegration programmes deal with this issue.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study population

In order to have the required information for this study, two categories of informants were targeted. These included actors in the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of the Rwandan child combatants; and secondly former child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region but were already demobilised in Rwanda for at least six months.

3.2. Study sample

Due to the financial and time limits, a total of 37 persons only were selected among the above categories and included 17 key informants from intervening bodies: Rwandese Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (RDRC), NGO's, community leaders, parents/guardians and neighbours of the former child combatants. In addition, 20 former child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region but were already demobilised in Rwanda were interviewed.

The key informants were found in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, because it is where a number of NGO's and government commissions have their headquarters, and in Mutobo District, the area of study where former child combatants, parents/guardians and community leaders were found. Given that former child combatants are scattered in different villages, and that their residences were therefore not known in advance, the snowball sampling technique was used**.** As defined by Greenstein *et al.* (2003:36), a snowball sampling *"is used to target difficult-to-reach people by asking some of them to direct the researcher to others of the same group***".** In fact, the first person contacted was requested to tell me another person falling into his/her category, until I found the complete number of the sample.

Community leaders also helped especially in identifying demobilised former child combatants 13 of whom were directly interviewed at their homes in Mutobo district, while 7 others were interviewed at Gacuriro Centre (Kigali City) where they were attending a one-year vocational training course in different sections. As far as key informants are concerned, I identified them during my contact with the RDRC Child Protection Officer.

The physical identification of respondents was based on their status, i.e.: for key informants: to be an organisation leader or someone directly involved in the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and /or social integration of combatants; for child combatants : to be a former child combatant already demobilised at least for six months.

3.3. Data collection instruments

The aim in qualitative interviewing is "to provide a framework for a subject to speak freely and in his or her own terms about a set of concerns which the research brings to the interaction and whatever else the subject may introduce", (Ferreira, 1982: 212-213). For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data.

For the sake of confidentiality, reliability and the interviewees' security guarantee, I used block notes to write down responses from the interviews. Given that interviews were carried out in Kinyarwanda (respondents' and researcher's mother tongue), I have translated my notes into English. This means that the quotes may not reproduce exactly the responses of the respondents.

3.4. Data analysis

"The qualitative proposal needs to show how its data will be analysed and how the proposed analysis fits with the other component of the study" (Punch, 2000:74, and "having collected the data from the field, the purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the accumulated information" (Vithal &Jansen: 1997:27).

After the field work, the data collected were analysed. At this stage, responses from interviewees were grouped following the items asked. Once grouped, the responses were read so as to understand their meanings and their relationships with the research question; then the findings were analysed on the basis of existing literature and the theoretical framework.

3.5. Ethical issues

"All social research involves consent, access and associated ethical issues, since it is based on data collected from people and about people" (Punch, 2000:75).

One of the *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices* adopted by the Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, provides that the *"rights of children involved in the demobilization process must be ensured and their rights must be respected by the media, researchers and others"* (UNICEF, 1997:8).

It also recommends that,

> "a code of conduct for journalists should be developed in order to prevent the media exploitation of child soldiers. This code should take account of, *inter alia*, the manner in which sensible issues are raised, the child's right to anonymity and the frequency of contact with the media" (*ibid*).

Before embarking on the fieldwork, the research proposal was submitted to the Wits University's Research Ethics Committee which made relevant comments that were taken into account. In addition, prior to conducting interviews, all interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study, as well as about how and why they had been selected. Moreover, I ensured that the children's consent was freely given. Respondents were also informed especially about their right to participate voluntarily and to withdraw at any time during the interview, without giving any reason, and with no risk for them. After being clearly informed about the study, a consent form was signed by every major respondent, while an assent form was signed by a parent or a guardian for a minor respondent.

Likewise, for the sake of confidentiality and anonymity, no name of interviewees was required as far as the former child combatants were concerned. Anonymity was also observed for some key informants who required so. No children's photographs were taken. All block notes used for interview coding are kept secret for my own use only. In addition, I gave my address to the interviewees so that they may contact me in case of any issue or any side-effect from this research.

3.6. Study limitations

This study is aimed at investigating the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of the Rwandan child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region. As mentioned earlier, the central question that the research addresses is "how are the specific needs of child combatants addressed in the process of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of the Rwandan Hutu rebels?"

However, this study has a number of limitations which restrict the generalisation of the results to all former child combatants in Rwanda who fought in the Great Lakes Region. The first limitation is related to the sample structure which included male former child combatants only because no single female former combatant could be found to participate in this study. Plausible factors explaining the absence of former female child combatants will be discussed in the second chapter. The absence of female former child combatants has restricted the data collection on female combatants' singularities in the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the Rwanda former child combatants. This constitutes not only a problem for the generalisation of findings, but also for understanding how the specific needs of female child combatants are being addressed.

The second limitation of this study resides in the fact that due to the time and financial constraints, the sample was drawn from one district (Mutobo district), while the country included 106 districts. Although Rwandans constitute one people (territory, language, history, etc.), there may be some sub-cultural differentials which are likely to differentiate Mutobo district from others. Subsequently, those differentials may for example determine the way former child combatants are differently received in their community.

The last limitation consists in my incapacity to get in touch with the armed groups from which the former child combatants come, and to visit MONUC assembly point in the DRC. This has particularly restricted the research insights on the process of children's recruitment, their life and their disarmament, as well as the MONUC assembly point process and facilities.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the research on the processes of disarmament demobilisation and social reintegration of the Rwandan child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region. The central question of the study focuses on investigating how the specific needs of the child combatants are addressed in these processes. Prior to doing so, the study analyses the background of the child combatants with a focus on the dynamics of recruitment and their life as combatants.

The findings were made possible and drawn from individual semi-structured interviews. The study involved 20 former child combatants. In addition, 17 key informants were interviewed. Interviews were conducted with former child combatants in Mutobo District (Ruhengeri Province), and at Kagugu Vocational Training Centre (Kigali Capital City) where some of them were attending a one year vocational training. Key informants were interviewed both in Mutobo district (home for main respondents) and Kigali Capital City (where many intervening NGO's are based). The findings are presented in the sections below. The discussion of findings for each section is done at the end of the section.

4.1. Characteristics of respondents

All twenty former child combatants interviewed were males because, as mentioned earlier, no female former child combatant was found on the ground to be interviewed. At the time of interview, eighteen in twenty former child combatants were eighteen and elder while two were still under eighteen years old. Fourteen and six were respectively under eighteen and eighteen or older at the time of demobilisation. Seventeen were twelve years or older, while three were under twelve years old at the time of recruitment.

In the same vein, in twenty former child combatants interviewed, three were recruited in 1996; ten in 1997; six in 1998 and one in 1999. Obviously, the majority were recruited during the highest times of insecurity, that is to say, in 1996 when the refugee camps were destroyed and as the first Congolese war started, in 1997 during the rebels'

incursions in the north-western Rwanda, and in 1998 during the second war of the Congo.

Regarding the family status of the child combatants at the time of recruitment, three were living with their two parents, three with one parent, six orphans or separated from both parents but living with an adult, eight orphans or separated from parents and living alone.

As far as the level of education is concerned, at the time of recruitment, two had never been at school, eleven were between primary one and primary three; six were between primary four and primary six; one was in secondary two. In other words, fourteen or (70 percent) of 20 child ex-combatants/ex-child combatants interviewed were recruited when they had not yet attended primary four. As nine of them put it, they did know neither to read nor to write before they arrived in the rehabilitation centre in Rwanda.

Concerning the country in which the children were recruited, eleven were recruited in Rwanda, and nine in the DRC. The majority of the former child combatants interviewed had been recruited during the insurgent's attacks in northern Rwanda, in 1997, 1998 and 1999. In addition, all these respondents who were recruited in Rwanda had been recently repatriated from Zaire (current DRC) either voluntarily or forced by the RPA.

With regard to the armed groups of which the respondents had been members before demobilisation, 4 belonged to the *Armée pour la Libération du Rwanda* (ALIR)[8], 12 belonged to the *Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), one was affiliated to the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie/Goma* (RDC/Goma)[9], and three were affiliated to Mai Mai. It should be noted that most of those who said they were members of the FDLR had also belonged to ALIR before they (ALIR) renamed

[8] This is a Rwandan armed group which renamed itself FDLR after being blacklisted by the USA as a "terrorist" group. They were accused of having killed 9 tourists including Americans, British and New Zealanders in Bwindi National Park , in the DRC (United States Department of State, 2004).
[9] RCD/Goma is a former Congolese opposition armed group backed by Rwanda. Today they are in the Government in Kinshasa. The Deputy-President Azarias Ruberwa is one of the high ranked figures of RCD/Goma.

themselves FRLR. Concerning the key informants, their details are presented in table I below:

It should be noted that the above characteristics, except age, were not determined prior to data collection.

Table I: Characteristics of key informants

Informant's name	**Organisation**	**Position held**
Alexis Rusagara	RDRC**	Child Protection Officer
Emmanuel Havugimana	RDRC	Director of the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Child ex-Combatants of Ruhengeri (CREER)
Ally Mugyema	RDRC	Social Worker (CREER)
Didi Koteuski Slobodan	MONUC	DDRR Officer
Emmanuel Tegera	Save the Children UK	Project Officer
Anita Ingabire	UNICEF	Project Officer
Catherine Mukantabana	ICRC	Coordinator of the Research Unit
Anonymous (3 informants)*	Mutobo District	Local authorities
Anonymous (7 informants) *	Mutobo District	Residents

*: These informants have formally requested that their anonymity be preserved

**: Rwandese Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission

4.2. Changing identity: the recruitment of children

One of the consequences of the armed conflict and the genocide of the Tutsi for the Rwandan children was their recruitment for military purposes. The recruitment of Rwandan children occurred in three main waves. The first wave took place between 1995 and 1996, among the Rwandan refugees hosted in the camps such as Mugunga, Kibumba, Katale, etc. in Zaire. Many ex-FAR also lived in these camps, and some of them still held their arms. The recruitment was done by members of ex-FAR and *Interahamwe* militia, both defeated by the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA). The recruitment aimed at mobilising human resources in order to overthrow the new government in power in Rwanda, after the genocide. This recruitment involved mainly children who had been separated from parents or whose parents had been killed either naturally or by the war in Rwanda or by the cholera epidemic in Goma, just after the

massive arrival of refugees. Children whose kin were militarily active were also recruited:

> "My father was a sergeant in the FAR. We lived in Kigali before the war and we were separated from our parents as we were running away after the fall of Kigali. I was living with my elder brother in Mugunga refugee camp. One evening, a member of FAR came to tell us that they were writing names of people who wanted to go to liberate our country from the Tutsi ethnic group, our enemy. I was therefore convinced that I had to join. My brother gave his name. So did I. The following day, the same man came back and took us to the training zone", (R.6)

Such a recruitment was reported by some other respondents.

The recruitment in refugee camps is illegal and unfortunately occurred while many NGO's including the most well known such UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC, WFP, etc. were operating in the camps. This highlights the failure of the International community to ensure that refugee's camps observe its civilian status. Ex-FAR and *interahamwe* militias were hosted among the civilian refugees in the camps where they lived on international assistance, while, at the same time, they were recruiting and training combatants for military purpose. In other words, the International community is perhaps partly to blame for having indirectly contributed to the occurrence of the political violence in the Great Lakes Region. This is true in that the International community failed to prevent the militarisation of refugee's camps. (Lischer, 1999:2) argued, "(r)efugee involvement in political violence, where it occurs, presents a serious threat to regional stability".

The same argument was given by Stedman & Tanner (2003) paraphrased by CISAC[10] (2003:8). In their study which focused on the geopolitical security environment surrounding militarized camps and the response of humanitarian agencies to Cambodian refugees along the Thai border in the 1970s and 1980s, Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s, and Rwandan refugees in Eastern Zaire from 1994 to 1996, the two authors found that,

> "Manipulation persists because the international refugee regime and major states have not identified a consistent approach to stopping it(…). Manipulation of

[10] Center for International Security and Cooperation

refugees has important ramifications for international security, turning some civil wars into larger protracted regional wars".

The second wave of recruitment occurred in 1996 when the first war of the Congo. When the troops led by Laurent Kabila launched an attack from the Eastern Zaire, the RPA- which backed Kabila's troops- also invaded the Rwandan refugees' camps in Zaire, destroyed them and repatriated refugees by force. Some refugees and most ex-FAR resisted this operation and ran away with their weapons throughout the Congolese forests. Again, many children were killed among other civilians, while others were separated from their parents or orphaned by that operation. Many children and adults who survived the killings were recruited by the resisting ex-FAR and *Interahamwe,* who tried to reorganize themselves in the Congolese forests. Those child soldiers were among the rebels who launched attacks in the Northern part of Rwanda (provinces of Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, Byumba and Kigali Ngali) since 1997.

In addition, many children interviewed for this study argued that after the destruction of the camps, some Rwandese refugees had managed to be hosted by some Congolese families until the second war of the DRC. However, the latter refugees were ordered by the RPA members who were fighting in the DRC- backing the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), to separate themselves from the "negative forces". Another wave of civilians including children joined the Hutu combatants, while others decided to return to Rwanda. These Rwandese children who could speak even Congolese languages (given that a number of them had spent nearly two years among Congolese populations) were recruited by ALIR, Mai Mai, RCD-Goma and other armed groups operating in the DRC.

The last wave of children includes those who were recruited by the Hutu rebels in Northern Rwanda in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

"The RPA destroyed our camp [Kibumba refugees' camp] in Zaire late 1996 and we came back to Rwanda. In 1997, infiltrators [rebels] attacked from the Zaire. They asked food and cooperation from the population and killed whoever resisted. The Rwandan army [RPA] counterattacked the infiltrators, but also killed many civilians accusing them of accommodating and feeding the enemy. They [RPA]

> killed my three elder brothers. My father had died in Zaire. I had no hope. We were no longer living at home. I hid here and there for 3 days, without eating. I didn't know my mother's and sisters' whereabouts. I thought I would be comfortable with the infiltrators and I therefore decided to join them. That's how I became a combatant", (R.2)

This finding is supported by the reports of Human Rights Watch (1998, 1999, 2000) and Amnesty International (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000) which all reported many killings of civilians in north and northwest Rwanda by both RPA and the Hutu rebels. This finding also concurs with Machel's finding (1996) which suggests that often children join armed opposition groups after experiencing harassment from government forces. Such a situation was described in Iraq where many young people have joined the Kurdish rebel groups, as a reaction to scorched earth policies and extensive human rights violations. It was also described in El Salvador, where children whose parents had been killed by government soldiers joined opposition groups for protection (Machel, 1996). Although, preventing the armed conflict is the best strategy to bar the use of child combatants, UNICEF(1997:2) claims that "Volunteerism into opposing armed forces can be reduced by avoiding harassment of or attacks on children, their homes and families".

Similarly, such a situation fits with the Burton's human needs theory which suggests that unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies, unless in every social system there is distributive justice, a sense of control and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability and conflict are inevitable (Burton, 1990, cited by Cunningham, n.d.). This theory draws attention to the individual's struggle for security, control and identity, suggesting that when basic needs are threatened, people and groups will react (Hakvoort, 2002).

Further, some children also reported that many forced recruitments by ALIR in the forests of the DRC during the first war of the Congo, and in the Northern Rwanda between 1997 and 2000. They argued that, given that many combatants had died or had also been forcibly repatriated by the RPA, ALIR combatants therefore undertook both

forced and voluntary massive recruitment among the Rwandan refugees in the DRC, and among civilian populations in conflict zones in Rwanda, including many children.

Other children were recruited by their kin who were also rebel combatants. In the words of one respondent,

> "Few days before the infiltrators' attack, my elder brother who had remained in Zaire came home in the evening. He told us that they [rebels] were about to launch a large-scale attack in Rwanda, and that we had to join them in the Volcanoes National Park for fear of being killed by *inyenzi* [cockroaches][11] during the war. My parents refused but I, my brother and two of my sisters agreed, and then next morning we followed him. We left not only for our security but also because I was eager to become a soldier, get a gun and therefore become powerful as other soldiers. We all integrated ALIR and became combatants"(R.17).

However, although no former female combatants could be found to participate in this study, all respondents argued that there had been female child combatants in their respective units in the DRC. Those girls had been also recruited either forcibly or voluntarily.

The findings on children recruitment for military purpose confirm previous reports on the use of child combatants in the DRC (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004; Watchlist, 2004). The use of child combatants is a violation of a number of international legal instruments such as the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the UN General Assembly (1959); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO, 1999); the Minimum Age Convention (ILO, 1973); the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (UN General Assembly, 1974); the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts (UN General Assembly, 2000); the Resolutions 1261(1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001) and 1460 (2003) of the UN Security Council; The Cape Town Principles and Best Practices (1997), etc. For example the latter maintains that " (a)

[11] When RPF-Inkotanyi attacked Rwanda in 1990, they were referred to by the then Rwandan government as "Inyenzi-Inkotanyi", and later on all Tutsi were equated with the "enemy" [rebels] and therefore also called Inyenzi.

minimum age of 18 years should be established for any person participating in hostilities and for recruitment in all forms into any armed force or armed group" (UNICEF, 1997:1).

From the children's testimonies, it is relevant to note that children are very vulnerable to violent conflicts in many ways, and are consequently likely to be enrolled in military services either voluntarily or by force. The fact that they are orphaned or separated from their parents or other adults contribute much to their recruitment for military purposes.

When children's basic needs-such as physical or psychological security, food, shelter, love, etc. are not met, the latter children could engage in military activities for "the search of security. The children often believe that the military- because of weapons- are able to do everything, and they rely on it expecting to get protection or whatever else they are denied by their society. This finding is similar to that of Machel (1996:12) which argues,

> "children themselves may volunteer if they believe that this is the only way to guarantee regular meals, clothing or medical attention. (…) Some children feel obliged to become soldiers for their own protection. Faced with violence and chaos all around, they decide they are safer with guns in their hands".

The same argument was made by Specht (n.d., 4) who maintained that,

> "Poverty, unemployment and overall economic decline due to the context of armed conflict is however known as one of the most important grounds for child recruitment. In a situation where families can no longer support their children, being dressed, fed and taken care of by an armed group is an appealing option to both children and parents".

Obviously, this enrolment in the military activities may be done either voluntarily, on the invitation of other combatants, or even forced by the latter.

The recruitment of children for military purposes has a negative impact on their own lives, their families, their community and on their country. As shown above, most children were recruited while they were at school age. They were therefore denied their right to education. As it will be argued later, while children are not physically and

mentally mature enough (UN General Assembly, 1959; 1989), the living conditions (work, health, food, etc.) are too hard to be endured by the former (children). The early recruitment of children - implying therefore the separation from their families- is also a denial of their right to the family and parental affection. At worst, given their physical and tactical natural weakness, child soldiers are often killed or mutilated during violent conflicts (Interayamahanga, 1994).

As far as the effects of child recruitment on the family, community and the country are concerned, it is important to note that when children are denied their right to education, it is not only a loss for the latter children, but it also impacts negatively on the country in terms of human resources, and therefore creates a threat to the national development. This is true also in case of death, mutilation and psychological impairment of child combatants. Figure I below presents the children's recruitment model in Rwanda.

For the model please see the attached excel file.

The conflict-to-conflict child recruitment model refers to the initial situation in which wartime entails many circumstances in which children are recruited to participate in armed conflict. This model describes a number of determinants of the children's recruitment during wartime. It is therefore obvious that during armed conflicts, children are likely to be recruited either voluntarily of forcibly because of different factors such as: (1) death of one or both parents/guardians, separation from parents/guardians, mutilation of parents/guardians, loss of family possessions/property, child/family displacement/exile; (2) ideological/political mobilization; (3) recruitment of child's next-of-kin; (4) need for armed group to get a bigger military personnel; and (5) the fact that in wartime combatants with weapons are perceived by people, including children as powerful persons.

(1): These variables entail the loss of family/children's livelihoods, parental affection and the hatred of real and/or perceived enemy of the children which all, in turn, create a state of physical and psychological insecurity in the child. S/he may feel the need to take arms to get both protection and livelihoods as well as to take revenge upon the "enemy".

(2): The warring parties are likely to use ideological or political mobilisation aimed at their existing and potential supporters in order to justify the cause of the war as well as to recruit new members. Sometimes this process creates identity issues and enhances stereotypes forging and ethnic cleavages. Children may be victims of this mobilisation and become therefore combatants.

(3): When some child's next-of-kin or relatives are recruited or are initially combatants, they may constitute role models for the former, and therefore enhance his/her voluntary recruitment.

(4): During wartime, warring parties may be short of military personnel (for example in case of death, desertion or surrender of combatants). They may therefore recruit by force among civilians, and children may be the most vulnerable to such an operation.

(5): During wartime, given that combatants have weapons and therefore are able to kill or save, they are considered as the most powerful. Children may enrol into warring parties in order to have a gun and also feel powerful.

4.3. Living as a child combatant

This section is aimed at describing the life of Rwandan children as combatants among armed groups in the DRC. It focuses on their training, activities as well as the main issues that they encountered. It should be remembered that due to ethical concerns, I had preferred not to interview children on their life as combatants for fear of evoking trauma crisis in case, for example, of abused females or other traumatic situations (UNICEF, 1997). However, two reasons made it inevitable to collect data on children's living conditions within their armed groups. The first reason was that on the ground, no female child combatant was found to be interviewed (i.e. the issue of harming abused female combatants was no longer relevant, though, on the other hand, the lack of female ex-combatants was itself a major limitation to this study). The second reason was that when it came to talk about current health-related issues experienced by former child combatants, they (respondents) themselves referred directly to their life as combatants.

After their recruitment, children were trained. The training took place both in DRC and in Rwanda (mainly in areas that rebels were then controlling). It included mainly arm/gun use, military tactics, physical exercises, military code of conduct and ideological/political education. With regard to the training on gun use, military tactics and physical exercise, there was no distinction between adults and children or between males and females. This part of the training was very painful to the children. All respondents reported that in case they showed tiredness or failure to perform any physical exercise during the training, they were often beaten. In addition, as a 14 year old child at recruitment said "if the training took place during rainy season, there was no excuse for children. You had to practice under the rain".

This finding is similar to that of Save the Children (2004b:12-13) in Sierra Leone where,

> "Child soldiers suffered a range of rights abuses during the war. In addition to their forced recruitment, many children were made to take part in or witness killing and other atrocities, including rape. Those who did not actually fight had to work for long hours carrying heavy loads, doing domestic chores, or raiding nearby towns or villages for food".

This is the reason why the UN General Assembly (1959) highlighted the necessity for "special care safeguards for children because of their physical and mental immaturity".

- **Ethnic indoctrination**

While the content of training was similar in all armed groups, the ideological/political education varied depending on the objective of each armed group and on whether the group was Rwandan or Congolese based. The majority of respondents- who were members of ALIR and later of FDLR- revealed that this education was mainly anti-Tutsi. In the words of one respondent, *"we were told that our situation was caused by the Tutsi who were in power in Rwanda, and that we therefore had to fight and overthrow them"* (R.1). This reflects how ethnic differences are mobilised to create ethnic antagonism.

In the same line, another respondent said they were told that,

> "all Tutsi are the same and that we won't have peace as long as they are still in power. We were also encouraged to fight and liberate prisoners and that otherwise, all Hutu will be precipitated into jail or be killed" (R.4).

Most respondents argued that they were urged to fight against their enemy [Tutsi] who "were determined to extend the Tutsi Kingdom over the Great Lakes Region". These are some phrases which describe well the ideological mobilisation: the "*Tutsi, our enemy*", *"Tutsi, a wicked ethnic group"*; the *"Tutsi, the source of our misfortune*"; the "*Tutsi must be eliminated*"; *"the power must come back to the Hutu"*.

With such a mobilisation which reflects serious hatred against the members of the Tutsi ethnic group, children learned to fight not the "military opponent" but the generalised group equated with the "enemy". It is real ethnic antagonism developed in and internalised by child combatants. This amplified the ethnic antagonism caused by the colonial rule and the Catholic Church (especially the early anthropologists) acting in favour of the Tutsi (formal exclusion of the Hutu from education system and the country administration). This is how Uvin (1996) describes the situation,

> "Under Bazungu [White people] control, the Tutsi were given a monopoly of access to these new sources of power. During most of the colonial period, the

> Bazungu believed that the Tutsi were more intelligent, reliable, and hardworking - more like themselves - than the Hutu. The Bazungu instituted a system of rigid ethnic classification that employed such "modern scientific" methods as the measurement of nose and skull size and required people to carry identity papers stating their ethnicity. Access to education and jobs in the administration as well as the army was almost exclusively restricted to the Tutsi"

However, the situation turned against the Tutsi later on mainly starting from the "Social Revolution" of 1959 (Mamdani, 2001; Nkunzumwami, 1996; Des Forges, 1999; Prunier, 1997; Des Forges). The Tutsi were since then officially excluded and discriminated against until some of them were killed and others forced to exile by the post-colonial governments. Such ethnic antagonism culminated on the one hand in the 1990 war launched by the RPF to claim Tutsi rights to repatriation and recognition as full citizens of Rwanda, and on the other hand in the 1994 genocide which claimed nearly a million of Tutsi and "moderate Hutu" (Mamdani, 2001; Nkunzumwami, 1996; Prunier, 1997; Des Forges, 1999; MINALOC, 2001).

Mamdani (2001:141) notes that until the RPA attack in October 1990,

> "the flip side of the Tutsi presence in the central state was that the Tutsi were carefully kept away from the organs of power: the army and the local state. While there was one Tutsi officer in the army, members of the army were prohibited by regulation from marrying Tutsi women. Similarly, there was an almost total absence of Tutsi from the organs of local state: there was only one Tutsi prefect, the prefect of Butare who was killed in the genocide, and not a single burgomaster. Though the Tutsi were defined as an ethnic minority and integrated as such within the central state, they were denied group recognition and were almost totally excluded from power in the local authority".

The ethnic indoctrination that the former Hutu child combatants were subjected to in the bush is therefore dangerous in that it contributes not only to hinder the peacebuilding process in Rwanda, but it also plays a key role in preparing another generation which might carry out another genocide, if nothing is done to counteract such indoctrination.

The same indoctrination is obviously evidence that genocidal forces still exist and do not regret the evil they did.

Children did not only learn to hate the Tutsi but also saw their colleagues (and/or themselves) killing them (Tutsi). Such an experience is very scaring for the children because, as Machel (1996:12) put it, "the lure of ideology is particularly strong in the early adolescence, when young people are developing personal identities and searching for a sense of social meaning". She highlights that "the ideological indoctrination of youth can have disastrous consequences".

Worse is that such an ethnic indoctrination targets children, among other people, who are expected to reintegrate the Rwandan society, torn by wars and genocide, and who are expected to be among the future leaders and educators. Such a hatred-based ideology that child combatants have learned, practiced or seen their adult colleagues practice, is likely to scar such children in their home communities after demobilisation, and in their adult life. This argument concurs with the social learning theory which suggests that people learn behaviour by observing the behaviour of others, (…) the social situation, as the context wherein behaviour takes place, is of great significance in the moral development of the children (Bandura and Bandura & Walters in Louw *et al.*,1998:60) . Also referred to as observation learning, this theory claims that,

> "when children see an adult behaving aggressively towards a doll, they can describe or act out the behaviour spontaneously or on request at a later stage, even though they had no opportunity to imitate the behaviour" (*ibid*.).

Fortunately, as it will be shown in the section on rehabilitation of child combatants, the RDRC is implementing a programme aimed at taking this challenge up.

In addition, some children revealed that they were part of incursions which targeted members of Tutsi ethnic groups and local authorities in Northern Rwanda. In the words of one respondent, "we were briefed to kill them because they were all enemies". According to some respondents, they were regularly reminded who their enemy was [Tutsi], and this was part of their daily conversations.

- **Sexual violence**

As far as the sexual life of combatants was concerned, all respondents except the former members of Mai Mai, maintained that sexual intercourse was prohibited among combatants. According to them, those who were caught in such behaviour were punished by being beaten (between 50 and 100 beatings) and sometimes shot dead. But they were allowed to get married or to have sex with their wives if they had any. However, two respondents from FDLR acknowledged that in their group, some of them could seek sexual intercourse with civilian females in their neighbourhood, provided that their commanders do not know it. The same respondents also argued that it was sometimes alleged that some of their commanders had regular sexual intercourse with some of the young female combatants of the same group, who even used to cook for them. One respondent claimed that in their ALIR battalion, a female child combatant had got pregnant and was immediately dismissed by the battalion commander because she was no longer fit for fighting[12]. According to the same respondent, this pregnant child probably went to the neighbouring Rwandan refugees' camp protected by ALIR[13].

Similarly, all three respondents, former members of Mai-Mai, revealed that their commanders used to have sexual intercourse with both female combatants and civilians, including female children. In addition, two respondents from the same armed group suggested that sometimes, they (both adults and children) could rape women and girls, especially after conquering an area initially occupied by an enemy. One respondent remarked that,

> " Where the population was against us, after chasing our enemy from the area, we sometimes had forced sexual intercourses with some wives or girls. We wanted to show their husbands and brothers that they were nothing in that they were not even able to defend their wives and sisters"(R.11)

These respondents did not report any case of a combatant pregnancy in their armed group. As there was no female ex-combatant among the sample of this study, it was difficult to collect accurate information about the sexual life of female combatants.

[12] The respondent argued that it was believed that not only the mother could no longer be active in the military, but also the baby could cry and disclose the group's position (hiding-place) to the enemy.
[13] Most respondents argued that there were many Rwandan refugees who resisted the RPA forced repatriation and preferred to move farther with ex-FAR members into the Congolese forests.

The above finding revealed that it was common for the Mai-Mai combatants to be involved in sexual abuse against women and that it was encouraged by the group leadership, as a way of humiliating the "enemy" and people under their protection. Both adults and child combatants were involved in such evil.

Sexual abuse was also reported by a few respondents from FDLR, although many reported that the practice was prohibited. The finding on sexual abuses confirms that of UNICEF (2005) which reported several cases of sexual violence perpetrated by different armed groups in the DRC, adding that some girls and women were raped after their fathers and husbands had just been killed by the rapists in front of the rape victims. According to UNICEF, this occurred mainly after the fathers had refused to publicly have sex with their daughters or wives in front of the killers. A similar situation was also described by Save the Children (2004b:13) in the same country where "(g)irls were often made to become the 'wives' of their commanders, and suffered physical and sexual abuse". This finding highlights how women's rights are violated during armed conflicts and as Machel (1996:22) claims,

> "(r)ape poses a continual threat to women and girls during armed conflict, as do other forms of gender-based violence including prostitution, sexual humiliation and mutilation, trafficking and domestic violence".

Such sexual abuse (in armed conflict situations) is a violation of a number of human rights instruments such as the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (UN General Assembly, 1974), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN General Assembly, 1993), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts (UN General Assembly, 2000), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989), the UN Security Council Resolution 1261 (UN Security Council, 1999:2), etc. For example the latter calls on all parties to armed conflicts,

> "to take special measures to protect children, in particular, girls, from rape and other forms of sexual abuse and gender-based violence in situation of armed

> conflict and to take into account the special needs of the girl child throughout armed conflicts and their aftermath, including the delivery of humanitarian assistance".

In all cases, sexual abuse committed or actively witnessed by child combatants is likely to impact on children in two main ways. Firstly, in the logic of the social learning theory described above, children who are encouraged to abuse, see/witness their colleagues involve in sexual abuse or who personally engage in sexual abuse, are likely to internalise such a behaviour; and may therefore adopt the same behaviour after rejoining their home community. This argument concurs with Machel's (1996:14) study which reported,

> "In a number of cases, young people have been deliberately exposed to horrific scenes. Such experience makes children more likely to commit violent acts themselves and may contribute to a break with society".

Secondly, by being involved in sexual abuse, children, like adults, are likely to contract HIV/AIDS and STDs. This is more likely to happen in war-torn societies like the DRC, given the high prevalence of unsafe sexual intercourse in wartime. Obviously, in armed conflict situations, there are often massive displacements of people, as well as destruction of infrastructure. Consequently, in cases of sexual abuse, people may not have access to condoms, for example, in order to have safe sex. Worse is that in such a situation the victims of violence have no power to negotiate the terms of the sexual relations, such as condom use. The result is likely to be the transmission of STDs and or HIV/AIDS from the abuser to the victim or vice versa. This argument is supported by Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana (2003) who suggest that a forced sexual encounter, such as rape, increases the risk of HIV infection due to bleeding and tearing. Women involved in violent relationships are less likely to ask their partner to use a condom, given that such a request may lead to more violence.

In addition, sexual violence is likely to cause unwanted pregnancy among female combatants. Considering the living conditions of combatants in armed groups like those fighting in the DRC, pregnancy becomes obviously a burden for female combatants who never or hardly have access to both prenatal and post natal care (health care, food,

shelter, *etc*.). This is likely to result in dangerous abortion or in death of the pregnant woman or the newborn.

When it comes to returning to their communities, say after demobilisation, pregnant girls and unmarried young mothers (either sexually abused or not) are likely to be stigmatised by their kin or neighbours. They are also unlikely to ever get married, while their children are likely to be ill-treated and stigmatised because their fathers are not known (Uwibambe, 2004). It is also argued that in Rwanda, "in order to get rid of unwanted pregnancies, women often induce abortion clandestinely, or they often precipitate the newborn into the toilets" (Uwibambe, 2004:32). Unfortunately, this study failed to collect enough data on the life of female child combatants, due to the fact that not one female former child combatant was included in the study sample, and that data on this very topic were collect from male child combatants.

- **Experiences of child combatants**

As fighters, Rwandan child combatants experienced a very hard life. Many were killed in the battlefield while others were seriously injured or mutilated. In addition, because of seeing their fellow group members being killed, they lived in a permanent fear of death. As one respondent remarked, "life was bitter and I was ready to die any time". He added that,

> "worse was that I couldn't even escape because not only I didn't know my way to Rwanda, but also if I could be caught trying to leave, I should be harshly beaten or sometimes immediately shot dead" (R.7).

Many former child combatants interviewed highlighted the same situation, suggesting that they are used to dreaming about war scenarios. Some of the respondents, referring to their experience, claimed that sometimes they experienced nightmares in which they see themselves killing the "enemy", or see their colleagues be killed on the battlefield.
Such fear of death was so traumatising that even today, according to some respondents, it is part of their recurrent nightmares. Part of their nightmares is also the loss of their colleagues in the battlefields, as well as the killings they were actively involved in. A

similar situation (nightmares) was also described by Ntakiyimana (2004) among the Rwandan children affected by armed conflict. This is the way he described it,

> "In my own house, I often witness nightmares among my own children. Recurring nightmares concern their dead mother or other dead relatives. Or they do dream that I was killed. As their mother was killed, they think I might be killed. When they are at school, I often have to travel to their school in order to tell them that I am still alive. But this did not really have long lasting effect" (Ntakiyimana, 2004:5).

This situation is likely to constitute long-term psychological effects on children. "An illustration is provided by Millwood (1997:3) who maintains that,

> "During events marking the 50th anniversary of the Second World War, this was poignantly expressed by many people who recalled the pain and sorrow they suffered as children at the loss of loved ones, and how such losses affected and continue to affect their lives".

Worse is that, according to the same author, the psychological and social effects suffered by one generation in many ways affect the next generation, partly through the parenting role.

In the same line, children suffered much as they had to fight through the rain, to run or walk over long distances and often without eating, to watch or patrol overnight and to fight for or pillage food and medication, to carry heavy loads (weapons, munitions, pillaged food, etc.), to be harshly beaten in case of failure to obey the commanders' orders, etc. In fact, the respondents reported that in the early years of the war in the DRC, they were supported by some Congolese populations who, on certain occasions, provided them with food.

Due to their natural physical immaturity, child combatants are therefore likely to fall ill more frequently than adults, which may result in death. In the same vein, what is more worrying is the punishments that children were subjected to when they failed to perform the military duties or requirements. The findings have shown that children were harshly beaten in such a situation. Machel's report (1996:13) has also described a similar

situation, suggesting that “children who are too weak to carry heavy loads are reliable to be savagely beaten or even shot”.

However, it was revealed that as the war kept on claiming many lives among the local populations, many of the latter populations started hating the rebels and subsequently refrained from supporting them. Therefore, in order to get food, the rebels started pillaging in villages or in neighbouring fields. Most respondents asserted however that during their war in northern Rwanda, they did not experience much food shortage because they had many supporters among the local population who provided them with food. They maintained also that some combatants were fighting in their own native areas. In other words, they could get food from their relatives and/or neighbours.

As far as medicines were concerned, the respondents revealed that they could difficultly get them after invading hospitals, dispensaries or public drug shops. They also claimed that they would use traditional medicines (herbs) from bushes or forests. However, some respondents maintained that there was a plane - allegedly from Kinshasa-, which, sometimes, dropped both medicines and arms/munitions.

Regarding the weapons that they used, apart some respondents who claimed that many (weapons) were dropped by a plane from Kinshasa, all respondents argued that they also used to get arms from the killed or captured enemies. The AK-47, Kalashnikov was reported by all respondents to be the main weapon that they used. The respondents asserted that it weighs 3.6kgs, adding however that this weight could increase depending on the number of magazines that each of the combatants was given. Most of them mentioned that the maximum number of magazines was 6 and that each magazine full of cartridges weighs 3kgs. This means that the maximum weight for a Kalashnikov rifle with 6 magazines is 39.6kgs. However, no respondent mentioned that he personally carried such a weight because, as most of them highlighted, they had not enough weapons or munitions and that, sometimes, a number of combatants could remain for a certain period without having any weapon. This could happen especially after being attacked and scattered by the enemy. As one respondent commented,

> "After each attack against our group, there was always at least one combatant who had lost his/her weapon, and it was not always easy to get a new one, unless new arms are provided by Kinshasa, or when we stripped the enemy of some of his arms"(R.2)

Kalashnikov is small and light, and its use enhances therefore the use of children in contemporary armed conflicts. In fact, as argued by Kaldor and Luckham (n.d.)[14],

> "While regular forces, especially international forces, will make use of air power and armoured vehicles, in general, the military technology used in these wars [contemporary] is often described as 'low-tech' (…) There have been huge improvements in small arms in the last few decades so that machine guns and rifles, for example are much lighter, more accurate and easier to use, even children can use them".

Similarly, Peters *et al.* (2003:15) argue that "(e)ven a child of ten is generally strong enough to handle a modern lightweight semi-automatic weapon".

This highlights that the endeavours to stop the use of child combatants should also focus among other things on prevention of the small arms manufacture. The latter prevention would also contribute to reduce or prevent the occurrence of many civil conflicts, especially in Africa, in which the traffic of such small arms has become easier and less controllable.

The situation of child combatants is very worrying in two main ways. Firstly, as argued earlier, child combatants are very vulnerable to armed conflict because of their being often a product of parents' death or separation during the war, as well as because of their physical and mental immaturity. Secondly, as the findings of this study have shown above, child combatants participate actively in many ways in abusing human rights: killing, sexual abuse, pillage, etc. This finding is parallel to those from previous research (Machel, 1996; Freedson, 2002) and highlights the necessity for all governments, armed

[14] In Cock, J. (2003) *The Sociology of War & Peace*, Reading Pack, SOCL 308, Second Semester, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (see page 112)

groups and the international community not only to protect children in armed conflict, but also to take all steps so as to avoid armed conflicts.

4.4. Disarmament and repatriation

This section describes different ways through which child combatants are stripped of their weapons and how they leave their armed groups, before reaching the demobilisation centre. Until the time that the data for this study were collected there was no report on forced disarmament of combatants by MONUC. The former child combatants interviewed have revealed different channels through which they had got information about Rwanda, and ways through which they had left their armed groups.

- **Accessing information about Rwanda**

All former child combatants interviewed acknowledged that they had got some information about life in Rwanda, when they were still combatants in the DRC. Four main channels of information were used**.** These respondents said that they used to listen to Radio Okapi (based at MONUC headquarters), Radio Rwanda, BBC and VOA. According to the respondents, the most programmes that they used to follow were the BBC programme in Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda-Kirundi[15]; VOA programme in Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda- Kirundi, Radio Rwanda in Kinyarwanda, and Radio Okapi in Kiswahili and Lingala.

However, given that some of the child combatants could not speak or understand Kiswahili and Lingala easily, most of respondents argued that the main sources of information about Rwanda were Radio Rwanda, BBC and VOA. Most ex-child combatants acknowledged that BBC and VOA had special programmes of family tracing and greetings which were the most popular among respondents. Radio Rwanda was also recommended by the same respondents for having advertised the solidarity camps for ex-rebels in the process of demobilisation. This was not however the case for the former members of the Mai Mai armed group. In the words of one of them**, "**we were not used to listen to Kinyarwanda programmes on Radio Rwanda, BBC and VOA for fear of

[15] Kinyarwanda is the mother tongue for Rwandans. Kirundi is mother tongue for Burundians but very close to Kinyarwanda.

disclosing our Rwandan identity"(R.20). This statement was also supported by his two former fellow combatants in the same group who contended that, as they could speak Lingala, Kiswahili and some Congolese local languages[16], they were therefore believed to be Congolese by their Congolese group members.

Further, most respondents asserted that although many commanders could not tolerate people who listen to radios, especially Radio Rwanda, some of the combatants had got their own radio sets[17] that they used to listen to. As one ex-child combatant argued,

> " our commanders did not want us to hear about positive things about Rwanda, because they believed that some combatants would desert and return to Rwanda" (R.9).

This argument is relevant in that, as it will be shown later in this section, some former child combatants decided to disarm and go to Rwanda, after hearing, from Radio Rwanda, of some testimonies from their colleagues who had arrived in Rwanda, and who were not ill-treated as they used to think. Most of respondents maintained that before hearing such testimonies, they used to believe that all combatants who return to Rwanda were immediately killed by the Rwandan regular army, police or genocide survivors. Others suggested however that until the time they returned to Rwanda, they believed that those returnees whose voices are heard on radios were immediately killed after their voices had been recorded.

Getting information about one's family, as well as information about a previous demobilisation of other child combatants has been identified as a strategy of reducing the likelihood of re-recruitment of ex-child combatants (UNICEF, 1997). The findings of the current study add to that of UNICEF by arguing that such information (about one's family and colleagues already demobilised) is a dynamic of enhancing the child

[16] As argued earlier, some children had been hosted by some Congolese families, after the former had been orphaned or separated from their parents or guardians in both the war in Rwanda and the one in the RDC. It is there that they were recruited by both different armed groups, and that they learned some Congolese languages.

[17] These respondents revealed that some of them had managed to buy radio sets thanks to the salary that they irregularly received. They could also obtain radio posts after pillaging some neighbouring households. Respondents from ALIR and FDLR (one group which changed the name) argued that, in theory, the monthly pay was FRC2000 ($20) in 2001 and FRC 10000 ($40) in 2004. However, they remarked that it was very irregular: 3 or 4 times a year. 4 respondents claimed however that they never got a salary.

combatants to disarm voluntarily, wherever possible. This is confirmed by the fact that some former child combatants interviewed had decided to escape after they had received information on their families' whereabouts and on the former colleagues who were already demobilised in Rwanda. This finding highlights therefore the necessity for actors to make every endeavour to insure that all child combatants get such information.

Further, most respondents remarked that listening to radio depended mainly on where they were located, claiming that when they were in remote areas, it was not easy to follow radio programmes. This is likely to be explained by the fact that most of the radio stations mentioned above broadcast in Frequency Modulation (FM) in the Great Lakes Region. Similarly, though most of radio stations (BBC, VOA, Radio Rwanda) also broadcast in Short Waves (Kiswahili programme for the two former and all the programmes for the latter) the two former radios are often not well picked up in some areas. The quality (power) of the radio set used is also likely to entail (un)successful picking up of the radio programmes[18]. In the same line, all respondents who had had access to a radio set argued that their receivers used FM only; they also reported that sometimes they could not use these radio sets because of batteries shortage. The two latter factors constituted therefore an obstacle to getting regular information about Rwanda in general and about the DDR processes in particular**.**

In addition, some respondents claimed that apart from radios, they had managed to meet with some MONUC field workers who sometimes came to sensitise them on voluntary disarmament and repatriation. This information was confirmed by the MONUC official in charge of the DDRR at its Liaison Office in Kigali. In fact, this official suggested that his organisation employs some field workers of Congolese nationality who enter some rebel controlled areas and talk face-to-face to the rebels, as far as disarmament and repatriation are concerned.

Furthermore, two children argued that they had got some written messages which were dropped by MONUC helicopters. These messages aimed at urging the combatants to cease fire and disarm voluntarily.

[18] I personally tested it when I was conducting interviews in Mutobo District, and when I was in Ruhengeri town (Rwanda).

- **Leaving the armed group**

With regard to the disarmament process, there are two main ways through which the Hutu combatants disarmed: either escaping from armed group or a non-voluntary disarmament. 8 in 20 former child combatants interviewed revealed that they had individually escaped from their armed groups, leaving their arms in the forests. As one of them remarked**,**

> " I was separated from my parents in 1997 when the war began in Zaire. I used to think that they had died. In 2001, I heard on the VOA that my parents and sisters had arrived in Rwanda. In their announcement, they urged me to return to Rwanda, if I were alive. They also informed me that they were living peacefully in Rwanda. I was very reluctant because in our armed group [FDLR] we used to believe that in Rwanda, most of members of the Hutu ethnic group had been killed by the RPA. In 2002, I heard again a similar announcement. Then I was convinced that my relatives were really alive and I started thinking about how I would escape from my group. I was particularly worried because two colleagues of mine had told me they had heard the announcement in question. I was afraid that they were keeping a close eye on me. Few days later, I and some of my colleagues were ordered to go to pillage some food in a closer village in Masisi. In our half way, I pretended to have a pee and I therefore managed to escape. I went to MONUC in Goma and they took me to Mutobo Solidarity Centre[19]"(R.5).

Six of the above eight respondents who had escaped used similar way to get to MONUC offices either in Goma or Bukavu, prior to repatriation to Rwanda. Three were members of Mai Mai, two came from FDLR and one from the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD). Going to fetch food from neighbouring fields and going to a local market were the common pretexts used by those who escaped. One former child combatant, also from FDLR, had been helped by a MONUC social worker (Congolese national) to get to MONUC office in Goma.

[19] This is a demobilisation centre, in Northern Rwanda. It used to host both child and adult combatants before being discharged. However, since January 2004, all child combatants are taken to the Centre for Rehabilitation of child ex-combatants of Ruhengeri, before the discharge.

The radio has played a key role in the disarmament of the above seven former child combatants. In fact, except one child who had been sensitised by a MONUC social worker, others claimed that they decided to escape either after hearing on radio the voices of their colleagues who escaped earlier and who were at the demobilisation centre (Mutobo Solidarity Centre), or after hearing of announcements from their kin on radio.
Further, three children argued that in their armed groups, they had discussed in discretion about escaping. But as they maintained, the discussion occurred only between best friends because as one respondent remarked,

> "You had to be confident of who you are talking to. Otherwise he would betray you by disclosing that information. Subsequently, you should, in turn, be taken as a group betrayer, and then be shot dead" (R.11).

Many of these children who had escaped reported that their discussion would not often involve female combatants because, in the words of one respondent,

> "they would divulge such information to our commanders because in most cases they were their friends. So we could be killed on the spot" (R.3).

This finding is likely to explain on the one hand, the reason why female child combatants could not escape, and further, why they are not demobilised as it will be shown under the demobilisation section below. On the other hand, this finding is likely to corroborate the earlier finding (see section on living as child combatant) which reported some sexual intercourse between female combatants and the group commanders.

Most of the respondents who escaped from their armed groups experienced hard trials when they were escaping. Some of them argued that they escaped while they did not know their way to Rwanda. This entailed walking over long distance without food. Two respondents claimed for example that it took them more than two days to get to a MONUC station or office. Further, some respondents said that the longer the distance, the more likely to be suspected, arrested, interrogated and eventually killed by local populations, sometimes hostile due to the conflict (war) atmosphere and particular to the rwandophone combatants.

As some respondents put it, the suspicion would occur especially when the one does not speak the local language. This is for example the reason why according to all the respondents who had escaped from armed groups, often they could not easily reveal his Rwandan identity before he reached a MONUC office, any other credible authority or NGO. *"You could not guess who sympathised with the Rwandan rebels or not"*, one ex-child combatant maintained, adding that *"both Hutu and Tutsi abused and killed people in Congo. A number of Congolese who see a Rwandan in the countryside kill him/her"* (R.12). Some respondents who had escaped from their armed groups argued therefore that they had to hide in bushes at night before reaching a MONUC station or office. This was not less risky because of many ferocious animals which dwell in such bushes namely serpents, hyenas, leopards, etc. They added that it was not easy to sleep in such a situation because of fear of ferocious animals. Another respondent said that he spent a night at a Congolese family that he had known in 1997 after they had been chased from the Kibumba Rwandan refugees' camp by the RPA.

Furthermore, most of the respondents who had escaped from their armed groups revealed that many children in their armed groups were willing to escape because of both harsh living conditions and the fact that they got good news about families in Rwanda. However, not all could effectively escape because of fear of both being caught trying to do so and the fact that they did not know their way to Rwanda or to MONUC offices.

In addition, asked why only male child combatants were being repatriated by MONUC, many respondents maintained that escaping was a real adventure that females feared to take. As one respondent argued,

> "I think that girls can not endure harsh conditions of escaping that experienced. It is not easy. They can even be easily sexually abused if they walk around alone, especially at night" (R.12).

This argument was supported by the MONUC official in charge of DDR**.** Likewise, many other key Rwandan informants backed the same argument, adding that female combatants are unlikely to escape because of the Rwandan culture which stigmatises female combatants. For example one key informant (an old rural man) believes that,

> "Girl soldiers are all prostitutes. The military job is for men, not for women. What do female combatants do if it is not to have sex with their male colleagues? A girl with a military background cannot find a husband, unless another ex-soldier. I do not think that a girl with a military background can respect her husband" (I.14)

The same view was also shared by two other female adult residents interviewed in Mutobo District.

In addition, some respondents remarked also that a number of female child combatants get married with some male combatants and can therefore not return to Rwanda if their husbands are not ready to return. In most cases, those married female combatants have got children with their husbands and may therefore no longer need to leave their new families. A similar situation was stressed by Save the Children (2001b:125) by suggesting that,

> "Girls in forced or consensual sexual relationships with adult commanders or older boys may be reluctant or afraid to leave – or commanders may not allow them to. Attachment to commander 'husbands', even if they are abusive, can be a powerful deterrent to demobilising. (…) Also, girls who were actually combatants (as opposed to 'wives') may feel strongly about being separated from boys in this process".

Further, some residents interviewed revealed that some female combatants, for fear of being stigmatised, are likely to report themselves as civilian refugees who return to Rwanda. As one old female resident commented,

> "It is shameful [for women] to return as ex-combatant" (I.15).

Another young woman remarked, "Nowadays, it is better to be at least a female ex-combatant from RPA, rather than from infiltrators[20]. The shame is not the same

[20] This is a translation of the Rwandan word "*Abacengezi*" used since 1996, first by media and government officials and later adopted by the population as a whole, to refer to the Hutu rebels' infiltrations into the Northern Rwanda, from the Rwandan refugees' camps in Zaire (current DRC). The term is still used today to refer to the Hutu rebels.

because the former are at least proud of war victory, while the former are seen as close to *Interahamwe* or genocidaires"[21] (I.13).

A similar finding was described by Musemwa (1995) in Zimbabwe where female ex-combatants were stigmatised and could not find civilian men to get married with after their demobilisation.

> "Those ex-combatants [female] who wished to marry found the civilian men reluctant to marry them. On realising that an otherwise attractive woman was an ex-combatant, a man might abandon interest. Female ex-combatants found it easier to marry ex-combatants, to whom they shared similar experiences and common understanding based on their relationship during the armed struggle. A group of female ex-combatants at a co-operative in Gweru disclosed that they were all married to male ex-combatants, and pointed out that this was a clear reflection of the people's general resentment towards ex-combatants" (Moto, 1990) cited by Musemwa (1995:44)

Likewise, Coulter (2005) claims that previous research has shown that women who have been active combatants are likely to become even more marginalised than other women in a society under reconstruction and peace building. Save the Children (2001b) also highlights the same argument by claiming that those who have been sexually abused or have had a child as a result of rape or a sexual relationship, presenting themselves in public can exacerbate their feelings of shame or fear of social rejection. And Farr (2002) cited by Coulter (2005:8) concludes that female fighters "do not occupy a position that can be easily reconciled with predominant gender ideologies".

The above finding highlights the necessity for actors to educate communities and change their mentalities with regard to their perceptions on female combatants. In many cases, females are recruited forcibly and become therefore combatants unwillingly. Besides being victims of forced recruitment, they are also stigmatised. Communities should therefore be taught to have compassion with such females rather than rejecting them. Even though the recruitment was voluntary, the need to educate communities still holds, because people's perceptions on military career should change so as to take it as a

[21] It should be well understood that no one of these two female interviewees identified herself as ex-combatant. Readers should therefore not make the unwarranted supposition that they are ex-combatants. They were interviewed among other residents.

domain that both male and female could join. This would encourage many females – except children- to involve voluntarily for example in national armies.

It should not be however understood that my intention is to enhance or promote militarisation. Here I argue that many communities are likely to stigmatise ex-female combatants because they still believe that the military domain is proper to men and that it is not normal for women to become soldiers. My assumption is therefore that when there will be a significant number of female in the army, people will find it normal for women to become soldiers and their negative perceptions on the latter (female soldiers) would significantly change. The military will become more and more an equal opportunity career, and gender-based stereotype around it would be mitigated.

As regards the fear of being caught while trying to escape, and the case of female combatants subject to sexual slavery, the peacekeepers should make all endeavours to meet with army commanders and try to convince them to release both child combatants regardless of sex and female adult victims of sexual exploitation. However, this suggestion is unlikely to be materialised for the Rwandan armed groups in the DRC because the US Government has labelled the ALIR/FRLR as a terrorist group to be tracked and brought to court. Furthermore, I argue that commanders of armed groups or national armies which recruit forcibly child combatants or use females in sexual slavery or exploitation should be arrested and brought before war crime courts.

Concerning the issues related to children's escape from their armed groups, the MONUC has tried, to some extent, to sort them out. As the MONUC DDRR officer interviewed at their Liaison Office in Kigali put it, his organisation has finally deployed its troops into the localities controlled by the armed groups. The rationale of such a deployment was mainly to help the combatants who are willing to disarm voluntarily to do so without any fear of being caught by the colleagues or the fear of long distance and all related-risks. The study was not able to assess whether this deployment is becoming fruitful. A further research is therefore needed. MONUC should also reinforce its strategy of dropping written messages by helicopters, and use more field workers in order to reach those who do not have free access to radio programmes. Like radio programmes, written messages

need to use a language understood by the combatants, although the high illiteracy level among the latter (especially child combatants who were recruited before they began or completed primary school) is also likely to interfere with the message transmission**.**

- **Capture or surrender**

On the other hand, 12 former child combatants interviewed were not voluntarily disarmed. They either surrendered or were captured by the RPA during the rebels' repetitive attacks and infiltrations in north-western Rwanda between 2001 and 2003. This is a story of one ex-child combatant interviewed,

> "In 2001, we [ALIR] came to operate in Rwerere District. After some days, we were short of ammunitions. We got very hungry for some days; many adults managed to run back to the DRC. The RPA shot on my leg and hurt me. I couldn't walk; so they captured me" (R.8).

Another respondent asserted,

> "We came from the DRC to fight in Gisenyi, in 2003. The national army [RPA] counterattacked and captured me. They took me to MULPOK in Gisenyi and detained me for three months. Life in detention was very hard; I could receive food once a day at 2 pm. Many people came to interrogate me but did not torture me. Three months later I was taken to Mutobo solidarity Camp. I met other ex-rebels waiting to be demobilised. I spent there two months and I was demobilised"(R.19)

Asked why nearly all combatants who had surrendered or had been captured by RPA were male, most respondents argued that not only majority of combatants in their armed group were male, but also that ALIR had planned a large-scale attack and subsequently, most female and weak male combatants had been advised to remain behind.

Although the capture has given them an opportunity to leave the army, the conditions in which they were captured highlight once more the bitter trials that child combatants are faced with such as death, permanent fear of death, bullet injuries, hunger, to mention but a few.

All captured or surrendered child combatants who were interviewed reported that they were interrogated by PRA soldiers and detained for at least one week before being transferred to Mutobo Solidarity Centre. No one of them reported being tortured. Detaining the captured child combatants for such a period delays the demobilisation and family reunification processes, and spreads death panic among the former child combatants. This is true because, most respondents who were captured and detained maintained that they believed that they were waiting to be killed after being interrogated. Their fear of death is also justified by the fact that it was commonly believed in their armed group (ALIR, FDLR) that the captured combatants (referring mainly to those whose voices are heard on radio) are killed after being interrogated and recorded. Such a detention is therefore a violation of child's right to a special protection.

In addition, six respondents who had been captured after being shot, as well as those who were sick acknowledged that they received health care in detention. They were however indignant that they were often interrogated by many people and that sometimes they ate once a day.

Such situations go against international principles and guidelines related to disarmament. For example the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (1999:2) urges all the warring parties to ensure that "children who take part in hostilities and are captured retain their right to special protection".

In the same vein, that child combatants were interrogated by many people at different times when they were in detention, is likely to be harmful to the former. In fact, such questioning by military personnel and eventually by journalists is likely to raise very sensitive issues which may worsen the psychological and emotional state of the child. It is with such concern that UNICEF (1997) warns that,

> "(s)ensitive issues should not be raised in the initial interview. If these issues need to be raised subsequently, they must be raised only when in the best interest of the child and only by a person qualified to raise such issues; (UNICEF, 1997:6), and that "(a) code of conduct for journalists should be developed in order to prevent the media exploitation of child soldiers. This

code should take account of, *inter alia*, the manner in which sensitive issues are raised, the child's right to anonymity and the frequency of contact with the media "(idem:8).

- **Repatriation**

With regard to the repatriation of the child combatants, the study has revealed that the latter (child combatants) come together with the adult combatants. The repatriation involves only the combatants who escape from their armed groups, because those of the second category - combatants who were forcibly disarmed- were either captured or surrendered themselves to RPA in northern Rwanda.

All eight respondents who had escaped from their armed groups maintained that they were repatriated to Rwanda by the MONUC which took them to Mutobo Solidarity Centre. According to the MONUC DDRR officer interviewed, child combatants are screened at the MONUC assembly point in Goma and Bukavu before repatriation to Rwanda. He explained that screening is a process which consists in checking the combatant's nationality, and whether they are really combatants (under 18).

The same key informant said that his organisation has got two sections respectively in charge of disarmament, demobilisation and repatriation (DDR); and child protection. After a child has been identified as combatant (this is done thanks to the demonstration of military skills) by the former (DDR), s/he is taken to the Child Protection Section which checks again whether this person is really under 18 and s/he is a combatant. When it is so established and that the child is really Rwandan, s/he is taken back to the DDR section for repatriation to Rwanda. In case the child is found to be Congolese, then s/he undertakes the demobilisation and reintegration processes in the DRC. On the contrary, if the child is found to be a Rwandan civilian (non combatant) s/he is given to the UNHCR for repatriation. It is also at the screening stage that the child's personal and family identification starts. As mentioned in the limitations section, I was practically not able to go to the DRC to talk with child combatants and their group commanders, as well as to visit MONUC assembly points.

Moreover, the UNHCR and Rwandan Ministry of Good Governance and Local Administration (MINALOC) are involved, to some extent, in the process of repatriation of combatants from the DRC. The Child Protection Officer (CPO) in the Rwandan Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) that I interviewed remarked that all the combatants repatriated by the MONUC/Bukavu, that is to say from South Kivu, transit in the Nyagatare Transit Centre in Cyangugu Province (South-Western Rwanda). This centre is managed by a MINALOC staff and funded by UNHCR. Initially, it is a transit centre aimed at receiving Rwandan refugees who return home from the DRC and Burundi. Both child and adult combatants are hosted together in the centre for at most two days, waiting to be transferred to Mutobo Solidarity Centre. The same situation was also reported by all the children repatriated by MONUC/Goma and Bukavu. They revealed that at MONUC assembly points, they stayed with adult combatants waiting for the repatriation. The failure to separate child combatants from adult combatants goes against the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices (UNICEF, 1997) which recommends that the two categories of combatants be separated since the disarmament stage for the good of the children, that is to say for example avoid the children's re-recruitment and other child abuses by adult combatants.

Lastly, it is important to note that it was not possible to assess how the specific needs of child combatants under the study were addressed during the disarmament process, due to the nature of this process – escaping, capture and surrender. In other words, this is not a planned process with precise actors, except media and MONUC intervention restricted to the dissemination of information to the combatants (without an immediate physical contact), and recently, the MONUC deployment of its military personnel in areas under the control of armed groups. It was therefore not easy to investigate who does what and how in this process, because, unlike in other countries such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Angola, Zimbabwe, etc., the disarmament process of the Rwandan Hutu combatants and other armed groups in the DRC is not a deliberate and coordinated process, involving two or several parties to a peace agreement. Until the fieldwork for this study, the MONUC had not got any mandate to disarm forcibly the armed groups in the DRC, while the leaderships of the latter armed groups were not willing to disarm voluntary. Obviously, the study has noted that it is with the demobilisation phase (at

MONUC assembly point) that actors start being actively involved in a planned and coordinated terms.

4.5. Demobilisation and rehabilitation

In the preceding section, it was argued that child combatants interviewed either escaped from their armed groups (voluntary disarmament), surrendered, or were captured by the RPA (forced spontaneous disarmament). When child combatants report themselves to the MONUC, the latter (their DDR Unit) disarms them and the Child Protection Unit documents them. Each combatant disarmed and demobilised is given a "*fiche de demobilisation*" (a demobilisation form) by the DDR Unit (MONUC). According to our interviews with the key informants from RDRC and MONUC (see Table I, p. 26), in theory, self-reported child combatants are demobilised at this stage. However, the demobilisation process goes on, in practice, in the rehabilitation centre. With regard to those captured or surrendered in the battlefields, the demobilisation process starts when they were taken to the demobilisation centre.

While MONUC deals with the disarmament, demobilisation (in the DRC) and repatriation of both child and adult combatants to Rwanda, the processes of demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration are initially coordinated by the RDRC in Rwanda. The RDRC activities are funded since 2002, by the World Bank's Multi-Country Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (MDRP).

Basically, according to the RDRC Child Protection Officer[22] and CREER director, the RDRC deals with (re)screening[23] the ex-combatants repatriated by MONUC and those who surrender or are captured in the battlefields; determining their entitlement to the demobilization and reintegration benefits; implementing and coordinating rehabilitation and reintegration exercises into families/communities; sensitising the local authorities and communities to receive and care for former child combatants; and ensure the follow

[22] [22] The RDRC has a Department specifically in charge of protection of child combatants. The department deals with all matters related to child combatants, supervises the CREER and interacts with other organisations working with child protection in Rwanda.

[23] Ex-combatants are re-screened by the RDRC in order to check the nationality, the age, the family and community of origin of the ex-combatants, and to make sure that no refugee has reported as a combatant so as to benefit from demobilisation and reintegration packages.

up after the discharge. Such a (re)screening is very necessary because the experience from other countries has shown that when the demobilisation process is undertaken within impoverished societies, civilians tend to report themselves as combatants in order to benefit from demobilization and reintegration packages. For example, Save the Children (2001b:130) remarks,

> "Non-combatant children are sometimes attracted to demobilisation sites or sent by their families in search of the benefits, or perceived benefits, offered by the DDR process. In high profile releases of children in Sierra Leone and South Sudan in 2001, for example, many of the children 'released' had never been child soldiers".

Initially, according to the former child combatants and the RDRC staff interviewed, depending on the border through which they are repatriated to Rwanda, child combatants (self-reported) are directly taken to Mutobo Demobilisation Solidarity Centre (those who come in through Goma-Gisenyi Border), and to Nyagatare Transit Centre[24] (those who come in through Bukavu-Kamembe and Kamanyola-Bugarama borders in Cyangugu province) before continuing their route to Mutobo Solidarity Centre. Both at Mutobo and Nyagatare centres, those repatriated by MONUC (self-reported) are screened for the second time (remember the first one takes place at MONUC Assembly Point in the DRC) by the RDRC to check whether or not they are under 18, Rwandan and really combatants.

For those who surrendered or were captured by the Rwandese army, they revealed that they were first detained in military camps or positions for a period varying from 5 days to three months before they were taken to Nkumba (Ruhengeri province) and Mudende (Gisenyi province)[25] solidarity centres – until July 2001; to Gitagata transit centre[26] -

[24] This is initially a transit centre for Rwandan refugees returning from the DRC and Burundi. It is funded by the UNHCR and managed by the Ministry of Local Governance and Social Affairs (MINALOC).
[25] Both were initially used as "solidarity camps" for Hutu refugees (the 1994 generation) returning from the neighbouring countries. In 1997, those who returned massively from exile, after the destruction of the refugees' camps in Zaire, and those returned mainly from Tanzania and Burundi underwent a two to three month "solidarity camp" which aimed at providing them with a new civic education and explaining to them the society project of the new Government in power since the fall of the Habyarimana's regime. Both centres were managed by the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), created in 1999.
[26] It was run under the auspices of the MINALOC.

until end 2002; to Mutobo Solidarity Centre[27] – during 2003**.** In each of these centres, they were screened by the RDRC to check their nationality and military status.

- **Rehabilitation programme**

According to the key informant from the RDRC, until July 2001, both child and adult rebel combatants, with no distinction, underwent a demobilisation process in Mudende and Nkumba Solidarity Centres. In both centres, former rebel combatants received a civic education including Rwandan history, genocide and its corollary, government structure, ethnicity in Rwanda, etc. No special attention was then paid to the child combatants and their special needs.

However, given that the number of child combatants captured in the battlefields increased significantly during the intense rebels' attacks in Northern Rwanda[28], child combatants were then separated from adults and were taken to Gitagata transit centre (funded by UNICEF), waiting to be united with their families. Eight former child combatants interviewed claimed that they spent at least one month at either solidarity camp with adult ex-combatants, before they were taken to Gitagata.

As maintained by the former director of the Gitagata transit centre (also current director of the CREER) and former child combatants interviewed, while waiting for the family reunification and social reintegration, former child combatants received a non-formal education and psychosocial support provided by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Save the Children (UK). They were also given some basic medical care. In addition, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) was conducting a family tracing, after which Save the Children carried out the family reunification. The same informant argued that this was not a rehabilitation centre as such, given that it had no adequate rehabilitation facilities, and children were just in transit to their families or communities of origin. What was mainly done in this centre was identification, documentation, tracing, reunification (IDTR). "As soon as the child's family was found,

[27] It is run under the auspices of the RDRC.

[28] It was revealed that between May and June 2001 over 2,000 rebels were either captured by or surrendered to the RPA. Among them were more than 350 children who had been forcibly recruited by rebel forces.

the child was immediately discharged and reunited", the same informant highlighted, adding that those who left earlier had not attended any rehabilitation except some one-month civic education programme attended either at Nkumba or Mudende Solidarity Centres.

- **Delayed discharge**

Surprisingly, some former combatants interviewed claimed that they spent between six and ten months in this centre, while they had also spent one to two months either in Mudende or Nkumba Solidarity Centres**.** The long stay in the centre was attributed by the former centre director to the delay in finding the children's family or native communities. Such delay in family reunification is against the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices (UNICEF, 1997:8) and Save the Children Federation (2001:23) which recommend that the "duration of the demobilisation process be as short as possible", in order to encourage the rapid return of the children to their families and communities. This is relevant in that, as Save the Children Federation (2001:23) suggests, "chances of re-recruitment may also be reduced when children are in families and communities rather than residing together in large facilities". This argument is true and holds even for the current study because, as the findings have shown earlier, many children were recruited and/or enrolled voluntarily after their parents or guardians had died or after they were separated from them.

It should be noted however that, despite the above argument, former child combatants should not be returned to communities where fighting is still underway or likely to take place, or when families and communities have not been well prepared to receive the latter children (Save the Children Federation (2001). This would hinder the reintegration process and would even enhance the children's re-recruitment. This study has for example found that some children (refugees) who had been repatriated from the DRC in 1996 and reintegrated into their communities, joined voluntarily the Hutu rebels to look for protection during the 1997/98 war or were forcibly recruited by the latter rebels.

- **Females not considered**

The Gitagata centre was not visited during the fieldwork because it no longer hosts child combatants. According to its former director, in total, the centre which was funded by UNICEF, received 366 child combatants, 2 of whom were females. However, the same informant revealed that those two female child combatants did not undergo any rehabilitation programme at all because "they were few and there were no facilities to receive females". They were immediately sent to their respective communities, and the informant seemed to not know their whereabouts. It was therefore impossible to trace and get in touch with them during the fieldwork for this study**.**

This finding highlights the persistent trends of neglecting or discriminating female combatants in the DDR programmes, while the latter female combatants have specific needs, related to their gender, which must be taken into account by all actors involved in the DDR programmes. Similar findings have been described in South Africa (Cock, *et al.*, 2003) and in Mozambique by Taju (1998), McKay & Mazurana (2001) and Thompson (in Peters *et al.*, 2003:17). For example Cock, *et al*. (2003:94) argue that "(t)here was significant focus during and after demobilisation on male ex-combatants. The needs of women ex-combatants were generally ignored".

The Gitagata Transit Centre was closed down late in 2002 because, according to the same informant, the number of child combatants coming in had decreased significantly, reaching sometimes zero. Since then it has become a rehabilitation centre for street children. However, it was found that no follow-up was done by RDRC to assess the living conditions of the former child combatants discharged from the same centre; and there was no effective involvement of the RDRC in their reintegration. In other words, there was no comprehensive, planned and coordinated demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programme. This is plausibly the reason why nearly all the respondents interviewed who had been discharged from that centre had not had any access to the RDRC medical support (except when they were still in the centre), and that some of them did not benefit from the RDRC education/vocational support after their discharge. Also consider that the CREER director revealed that the RDRC had recently issued an

announcement to call for the "forgotten" former child combatants to report themselves to the RDRC provincial office for registration and support.

In the meantime, due to the MONUC and different media campaigns for voluntary disarmament and repatriation, some child combatants escaped from their armed groups, and this increased again the number of child combatants returning to Rwanda. As the Gitagata transit centre had been closed down, all child combatants newly repatriated or captured, with their adult counterparts underwent a rehabilitation programme in Mutobo demobilisation camp.

At Mutobo, former child combatants underwent a rehabilitation programme with adult combatants in Mutobo Centre. This was a common programme which did not take into account the specific needs of children (adequate food, medical treatment, protection from any re-recruitment, psychosocial counseling, prevention from sensitive interviews or questioning, etc.).

- **Life in the CREER**

However, according to the informants from RDRC and Save the Children, MONUC, UNICEF and ICRC, the practice of not separating children from adult combatants was questioned by some organisations working with children – especially Save the Children, UNICEF, MONUC and ICRC. Subsequently, these organisations lobbied for such separation and the result was the opening of the Ruhengeri Rehabilitation Centre for Ex-child Combatants (CREER, a French acronym) in January 2004. This centre is run under the auspices of the RDRC.

The interviews with former child combatants (those who had undergone a rehabilitation programme at the CREER), the RDRC and the CREER staff revealed that before ex-child combatants come to the CREER, they are welcomed at Mutobo Solidarity Centre by a CREER social worker.

The latter social worker gives them a friendly welcome in these words,

> "My name is (the social worker's name). I'm one of those in charge of receiving and caring for the child ex-combatants, specifically those who voluntarily

> separate themselves from the armed groups in the DRC. Welcome in Rwanda, feel at home and free; we welcome you with love; I'm now going to have a short and free talk/interview with you about how you can join your other colleagues at the centre in Ruhengeri town"[29].

After such a welcome, the social worker fills in an identification form (presented as Appendix 10) which contains among other data, the child's name, age, sex, native community, parental status (parents alive or not), armed group belonged to, number of years in the army, tasks in the army, and his/her wishes. S/he is also formally asked: "Do you have any particular needs that must be taken into account before I take you to the CREER?"

The discussion with the child allows the social worker to conclude whether or not the child is really a former child combatant and therefore (in)eligible for the demobilisation and reintegration programmes. In affirmative, the child is immediately taken to the CREER. The identification form is co-signed by the CREER social workers one of them being herself female and particularly in charge of female ex-combatants. While the former social worker deals specifically with the former child combatants' specific needs, the latter is expected to care specifically for those of female ex-combatants.

The centre has got a total of 14 permanent staff and four security agents from the local defence forces whose characteristics are presented in Table II below:

[29] The researcher's own translation of the RDRC ex-Child Combatant Identification Form.

Table II: Staff's Details of the Ruhengeri Rehabilitation Centre for Ex-Child Combatants

Staff position	Sex	No	Qualification
Centre Director	**M**	**1**	**BA Philosophy & Sociology**
Logistician	**M**	**1**	**Licence (Honours) Administration**
Social worker	**M&F**	**2**	**BA Sociology; High School Diploma (A2)**
Teacher	**F**	**1**	**High School Diploma in Teaching (A2)**
Nurse	**F**	**1**	**High School Diploma in Nursing (A2)**
Hygienist	**F**	**1**	**High School Diploma (A2)**
Maintenance	**M**	**1**	**High School Diploma (A3)**
Cook	**M**	**4**	**P6**
Cook	**F**	**1**	**P6**
Gardener	**M**	**1**	**P6**
Security Agents	**M**	**4**	**?**

Source: Drawn from the interview with the Centre Director

The interview with the centre Director revealed that he has got extensive experience (nearly 10 years) working with vulnerable children. As said earlier, he was also the director of Gitagata transit centre for child ex-combatants. In addition, he has attended several trainings on projects planning and management, psychosocial support for vulnerable children, trainers' training on rights and protection of children's rights, principles and techniques of protection of the children's rights, etc., organised by Setym International, CNDH, UNICEF, Trocaire and MIGEFASO. As for the social workers, the centre Director claimed that they were trained on rights and protection of the rights of children and on psychosocial counselling organised by Save the Children, UNHCR and UNICEF, adding that he had no background details on other staff members. According to the RDRC Child Protection Officer, the CREER Director, and the informant from Save the Children UK, the staff training on the issues related to the child combatants had been run by the latter organisation (Save the Children UK).

However, it was not revealed whether other staff members such as the nurse and the teacher had got a specific training on interviewing vulnerable children such as child combatants. Such a training is vital for people who work with vulnerable children in that some specific techniques are needed when it comes to raise some health issues and

traumatic individual experiences. These people should have relevant skills because they are

> "responsible for anticipating direct and indirect consequences of the information-gathering activity as much as is reasonably possible. They should make sure that appropriate safeguards are in place to minimize adverse effects [on children]. They must ensure the safety and security of child participants including their physical and psychological welfare as well as their social and communal interests" (Schenk & Williamson, 2005:26-27).

It has been found that both the MONUC and RDRC have units specifically in charge of the child combatants. In addition, the RDRC, through its CREER has a staff (social worker) particularly in charge of female child combatants. Further, the creation of the CREER in 2004 marked a vital step in the processes of demobilisation and reintegration, given that the practice of not separating former child combatants from adults is against the child's interest and is likely to enhance the child re-recruitment and abuse (UNICEF, 1997; Save the Children Federation, 2001; Save the Children, 2004a). This finding highlights the attention paid and the place given by both the MONUC and the RDRC, to some extent, to the special needs of child and female combatants, as recommended by the UN Security Council (1999, 2000, 2001and 2003) in its resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379 and 1460. The latter resolution for example calls upon,

> "Member States and international organizations to ensure that children affected by armed conflict are involved in all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, taking into account the specific needs and capacities of girls, and that the duration of these processes is sufficient for a successful transition to normal life, with a particular emphasis on education, including the monitoring, through, *inter alia*, schools, of children demobilized in order to prevent re-recruitment" (UN Security Council, 2003:3).

Located at 3km from Ruhengeri town, the centre has got staff offices, a sick bay, dormitories, classrooms, a kitchen, toilets, a large courtyard and a football ground nearby. The same source revealed that former child combatants in the centre interact regularly with other children from the neighbourhood, in terms of recreational activities

such as sports and cultural dances. In addition, children have one day a week (Saturdays) to go for a walk in Ruhengeri town, and attend local church services on Sundays. In the same line, Wednesdays are open to children in the centre for visits by relatives or friends. The centre has also some fields that children are used to ploughing. Until June 2005, the centre had received 132 child ex-combatants whose age varied from 8 to 17.

According to the centre staff members and former child combatants (those whose rehabilitation took place in the same centre) interviewed, for a three-month period, former child combatants in the centre follow a rehabilitation programme focused on different themes such as literacy and numerical teaching, and civic education including Rwandan history (pre, during and post colonialism), ethnicity, genocide and its corollary, unity and reconciliation, judicial system (classic and gacaca systems), national security, national economy, good governance, State structure, decentralisation, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, tuberculosis, land tenure issues; and training on the planning of small-scale income generating activities. These themes are lectured by either the CREER staff or others qualified people from the RDRC rehabilitation department or other governmental institutions and NGOs.

As argued by the RDRC Child Protection Officer and the CREER Director, these components of the civic education programme for both former combatants and civilian returnees have been chosen so as not only to have the two latter (ex-combatants and civilian returnees) be familiar with the government programme and society project, but also to rid them of the ethnicist ideology preached by the genocidal forces both in Rwanda (before and during the 1994 genocide) and in exile (after the genocide).

In the words of the RDRC Child Protection Officer,

> "Those children have innocently been ideologically intoxicated with ethnicist and genocidal ideas in the refugees' camps and in the army. One of the tasks of the government in general, and the RDRC in particular, is therefore to endow them with a new ideology as they have now to live with those they were told to hate and kill".

In the same vein, all former child combatants interviewed appreciated positively such a civic education. As one of them remarked,

> "For example, before I was captured and brought to Nkumba Solidarity Centre and Gitagata transit centre, I used to believe that I couldn't live in Rwanda with Tutsi. But now, thanks to the civic education I received in the rehabilitation centre, I came to understand that Rwanda is for all the Rwandans with no distinction and that we all need to work hand in hand to reconstruct and develop our country" (R.8).

With regard to literacy and numerical teaching, former child combatants are divided into four groups or classes on the basis of their literacy levels and attend a daily 45-minute session. Thirteen former child combatants interviewed said that this programme (attended either in the CREER or at Gitagata) helped them much because two of them had never attended school while eleven others could hardly remember how to read and write (these were between primary one (P1) and primary three (P3) at the time of recruitment). Others were able to read and write when they arrived in the rehabilitation centre (either Gitagata centre or the CREER). In the CREER, children are given local newspapers and other documents all written in Kinyarwanda (their mother tongue) for individual reading practice.

Furthermore, the interviews with former child combatants (demobilised), the CREER Director and one social worker, revealed that as soon as children arrive in the CREER, the nurse and social workers dialogue attentively with them in order to check their physical and psychosocial health conditions. Those with any health problem receive medical care and/or psychosocial counselling depending on the nature of the problem. For cases which require medical or psychosocial expertise, these are transferred to the nearest hospital (Ruhengeri Hospital located at nearly 3km from the CREER), or to the Kigali Central Hospital (Centre Hospitalier de Kigali) and Kanombe Military Hospital, both in Kigali Capital City. As revealed by both the RDRC Child Protection Officer and the CREER Director, the RDRC has signed an agreement with those three hospitals to offer free treatment to former child combatants during the rehabilitation exercise.

After their discharge, the RDRC guarantees the payment of the annual medical scheme:[30] "*Mutuelle de santé*" for a period of two years to those who choose to attend formal and vocational education and those who experience serious and/or chronic health problems. Those who do not fall in these categories rely on their "own means" to get treatment after being discharged from the rehabilitation centre.

Moreover, all former child combatants interviewed maintained that when they attended a discussion on HIV/AIDS they were urged to proceed with voluntary counselling and testing. No one has declared to have tested for HIV /AIDS in the rehabilitation centre, but 13 claimed they later tested in their community. Others maintained that they would not test as they never had sexual encounters, while one remarked, "Why should I test for HIV/AIDS while we are told that the latter has neither vaccine nor cure?"

As regards health cases observed among former child combatants when they come to the centre (both Ruhengeri and Gitagata), the centre's Director, and the social worker interviewed, reported as "most common health problems", bullet/grenade wounds, bullets still in the body, chest pain or respiratory problems, heart cases, malnutrition, recurrent malaria, some organs mutilated, etc. Apart from these medical cases, the same respondents reported a number of psychosocial problems among the former child combatants. These include aggressiveness, delirium, insomnia, bedwetting, somnambulism, and nightmares. The two latter were reported by all former child combatants interviewed.

Concerning food, both former combatants and the centre director said that three meals are given per day: sorghum porridge for breakfast, rice, maize paste, maize grains, potatoes, beans and vegetables changeably for lunch and diner, and beef meat twice a week. This is a reasonable diet if compared with what child combatants used to eat in their armed groups and what they are expected to eat in their respective families after their discharge.

[30] This is a compulsory yearly prepaid medical scheme where each household pays an amount of money (non refundable) for medical consultation and treatment on behalf of each household member. The amount varies depending on the size of the household. Poor households unanimously identified and agreed upon by the local population are exempted and get treated free of charge.

The study has also found that, unlike the former child combatants who attended the Gitagata Transit Centre, those who underwent the CREER spent a shorter time (three to four months) in this centre before being discharged. This is a significant improvement if compared with the time many former combatants spent at Gitagata Transit Centre. As argued earlier, UNICEF (1997) recommends that the duration of children's stay in the demobilisation centre should be as short as possible. This is relevant in that former child combatants need to rejoin the families and communities for emotional or affective, and security reasons. For example one respondent who had spent eight months at Gitagata transit centre revealed that the longer the time he spent there the more anxious he was about his fate, and used to think that he would finally be killed after all the media had interviewed him. Actually this reminds what they were told by their group commanders (ALIR/FDLR) that those whose voices were heard on radio (those undergoing a demobilisation process in Rwanda) were executed after being recorded by journalists.

Obviously, the creation of the CREER has marked a tremendous step in the DDR processes by addressing to some extent a number of issues raised earlier. Former child combatants are separated from adults; the rehabilitation programme attempts to address the psychosocial problems and to offer medical, socialising, recreational, and educational services to former child combatants. Given the anti-social background of the former child combatants, these services take into account some specific needs of the latter former child combatants by creating a new social environment needed for an effective reintegration in both families and communities. It was for example found that former child combatants in the CREER attend church services regularly with local residents, play football and dance with children from the centre's neighbourhood, walk once a week to the neighbouring town (Ruhengeri), and receive visitors including relatives and friends.

It is obvious that such moments offer former child combatants opportunities to meet different people including those they were taught to hate and kill (members of the Tutsi ethnic group) when they were still in their armed groups. This finding reflects a recommendation by UNICEF (1997:11) that,

> "Recreational activities should be included in all reintegration programmes for war-affected children" because they "contribute to the children's psychosocial well-being, facilitate the reconciliation process and constitute part of their rights as children".

Moreover, the study has found that such opportunities for former child combatants to get in touch with the broader Rwandan community before returning to their respective families and communities were accompanied with a civic education on different contextual themes about Rwanda: history of Rwanda, gacaca jurisdictions, unity and reconciliation processes, government structure, Rwandese economy, HIV/AIDS and other epidemics to name but a few. Such themes and the psychological support offered to the former child combatants in the CREER are very relevant in healing the latter children psychosocially, given the impact of armed conflict on them (children) and the ethnicist indoctrination that they were subject to in their armed groups. This sort of rehabilitation is therefore a precondition to an effective social reintegration, given that, as argued earlier, what these former child combatants were told in their armed groups did not reflect the realities in Rwanda. This is also recommended by UNICEF (1997:11) that,

> "Psychosocial programmes should assist children in developing and building those capacities that will facilitate reattachment to families and communities".

It was further revealed that apart from the psychosocial support offered to former child combatants in the CREER, a medical history of the latter children is established through discussions between each child and the centre's nurse and/or the social worker. This helps to identify the child medical background in the military for a relevant follow-up. It was for example found that there are a number of health problems such as bullet/grenade wounds, bullets still in the body, chest pain or respiratory problems, heart cases, malnutrition, recurrent malaria, some organs mutilated, etc., as effects of war. The medical history check of each former child combatant is therefore relevant in that, without it such problems might not be addressed, while generally speaking, these children have no financial means to deal with them. This holds also for a number of psychological problems encountered by former child combatants as pointed out earlier.

Early interactions between former child combatants and the demobilisation or rehabilitation staff is an approach recommended by UNICEF (1997:9):

> "The impact of the conflict on children and their families must be assessed in order to develop effective programming. This should be undertaken through interviews and discussions with the children concerned, the families and the community, as well as the government, where appropriate. Information should be gathered as early as possible to enable preparation and planning".

It was not however easy to assess objectively whether 18 staff members are enough for the centre not only because the number of former child combatants who undergo the rehabilitation in the same centre varies depending on how many children have come in at a specific time, but also due to the fact that, to my knowledge, there are no international guidelines on how big the staff for a rehabilitation centre for former child combatants should be. One can however argue that should former child combatants report themselves massively from their armed groups, two social workers, one nurse and one teacher would be too few to deal with the latter children effectively; and the other support staff would be completely overworked.

Briefly, the study has noted that there was a significant shift in addressing specific needs of former child combatants in the process of demobilisation, through the creation of the CREER. Besides the above mentioned tasks performed in the rehabilitation programme, the RDRC through its CREER, with their partners conduct the family tracing, mediation and reunification. The three stages are described in detail in the discussion below.

4.6. Family tracing, mediation and reunification

While the preceding section has attempted to describe the rehabilitation process as a component of demobilisation of the former child combatants, this section adds to the latter by analysing family tracing, mediation and reunification as further components of the demobilisation process. As it will be shown below, effective family tracing and family mediation stages take place while former child combatants are in the rehabilitation centre, whereas family reunification coincides with the discharge of the former combatants and puts an end to the demobilisation process. However, like the

rehabilitation process, the family tracing, mediation and reunification stages are not without problems as will be shown below.

- **Family tracing**

The process of family tracing starts basically at the MONUC assembly points (identification stage) for the self-reported child combatants and continues in the rehabilitation centre. As argued in the preceding section, in the rehabilitation centre, all former child combatants are (re)-screened by the social workers. This gives more light on their identity (nationality, age, military status)[31]. Thereafter, a documentation form is gradually[32] filled in by the social workers and the nurse/medical doctor on the basis of data given by the child ex-combatant. The documentation form (presented as Appendix 7) includes the child's biographical information, health history (established by a doctor/nurse), past medical history of the child, check list regarding resources and health check (established by a doctor/nurse), child's life before recruitment, child's history of recruitment, and child's family history to name but a few.

When information is provided by the child with regard to his/her family; the ICRC undertakes the family tracing process. The latter organisation starts using that information to locate physically the child's relatives or community. In most cases, children write messages to their relatives. The ICRC takes these messages to the concerned people (if any) and the latter reply. As an ICRC staff interviewed maintained, "this is an effective way of creating contact between children and their relatives, and contribute effectively to the family reunification". All the former child combatants interviewed revealed that they had written to their relatives and had got feedbacks.

However, as highlighted by both the ICRC research officer and the CREER staff interviewed, there are some issues in the family tracing process. The first one is related to some relatives who are identified but are not willing to respond to the former child

[31] It was for example revealed by the social worker that three child ex-combatants had been found to be Congolese after (re)screening in the CREER and were repatriated to the DCR.
[32] This form is gradually filled in from the arrival of the child in the CREER till the follow-up visit after the child has been reunited with the family.

combatant's message, because they have taken/sold the child's property (for example when other relatives are dead or in exile) and do not therefore want the child back home.

A similar situation sometimes occurs when the kin to trace are genocide suspects or have been prosecuted by the "gacaca courts"[33]. One key informant claimed, "because some communities or individuals still label these former child combatants as killers or related to genocidaires, some relatives prosecuted in the gacaca courts, refuse to recognise their relationship with the child for fear of worsening their own prosecution" (I.9)

Another issue in family tracing is that sometimes, the child's relatives may not be in Rwanda (may be combatants still in the DRC or still in exile). This becomes problematic because, as remarked by the ICRC staff, her organisation (ICRC, the Rwandan Agency) cannot go abroad to trace a family, unless the ICRC agency in the country of interest intervenes. This requires however that the child gives enough details about the relatives to trace.

- **Family mediation**

When children's relatives have been identified and physically located by ICRC, the CREER staff (social workers) undertakes the family mediation process. This process was not run at Gitagata transit centre, as stressed by the CREER Director. Family mediation, in the context of the former child combatants in Rwanda, consists in meeting between the social worker and the relatives identified by ICRC so as to prepare them to receiving their former child combatants waiting in the rehabilitation centre. As highlighted by the social worker and the centre director, this task is not easy because in the beginning of the mediation process some families are reluctant to accept the child. Like with the family tracing, the same informants claimed that, because of the "genocide" or "killer" labels given to all Hutu rebel combatants by some people in Rwanda, some relatives who are genocide suspects become reluctant to receive their former child combatants for fear of worsening their prosecution situation.

[33] These are traditional/community courts restored by the Rwandan government to judge the genocide suspects.

In the same vein, interviews with the above informants revealed that when it happens that the traced relatives are not the immediate parents (father, mother) – when the latter have died or are in exile- some relatives tend to refuse the coming home of the ex-child combatants as these relatives have, in some cases, already appropriated or sold the property (house, land) of the deceased parents. However, in all cases, family mediation has succeeded to convince and prepare such relatives to receive the former child combatants.

Likewise, the CREER social worker and director revealed that some relatives are reluctant to accept their ex-child combatants because "they believe that the latter children are aggressive and would therefore cause trouble in the family". Here the task of the social workers is therefore to explain and convince the child's relatives that the child has undergone or is undergoing rehabilitation to prepare him to live in the family and community. In all cases, as the same informants maintained, the relatives finally accept to receive their children after their (relatives) fear was dissipated.

Further, some key informants revealed that some relatives become reluctant to receive the former child combatants because the latter relatives are so poor that they cannot accommodate the new child (former combatant) with their own children. In the words of one informant (resident),

> "Some families cannot afford food, school fees, clothes, and medical treatment for their members. How would you ask them to receive more children while they lacked someone to accommodate at least one or two children of theirs? This is demanding too much from them".

The above concerns highlight both the problems that the post-genocide Rwandan society is faced with, and potential problems to arise during the reintegration process of the former child combatants. In addition, this stresses the necessity of putting many efforts in the family mediation process with a well-trained staff (social workers) as recommended by UNICEF (1997), without which efforts, the reintegration process would be unsuccessful and, consequently, the former child combatants would be

susceptible to be re-recruited or involved in some indecent activities to look for livelihoods.

It should be noted that the family mediation process is also aimed at evaluating the family capacity to accommodate the former child combatants. As argued by the CREER Director, this evaluation focuses on the family's financial capacity to allow the child to have food, study, have access to medical care, clothes, etc.; and that there are no family conflicts that might hinder the child's effective reintegration**.**

Both the CREER director and the RDRC Child Protection Officer claimed that in case the family's capacity is found insufficient to accommodate the child, the family is given some money by the RDRC to afford the short-term material needs of the child. The RDRC has got a Vulnerable Support Window (VSW) aimed at strengthening the financial capacities of vulnerable families of the ex-combatants (both child and adult former combatants)[34]. The families identified for such support are trained by the RDRC in planning income generating activities, after which they are urged to elaborate proposals and submit them to the community leaders for appreciation. When approved, the proposal is funded by the RDRC to a limit of US$ 333. On the occasion of giving such amount, a managerial convention is signed between the RDRC and the beneficiary, and the latter convention is formally approved by the administrative district authority (the Mayor of the district). However, none of the former child combatants interviewed seemed to know about this VSW, though some of them maintained that their families were very poor.

With regard to the family conflicts, the same key informants argued that "no serious conflict has been remarked so far" and that "relatives for all former child combatants, except five others, have now been found"**.** However, when the same was last contacted by phone late December 2005 (for more light on some related issues), he claimed that even these five former child combatants had found their relatives. It was also argued by the same informant that the social workers are generally advised that should a serious

[34] Families of ex-combatants demobilised from the current Rwandan regular army also are eligible for VSW if they qualify for it (vulnerable families).

family conflict be observed, they would better look for another family which would be willing to receive the child.

The interviews have also revealed that when the child's family has been traced and when the family mediation has been successful, in most cases, the child's relatives come to visit the child in the rehabilitation centre. Such an event (visit) plays a key role in the family mediation process because both child and relatives get an opportunity to meet with one another and talk on different issues of concern (for example the child can get accurate information about those who were demobilised before). Furthermore, the child is now effectively convinced that (some of) his relatives are alive, and this dissipates his fear of being killed by the government as they used to be told in their armed groups[35].

Further, most key informants and former child combatants maintained that a community sensitisation is regularly made with regard to the necessity of receiving ex-combatants in families and communities. The central theme of such campaign is to convince the population that these ex-combatants are ordinary people rather than criminals and violent as some people generally label them. Such campaigns are mainly run by local leaders who use community meetings as a medium. Media such as radio, television and newspapers are also involved in such campaigns, though the frequency of their involvement depends only on that of the events they need to cover (e.g. ceremonies ending the rehabilitation programme; repatriation of ex-combatants, etc.). In other words, no media has a regular and specific focus on ex-combatants.

- **Family reunification**

When the rehabilitation programme is completed, the child's relatives have been traced, and the family mediation has been successful, the child is discharged from the rehabilitation centre. This marks the end of the demobilisation process, and the beginning of the reintegration one.

[35] As argued earlier, child combatants used to be told that most Hutu were killed by the Government army and the genocide survivors and that if they themselves try to disarm and return to Rwanda they would be killed too.

There are two ways in which former child combatants are discharged from the CREER. The first one is when the CREER staff directly takes each child to his/her native district. The child's relatives are invited to meet with the child, the district's mayor and other local authorities, and the CREER staff (social worker). On this occasion, a "handover form" (attached as Appendix 8) is signed (in three copies) by the child's relative, the child, the social worker, and the mayor of the district.

With this handover form, the child's relative takes the following commitment,

> "I freely accept the child whose name is mentioned above. I commit myself to make every endeavour to observe all his/her rights within my family, without any discrimination. Should family integration-related problems occur, I commit myself to report them to the nearest authority so as to have them sorted out accordingly"[36].

This involvement of local authorities is vital in that they have to play an important role in keeping on mobilising the communities on the necessity to accommodate the former combatants without stigmatising or discriminating against them. They also have to ensure that the child's rights in general and those of former child combatants in particular are observed by the families and community as a whole.

The second way of discharging the former child combatants consists of inviting all the district mayors concerned (i.e. those leading the districts from which the children's relatives come) and the children's relatives to meet at the CREER with the RDRC officials, provincial authorities and media (both national and international). The discharge ceremony is therefore organised at the national level and presided over by the RDRC chairperson. Like with the first way of discharge, the same handover form is signed during such ceremony. After the ceremony, children and their relatives are taken home either by the CREER social worker or are given a transportation fee.

The choice of the way in which former child combatants are discharged depends mainly on the number of children available for discharge. When they are many, the second choice is made, and in the opposite case, the first one. As highlighted by the CREER

[36] The researcher's own translation from the Handover Form for Child ex-Combatant.

director and the social worker, the second way of discharging the former child combatants plays a key role in mobilising the Rwandan population on their duty of receiving former combatants and help them to reintegrate their communities. Using the media, the chairperson of the RDRC takes such an opportunity to urge the population to not discriminate or stigmatise the ex-combatants, highlighting that the latter have undergone a rehabilitation programme which has prepared them to live with other Rwandans in the communities.

Furthermore, the second way of discharging the former child combatants serves as an opportunity, for both the chairperson of RDRC and former child combatants through the media, to sensitise other combatants still in the Congolese forests to lay their arms down and voluntarily return to Rwanda. Such calls are relevant in encouraging other combatants in general and child combatants in particular to return to Rwanda. It should be remembered that some of the former child combatants interviewed had decided to escape from their armed groups after listening to such calls.

Interviews with former child combatants, the RDRC and CREER staff revealed that prior to the discharge, each former child combatant is requested to choose an activity that s/he will embark on as a part of the socioeconomic reintegration process. There are three options including formal education, informal education (vocational training), and income generating activities. Each option is supposed to be financially supported by the RDRC. As far as income generating activities are concerned, the study found that one of the rehabilitation programme components was training on formulation and implementation of small-scale income generating activities including commerce (shop), farming of goats, sheep and poultry; and Irish potatoes farming.

This participatory approach gives an opportunity of involving former child combatants in selecting the kind of activity they would become engaged in so as to generate income or to shape their future once they have returned to their communities. It is relevant in that each former child combatant makes her/his own choice for her/his future rather than being forced to do what s/he does not like. This down-top methodology is encouraged by UNICEF (1997:11) which recommends that, “(p)rogramme development and

implementation should incorporate the participation of the children and reflect their needs and concerns with due regard for the context of reintegration". However, it was found that despite the choice they had made, many of those who were discharged at Gitagata transit centre had not yet had access to what they had opted for. Remember that the first ones were discharged in 2001 and 2002, while this study was conducted in 2005. It means that some of those former combatants have spent more than three years in their communities without reintegration support from the RDRC. This is likely to hinder the DDR programmes because without consistent support, former combatants are likely to engage in criminal activities or to be re-recruited for warfare.

The above argument is supported by that of Stephen (1995:65) which remarked that in Mozambique, ex-combatants warned that "(w)ithout adequate special treatment for the demobilized, we will cause more wars". Similarly, Cock (1993) in her study in South Africa has argued that unless the material needs of ex-combatants are met, the discontented demobilized soldiers represent a considerable security threat through political or criminal activities. It is in the same vein that Baynham (1992) cited by Cock (1994:1) also highlights that,

> "a serious danger is that groups of guerrillas or ex-soldiers will feel let down and disappointed by the lack of employment opportunities and that they will use their military training and guns, to go their own way".

Moreover, it was found that prior to the discharge, children are given a take-home kit which includes a supernet (mosquito net), a blanket, a pair of bed sheets, two sauce pans, a basin, a piece of washing soap, two plates, and a hoe. According to the CREER director, neither food nor money is given to these children at the discharge time, unless the families' financial capacity is found to be very critical.

According to the RDRC and CREER staff, until early July 2005, 554 former child combatants had been demobilised by the RDRC. 366 child combatants were demobilised at Gitagata transit centre, 130 were registered at the CREER, 88 of them had been already reunited with their families/relatives; and 58 had been demobilised at Mutobo Solidarity Centre. Thirty-seven were still in the CREER waiting to complete the

rehabilitation programme and the family reunification. One had been killed in a car accident near the CREER, while three had fled when they were at the same centre. Table III below summarises these statistics.

Table III: Statistics of the former child combatants in the CREER as of 5 July 2005

Registered (Rwandan)	Reunited	Killed in a car accident	Fled from the CREER	Repatriated to the DRC*	Still in the CREER
130	88	1	3	3	32

Source: Drawn on the basis of interview with the CREER Director and social worker.

*These three former child combatants are not among the 130 Rwandan children registered. They were repatriated to the DRC after they had been found to be Congolese.

Given that the number of Rwandan child combatants among the armed groups in the DRC is estimated as 2500[37], and that only 554 have already been demobilised, it can therefore be deduced that nearly 2000 Rwandan child combatants are still in the DRC. In other words, only 22 per cent of all Rwandan child combatants were demobilised until the time this study was conducted. This is a challenge that the actors in the processes of DDR need to take up, given that nearly 80 percent of the child combatants are still in the armed groups in the DRC. This figure is however likely to decrease, not because more children have reported themselves for disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation and reintegration, but because as they grow older, say 18 and older, they will not be considered as child combatants at the time of disarmament and repatriation. This study has found that all combatants aged 18 and older, though having spent many years as child combatants, are not considered as a special category of combatants with special needs**.**

Although the age of 18 is commonly taken as the end of childhood, even by many international legal instruments, one can argue that this should not restrict or exclude those (former combatants) who spent many years as child combatants but who, at the demobilisation time, are older than 18, to benefit from such programmes intended to child combatants. The rationale behind this argument is that armed conflicts have

[37] This is an estimate made by the RDRC (Interview with the RDRC Child Protection Officer, Kigali, July 2005)

particular disastrous effects (physical, psychological, social and economic) on children, especially child combatants, and these effects are likely to keep on worsening the child's life even beyond his/her childhood. It would therefore be aberrant to overlook such effects during the demobilisation and reintegration processes, by not considering such former child combatants as a special category with specific needs like those of their younger former colleagues.

Further, it was revealed that a month after discharge of the former child combatants, an RDRC team including a social worker, the RDRC Provincial Programme Officer (PPO) and the local government official in charge of Social Affairs (at the administrative sector or district level), organise a follow-up visit to the families that have received these children. This follow-up is aimed at assessing the child's adaptation to the new family life and whether the option s/he made (regarding the reintegration activity s/he would involve in) is still really relevant. The CREER director claimed that further follow-up visits are regularly organised by the PPO. In addition, it is stated in the handover form for former child combatant that the child's parent/relatives will, as soon as possible, report any specific problem encountered with regard to the child's reintegration. But 7 in 20 former child combatants interviewed claimed that they did not know whom they could report their problems to if their rights were abused by their relatives, while 12 said they would report their rights' abuse to the local authorities and to courts.

Such a follow-up is necessary in order to assess both how the child is coping with the new life and the family's impressions of the new child. It should be necessary to organise regular follow-up visits until effective reintegration takes place because, as this study has revealed (see the following section on the social reintegration), most problems do not occur during the first days of the child's arrival in the family. They occur when the former child combatants start claiming the sold properties or when they start interacting with the members of the broader community.

4.7. Social reintegration

The final process undergone by the former child combatants is the reintegration into both families and communities. Although effective disarmament and demobilisation are

preconditions to an effective reintegration, the two former processes may become useless if the latter one is not successfully carried out. An effective and sustainable reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life is therefore necessary to prevent a new escalation of the conflict (Fusato, 2003). This section attempts to analyse how former child combatants are socially integrated in their families and communities. The measurement of this process is made on the basis of variables such as the child's level of acceptability by both the family and community; the child's access to vital facilities such as education, health care and income; and the level of the child's involvement in social activities such as church, recreational and lucrative associations.

- **Property and stigma issues**

With regard to the way the former child combatants interviewed were received in both families and community, all respondents maintained that in the first days of their arrival, they did not experience major problems with families and community, though they were not received as heroes because of their background[38]. However, problems of stigma and discrimination did not wait longer to manifest for some former combatants**.** One respondent claimed that he had been dismissed from his job (domestic) after his boss had known that the latter child was a former child combatant. Similarly, three respondents maintained that some of their schoolmates used to label them (former child combatants) as "*Abacengezi*"(rebel infiltrators), killers and sometimes as "*interahamwe*"(militiamen who took part in the 1994 genocide). They however added that this did not last long as the school headmaster warned the school community not to stigmatise the former child combatants.

Further, for four former child combatants whose property (land, house) had been sold by relatives (those families who received them), problems occurred when they started questioning the sale of these properties. Relationships between the concerned children and their families started deteriorating, and both the two former combatants had to move to other families with which they did not have problems. Even if this problem has nothing to do with the children's military background, it is a crucial one as it engages the

[38] Most of them argued that having been associated with rebels and people who committed genocide constituted a bad background for them.

familial relationships which are important in effective social reintegration. However, the CREER Director argued that the RDRC allows free of charge legal assistance to the former child combatants, but he also maintained that all claims made so far by some former child combatants were solved by the PPOs. All former child combatants however seemed not to know about the availability of such legal assistance, though, as mentioned above, two of them experienced property-related problems which were unsolved until the time of the interviews. Two others recognised however that their problems had been sorted out by the community leaders.

The sale of property of relatives is probably explained by the acute poverty which characterise the war-torn societies and highlights the necessity for the peacebuilding process to focus on poverty reduction among other issues to address. In addition, the above property sale-related problem stresses the role that community leaders and the judicial system need to play so as not only to enhance a sustainable reintegration of combatants, but also to preserve or restore good family and community relationship and social capital, without which the community development would not be possible.

- **Jealousy and poisoning**

In the same vein, it was revealed that many former child combatants were victims of jealousy and some of poisoning by some community members. In fact, 12 respondents reported that some people – neighbours including relatives – were jealous of the former combatants because of some demobilisation and reintegration benefits such as the take-home kits, free formal education and vocational training and free medical care. Four respondents claimed that they had personally been victims of poisoning that they attributed to some neighbours and relatives who were jealous of their demobilisation and reintegration benefits. Likewise, respondents argued that jealousy and poisoning characterised some families whose children were also combatants in the DRC but were reported killed or those whose whereabouts was not known so far. In the words of one respondent,

> "I was poisoned by the wife of my paternal uncle whom I had told that her son was killed when we attacked Gisenyi province in 2001. One day, she gave me a cup of

sorghum beer at Byangabo market. In the evening of the same day I fell seriously ill, and it was discovered that I had been poisoned" (R.8).

Jealousy and poisoning of former child combatants because of their demobilisation and reintegration benefits highlight once again the poverty experienced by the war-torn societies where households economies are ravaged by the conflict and most bread winners (especially fathers) are the victims. Such jealousy and poisoning therefore may occur because some children are being cared for while other children are starving, despite the fact that both categories of children have been affected by the war in one way or another. I therefore borrow the UNICEF (1997:10) argument to suggest that,
"(p)rogrammes targeted at former child soldiers should be integrated into programmes for the benefit of all war-affected children" because "(w)hile stressing that it is essential to normalize the life of child soldiers, it is important to recognize that all children in a community will have been affected by the conflict to some degree".

Furthermore, two respondents reported that some genocide survivors used to question the demobilisation and reintegration benefits given to the former combatants. One respondent remarked that some genocide survivors say,

> "our killers and their children are being rewarded by the government. They have free access to education, health care and are being given financial support for income generating activities".

This claim was also made by one key informant (a district resident) who blamed the government for ,

> "caring for the genocidaires [referring to ex-combatants] much better than it does for the genocide survivors" (I.17).

On the part of former child combatants' relatives and neighbours, three of the seven interviewed (relatives) argued that in the first days of the children's arrival at home, they were worried about what the police and regular army and some neighbours would say if they knew these children were *abacengezi* (rebel infiltrators):

> "Those *abacengezi* have killed many neighbours in this area [district]. Many members of the national army were also killed in their [rebel] war. When my

> younger brother [former child combatant] came, I was not happy with him and was very worried because I thought the police or government soldiers would kill both of us or put us in jail. Fortunately, nothing bad happened to us, and the demobilisation commission [RDRC] is sponsoring his vocational training"(I.14).

Such fear was probably due to the fact that, as some respondents argued (see the section of recruitment above), a number of civilians had been killed by RPA fighters during their war against the Hutu insurgents between 1997 and 2003. The victims of RPA killing were blamed by the latter RPA for supporting, conniving with and accommodating the rebels. Some residents probably still remember such horrors and still fear the government army.

However, three others (neighbours) maintained that they were happy with the coming home of such children, highlighting that, in the words of one female informant,

> "We are tired of deadly wars and would like to have lasting peace. The war deprived us of husbands, children, and has devastated our economies. I wish all the combatants were disarmed and came back home" (I.13).

Unlike the three latter informants, another one said that,

> "It's fine that those rebels be disarmed and come back to Rwanda. However, I'm revolted by the fact that they [former combatants] walk around freely while they killed our relatives and made others mutilated. This is unfair and the government should do us justice" (I.17).

Her opinion is probably shared by some other residents who lost their loved ones to the rebels' war. Such situation is a reflection of the realities in the post-genocide Rwanda where many people still suffer from the genocide effects, and others seem to be prisoners of the wrong "globalisation" or "collectivisation" of others' behaviours (for example crime) on the basis of their ethnic and regional identities.

The above argument highlights a challenge that the Rwandese Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, as well as other actors in the same process should take up. In the same vein, the above situation shows that communities, especially the genocide

survivors' circles, have not been effectively prepared to receive the former combatants. It can be argued here that the mobilisation on receiving the former combatants in the community should have a particular focus on the genocide survivors because not only a number of Hutu former combatants have effectively taken part in the 1994 genocide and targeted the Tutsi ethnic group members in their attacks in northern and western Rwanda (1997-2003), but also others were in the same armed groups with them.

Likewise, this situation urges the Rwandan judicial system, particularly the "gacaca jurisdictions" to do the genocide survivors justice and offer them reparations in order to not feel resentment. It should however be noted that, according to the CREER director and some local authorities interviewed, the Rwandan government has no intention to prosecute the former combatants (adults) for their only being "former rebels", but those, whose responsibility in the genocide will be established, will be handed to the judicial system. However, it was not clear whether those who were involved in war crimes would be prosecuted.

One can argue that in order to do justice for victims of war crimes and for the sake of contributing to the eradication of the historical impunity culture in the Great Lakes Region (LDGL, 2002), the authors of those war crimes should be prosecuted. However, given that this study has revealed that even some members of the governmental army committed war crimes during their war against the Hutu rebels (see the above section on recruitment, see also Interayamahanga, 2004; Human Rights Watch,1998, 1999, 2000; and Amnesty International,1997, 1998, 1999, 2000), authors of both sides should be prosecuted. Otherwise, effective and sustainable reconciliation would not be attained unless justice for all is done. At the same time reconciliation and justice for all are, in post-conflict societies, components and measures of "good governance", a concept that the World Bank (in Cock, 1999:18) takes as a social dimension of sustainable peacebuiling, and therefore a precondition to sustainable development.

With regard to the former child combatants, the demobilised ones are unlikely to be prosecuted for involvement in the genocide because not only were they too young to be legally prosecuted, but also probably too young to be involved in that odious crime in

1994. Moreover, they can not be prosecuted for being former rebel combatants in that not only has the Rwandan government no intention to do so, but also because some of them can not be criminally held responsible because of their age. In their campaigns, the government in general, and the RDRC in particular should therefore clearly explain to the genocide survivors why the former combatants were not prosecuted for their war crimes and why they are given demobilisation and reintegration packages.

- **Towards a sustainable social reintegration**?

As regards the former child combatant's access to vital facilities such as education, health care, and income, it is relevant to describe here each component separately. The study has found that there is a great difference between the former child combatants who attended the CREER and those who passed through both Gitagata Transit Centre and Mutobo Solidarity Centre. The former seemed to be more cared for than the latter.

Concerning the education component, all the interviewed respondents whose rehabilitation took place in the CREER had chosen to study and were all effectively enrolled either in a formal school or a vocational training centre. One was in primary school, while two were attending a vocational training at Gacuriro training centre.

As for those (interviewed) whose rehabilitation took place at Mutobo Solidarity Centre and Gitagata (17 altogether), only five of them were attending a vocational training at Gacuriro, one had started studying in primary school but had abandoned because of "family poverty" and was a domestic at the time of the interview (early July); three were in primary school, while others (8) had neither attended a formal nor a vocational training after demobilisation. Gacuriro Vocational Training Centre, which also trains civilian youth without a military background, offers a one-year programme in automobile mechanics, plumbing and soldering, masonry, sewing, hairdressing, domestic electricity, and cookery. The Centre's headmaster maintained that at the completion of their training, all the trainees will be given a take-home kit each, comprised of basic material set which would enable them to start running their own small business.

However, all these trainees expressed their worry about how they will find jobs. One of them remarked,

> "Because the rural area from which most of us come has no relevant infrastructure, we are unlikely to find jobs or run any related business there. Yet, it's not easy to find a job in town because for example, I, personally speaking, have no relative who can accommodate me, while looking for job in town" (R.3).

Reacting to such a worry, the CREER Director argued that the RDRC through the PPO would assist those trainees to get jobs; but it was not clear what the latter PPO would concretely do. But another trainee highlighted, "it's not even easy to form an association and work together to run a small-scale business in our rural areas, given that we come from different and distant places"(R11).

Concerning school fees and material, all trainees asserted that everything is paid by the RDRC. This also holds for those in primary and secondary schools. As the CREER Director and the RDRC Child Protection Officer put it, the RDRC pays one-year of school fees and material for those attending vocational training; while for those attending formal education, the Commission pays for two years only. The same informants claimed that the RDRC pays 30.000 Rwandan francs (nearly US$ 55) per year for those attending secondary school as fee for school material and transportation; 16.500 Rwandan francs (nearly US$ 28) per year for those attending vocational training; and 5.000 Rwandan francs (nearly US$10) for those in primary school. The concerned interviewees confirmed this information, although no former child combatant attending secondary school was able to be included in the sample. According to the CREER Director and the RDRC Child Protection Officer, there were 67 former child combatants in primary school, 17 in secondary and 130 in vocational training at Gacuriro until end July 2005. In total, 214 out of 554 have benefited from the RDRC education scheme so far.

However, though the same informants argued that the former child combatants then attending school (either formal or vocational) were those who had made such a choice, three respondents who were demobilised at Gitagata vocational training centre claimed

that they had expressed their desire to attend a vocational training, but that the RDRC had not kept its promise yet to help them studying.

Both formal education and vocational training play an important role in the social reintegration of the former child combatants. In fact, schools (formal and informal) constitute a favourable social environment in which the former child combatants are socialised and interact with civilian people. Former child combatants are therefore offered a new form of socialisation which is quite different from that received in the military, and which is relevant in their civilian life. This argument is supported by ILO (1995) cited by Nubler (2000:65) by remarking that "attending schools or participating in training allows them [former combatants] to learn norms and practices of civilian society".

Likewise, schools offer child combatants skills and knowledge which facilitate former combatants to find jobs, and help them therefore to be accepted by the community and relatives who used to believe that they are only dependent of and criminals.

In the same vein, because "military training makes soldiers follow orders without asking too many questions" (Nubler, 2000, 65), schools and training offer the former combatants a flexible framework whereby free discussions are held with teachers or trainers, developing therefore in the former combatants a culture of debate and verbal interaction, necessary for social life.

Moreover, as suggested by Nubler (*idem*.), education and vocational training facilitate the development of a sense of new identity, and by doing so, contribute to building self-confidence and respectability and redirect the individual's energy in useful ways for the future. Nubler (2000:65) also argued that "regaining lost education and training opportunities avoids frustration among ex-combatants and facilitates reintegration".

It should be noted that formal education and vocational training for former child combatants constitute an important contribution not only to the social and economic reintegration of the latter former combatants, but also to the process of the country

development. In fact, by investing in the education and training of the former child combatants, the RDRC and other actors involved in this process are preparing the same forces that have been used to destroy the country's economy and both human and social capital, to be rather useful for its development process. This is true in that most former child combatants interviewed had not completed primary school when they were recruited, and have received neither formal education nor vocational training in the bush except gun use and military tactics. In other words, at the demobilisation time, these former child combatants had neither skills nor knowledge that can be useful for the country's development.

Both formal education and vocational training intended to former child combatants imply a human resource development which - if the acquired human resources are well utilised, is a precondition to the achievement of the individual, collective, organisational and national development. This argument concurs with the objective of the human resources approach in the demobilisation and reintegration processes which resides in the utilisation of existing skills and knowledge of ex-combatants on the one hand, and the development of skills and knowledge among those (ex-combatants) who do not have them on the other hand (Nubler, 2000). It is therefore important to urge the Rwandan government not only to invest in the resources development of the former child combatants, but also to put in place relevant strategies aimed at utilising their acquired skills and knowledge accordingly for the development of the country.

In addition, though it is argued that former child combatants, at the time of demobilisation, have no skills and knowledge relevant for the social and economic development of the country, it is still relevant to argue that their demobilisation fits in the objective of the demilitarisation process which, according to Cock (2003:23) consists in "shifting power and resources away from bloated, capricious, unaccountable and expensive armed forces towards social and economic development". As argued above, while former child combatants, then in the bush, were involved in activities that have ruined the country's social and economic capital, their demobilisation has placed them in a position where they can gain skills and knowledge to be utilised for the development of the country rather than for its destruction. This highlights therefore the necessity for

actors to set up strategies that would facilitate the demobilisation of the 80 percent of other Rwandan child combatants still in the bush in the DRC, so that they may be useful for themselves, their families and community, as well as for the development of their country.

As far as health care is concerned, all respondents who were attending either a formal school or the Gacuriro training centre asserted that when they fall ill, the related costs are covered by the RDRC. The latter (RDRC) pays money into the school's or centre's bank account for each former combatant. But for serious medical cases which require more expertise and therefore are more expensive, the RDRC pays directly to the treating doctor. However, those who were demobilised at Gitagata and Mutobo centres argued that they had not had any access to the RDRC medical benefits between the time they were discharged and when they embarked on studying. Note that the time in question was three years for those who were demobilised in 2001.

As regards the access to health care, it is vital that the latter cares are supported by the RDRC for two years. However, given that the RDRC can not be in charge of these cares for a long time, it (RDRC) should do every endeavour to assist the trainees to find jobs as soon as they complete their training in order to avoid health-related problems entailed by the suspension of the RDRC medical scheme intended to the latter trainees. This is very important because as suggested by World Bank (2002:18) "reintegration assistance should be limited in time to avoid the creation of a dependency syndrome". In addition, I argue that poor families of those who are undergoing formal education would be assisted in running some income generating activities in order to be able to support health cares and school fees and material for former child combatants and other children once the RDRC assistance will be suspended after the two-year term.

The former child combatants who did not choose to undertake any sort of training or education had never benefited from the RDRC medical scheme after they were discharged. As explained earlier, the rationale behind this is that the RDRC believes that members of this category of former combatants can afford the payment of health care services as they are running income-generating activities. Paradoxically, these former

child combatants, at least the seven interviewed, maintained that since they were demobilised, did not get any financial support from the RDRC to help them running some small-scale business, and that they therefore often have difficulty to get medical treatment. However, some of them whose families have adhered to the "Mutuelle de santé" use this medical scheme to get treated in their community.

With regard to the income generating activities, remind that it was argued earlier that the RDRC trains former combatants to plan and run small-scale income generating activities. This training is part of rehabilitation programme offered to both adult and child former combatants. The former child combatants who were attending either a formal education or a vocational training were not running any income generating activity due to their status of pupils or trainees. However, 6 of this category (pupils or trainee) argued that prior to joining the Gacuriro vocational training centre, they had spent some time at home (after being discharged from Gitagata transit centre) where they were involved in informal sector but without any assistance from the RDRC. The main activities they were involved in were public transportation by bicycles, domestic work, brick making, and agricultural work. Their estimate monthly income varied between RWF 2000 (US$ 4) to RWF 7000 (US$ 14). As they maintained, this income was too little if compared to the living issues they are faced with in their families (food, health cares, relatives' education, housing, clothes, etc.). One of them remarked that,

> "My father was killed during the wartime and my mother is getting older and often gets sick. I have four brothers and one sister. They all expected me to bring food as I used to transport people by a bicycle. I could earn RWF 200 only per day and I could provide for food to my family, though this amount was too little to cover the daily home needs. Our mother tries to sell sorghum beer, but very irregularly. Now that I am studying, they are starving, and expect me to get a better job later. I don't know what will happen, given that getting a job is not easy" (R.2).

- **More worries**

As regards those who were not enrolled in any sort of education, it was found that they experience problems to earn some income. All the former child combatants of this category claimed that none of them had got any financial support from the RDRC since

the time they were demobilised. Two of them argued that they had made and submitted proposals (for income generating activities) to the PPO, but that all their proposals were rejected for being either badly formulated or focused on irrelevant activity. The concerned said that they were discouraged to write other proposals. In the words of one respondent,

> "My proposal was rejected even after amendment. I had used all my skills that I had acquired in the rehabilitation centre. I dropped this project out because the commission [RDRC] was very demanding. It's not clear what the commission wants us to do" (R.17).

These respondents claimed that their living conditions were so bad that they believe their future is too dark. One of them expressed his worry on whether he will be able to get married while he had no source of income, adding that,

> "On the one hand I'm happy to be back in Rwanda, but on the other hand, life here is bitter for me and I do not see clearly my future".

It was however revealed by the RDRC Child Protection Officer and the CREER Director that the RDRC supports only the proposals which are well elaborated and are therefore promising in terms of profitability. They added that it is for this reason that their organisation (RDRC) has organised training on planning and running small-scale incoming generating activities as part of rehabilitation programmes for ex-combatants.

The study also revealed that some former child combatants had never attempted to submit any proposal to the RDRC for financial support. The reasons given by these respondents were that they either did not know how to elaborate such proposals, despite the training they received from the RDCR (during the rehabilitation stage), or that they had heard their fellow former child combatants claiming that the RDRC had rejected their proposals, and were therefore deceived. One respondent remarked,

> "Yes, we were trained on such income generating activities, but as my literacy level is very low, I couldn't write down all that we were taught. So I didn't get much from the training and cannot therefore remember what were taught on this topic. Yet I don't have money to pay those who are able to elaborate such proposals" (R.14).

Some of these respondents acknowledged however to be members of some lucrative associations, mainly focused on growing round (irish) potatoes, though according to them, what they monthly earn from such associations was less than RWF 500 (less than US$ 1).

However, two of those who were not at school or on vocational training courses have managed to run some small-scale income generating activities, though without any assistance from the RDRC, which they blamed for not keeping its promise to support them financially. Speaking out the RDRC reluctance to fund their projects, the two respondents argued that they managed to get microfinance credits to run a haircutting salon and a round potato growing project respectively. The latter respondent added that his project was so profitable that he had managed to pay back his bank credit and had bought a large piece of land for further potatoes farming.

Obviously some former child combatants have not had any access to education, either by choice or by the RDRC failure/delay to keep its promise. Others have not yet had access to health cares and financial support by RDRC. They are faced with serious living problems, given their lack of source of income.

As maintained by most respondents and informants (residents and local authorities), this situation was particularly exacerbated by the fact that Mutobo district, like many other northern districts, apart from being hit by the 1994 genocide, has also been devastated by the rebels' war from 1997 until 2003. Subsequently, such situation has therefore entailed the death of many parents, especially fathers, who were the main bread winners; others are still in the DRC (being either combatants or refugees), while others are detained for being genocide suspects. In other words, respondents and informants claimed that many households (no statistical data available) are mainly led by women or by elder children and get hardly access to livelihoods. In most cases, the latter children were obliged to stop schooling in order to care for their younger bothers and sisters, to help their mothers struggling for livelihoods, and in case fathers are in detention mainly for being genocide suspects, children help their mothers to look for food and bring some to their fathers in detention.

Reacting to the concern of the former combatants who, until the time of the fieldwork for this study had not benefited from the RDRC reintegration programme, the CREER Director acknowledged the RDRC failure to follow up effectively some former child combatants, especially those discharged from the Gitagata Transit Centre. However, he further argued that "the RDRC has recently passed announcements on radio and newspapers to urge those former child combatants who were not benefiting from the RDRC programmes to report themselves to the RDRC provincial offices for registration", and he therefore assured that these former child combatants will be supported as their colleagues are.

In addition, most former child combatants interviewed complained that they were not given money and food like their older former colleagues (former adult combatants). It was revealed that the latter former adult combatants, at the time they were discharged, were given home stuffs and food worth RWF 50,000 (nearly US$ 100), and were given RWF 100,000, few days after their discharge. They had been requested each to open a bank account into which the latter amount was paid. The former child combatants interviewed said that this was unfair because, like their older former colleagues, they had been combatants and had suffered so much that the above demobilisation package (that given to older combatants) should have assisted them usefully. On the part of the CREER director, this is not a discrimination at all because, the same sum of money that the adult former combatants received was also given to the former child combatants through all expenditures related to formal education and vocational training, and to the small-scale income generating activities funded by the RDRC.

It is normally recommended that with regard to services and benefits for demobilised soldiers, non-discrimination of demobilised children should be ensured (UNICEF, 1997:8). On the one hand, one can argue that the former child combatants who benefited from the RDRC education and medical treatment schemes were not discriminated against because they were offered services instead of liquidity. But on the other hand, the latter children were not helped to survive during their transitional period towards effective reintegration. In fact, while the money and food that the adult former combatants were given would help them in their reinsertion phase, the former child

combatants did not receive similar benefits which would assist them to survive during the same phase.

It should be noted that a study conducted by Interayamahanga (2004) on the impact of armed conflict and genocide on the Rwandan children, revealed that many households were headed by children. A number of demobilised former child combatants are therefore likely to head their households and care for their younger siblings in case that their parents have died, are mutilated, are still in exile or are in detention for being genocide suspects. They should have access to such money or food as a demobilisation or reinsertion package, like their older colleagues (adult former combatants) to help them to care for both themselves and their relatives. This is relevant because the options proposed by the RDRC to the former child combatants (formal education, vocational training, income generating activities), though vital in the reintegration process, can not yield livelihoods right after their discharge. They will probably take one, two or three years to bear fruit, whereas, meanwhile the former child combatants and their relatives need to survive. This also holds for the support that vulnerable families of former child combatants are given through the VSW. As said earlier, the CREER director maintained that such a support is only given to the families that have made proposals for income generating activities. This is a long process which can take time before the support is given. But the former child combatants are already in the families and need to survive.

The above arguments concur with that of the World Bank (2002:18) which suggest that "(u)pon demobilization, the ex-combatants lose their source of (formal or informal) income" and " are usually in a vulnerable financial situation until they can generate income. During this period (the "*reinsertion*" phase), ex-combatants require a transitional safety net to cover their families' basic material needs". Such transitional assistance would be aimed at enabling "the ex-combatants to return to their community and to sustain themselves and their families for a limited period immediately following demobilization" (*ibid.).*

One can also argue that in wartime or where the war is likely to erupt, failure to ensure livelihoods to the former combatants during this transitional period may enhance re-

recruitment of the latter discontented former combatants. Otherwise, as argued earlier with Cock (1994), they may engage in criminal activities to look for livelihoods their own way. The latter argument is supported by Burton's human needs theory which suggests that unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies, unless in every social system there is distributive justice, a sense of control, and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability and conflict are inevitable (Burton, in Cunningham, n.d.), and Hakvoort (2002).

As for the food which was given only to adult combatants, I argue that former child combatants were right to complain because food is a basic need that all human beings struggle for. It should be reminded that most children were returning to war-torn communities where many families are poor and have not access to sufficient livelihoods.

Discriminating against children with regard to access to food as a demobilisation package component should therefore be avoided. Although the CREER director claimed that poor families who receive former child combatants were supported through the VSW, no former child combatant seemed to know about this VSW, while many of those interviewed claimed that their families were poor when they (children) moved in.

A similar situation occurred in Angola where "(t)he authorities classified the under 18's as family members and not soldiers, so that the former child soldiers did not get similar assistance to adults" (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004:1).

Other reintegration problems experienced by the former child combatants are mainly related to the fact that many of those who were discharged from Gitagata transit centre and Mutobo Solidarity centre had not received any support (financial, medical, educational) from the RDRC and were starving in their communities, despite the promise by the latter to do so.

The situation of those former child combatants seems to indicate that there was no well-planned and coordinated DDR programme at the time the latter child combatants were demobilised. Obviously, though former child combatants were taken to the Gitagata Transit Centre, there was no child combatant-focused programme and a framework to address their special needs, except the former programme of the Ministry of Gender and

Family (MIGEPROF). This is why, as argued earlier, there has been a clear shift in the way of addressing the former combatants specific needs since the creation of the CREER if compared to what was done at Gitagata Transit Centre and Mutobo solidarity centre.

Fortunately, remember that it was revealed by the CREER director that the RDRC has recently issued an announcement to call those "forgotten former child combatants" to report themselves to the RDRC Provincial Programme office to register for assistance.

It should however be argued that the immediate needs of these former child combatants at the time of demobilisation may have significantly shifted due not only to the time the former combatants have spent at home (now nearly 4 years), but also that many if not all of them have become adults and aspire therefore to new needs related to their age and socioeconomic environment. In the same context, Specht (n.d.: 4) argues that,

> "(t)he needs of a child ex-combatant immediately following a conflict may be substantially different from the needs a year later. Health and personal safety needs, and therapeutic and relationship issues, may be at a critical level immediately following a conflict. A year after the conflict, vocational and educational issues may be the most significant".

Their real basic needs should therefore be carefully assessed with a participatory approach so that the intended assistance be useful to them and contribute to their sustainable reintegration.

- **Participation in social framework or socialising activities**

Furthermore, as said earlier, the social reintegration of the former child combatants was also measured in this study by the extent to which the latter former combatants were involved in socialising, recreational and lucrative activities. Interviews with former child combatants revealed therefore that the former child combatants were mainly involved in church services, and some sportive and socioeconomic activities. In effect, all these respondents were attending church services (Roman Catholic, Adventist, and Pentecostal Churches), nine of them were actively involved in some church activities such as deaconship and/or choir members. The respondents argued that their churches help them spiritually, morally, and socially by restoring relationships with their relatives and

neighbours, no one of them (respondents) acknowledged however to have received any sort of material assistance from his church. It was also found that four respondents were members of local football teams. With regard to membership in socioeconomic associations, four respondents said that they were involved in local associations dealing with potatoes farming, and their monthly income was too low (less than RWF 500 or US$ 1). They also sometimes work for some well-off people in their community and get paid RWF 100 (nearly US$ 0.20) per day.

It was found that all former combatants attend church services and some of them are even deacons, which means that they actively participate in the church activities. Some are members of football teams; and others are members of socioeconomic associations (potato farmers). It can be argued that such social frameworks constitute a measure of social reintegration because for example, the church and peers (those in football team and associations) are commonly accepted as powerful socialisation agents (Powell & Jorgensen, 1985; Schaefer, 1989; Netting, 1992; Popenoe, 1995; Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998; Deane, 1999; Lefkowitz *et al*, 2004; Du Toit & Van Staden 2005). Like schools, such frameworks offer former child combatants opportunities to interact with other community members including those they used to call “enemies”. They can then accept and learn from each other, and work together for a common society.

Briefly, considering the findings discussed in this chapter, it is worth noting that the DDR programmes on behalf of former Rwandan child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region were, at the beginning, run without any relevant planning and coordination. This entailed the failure to take into account specific needs of child combatants and their rights. However, it should be highlighted that significant step was marked from the beginning of the year 2004 when the CREER was opened, with the putting in place of a child protection department within both MONUC and RDRC.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The central aim of the study was to analyse the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration of Rwandan Hutu rebels who fought in the Great Lakes Region, with a focus on child combatants. Specifically, the study has attempted to investigate the circumstances of children's recruitment and their life as combatants, after which the following question has also been addressed: "how are the specific needs of child combatants addressed in the processes of disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration of the Rwandan Hutu rebels?"

This study is relevant firstly because demobilisation and reintegration are social processes which are crucial phases in a broader peacebuilding process. Their success is therefore crucial to achieving a lasting peace; but in case they fail to provide for ex-combatants livelihoods and a civilian identity, the latter ex-combatants are likely to retake arms and hinder the peacebuilding process. Secondly, the focus on child combatants is relevant given that, due to their physical and mental/psychological immaturity, child combatants have specific needs that must be addressed by the DDR programmes. Lastly, there is a paucity of data on how the latter specific needs of child combatants are being addressed by the DDR actors in Rwanda.

Data collected by using semi-structured interviews with a sample of former child combatants and key informants have yielded a wide range of valuable results which shed light on circumstances of the children's recruitment and their life as combatants, as well as on how the DDR programmes are addressing specific needs of the former child combatants. This study contributes therefore to the emerging body of knowledge on the DDR processes in general, and that focused on child combatants in particular, in many post-conflict countries. Specifically, this study has generated data on the DDR processes of child combatants on Rwanda which could enlighten to some extent further research on other aspects of the child combatants' phenomenon in Rwanda.

As far as the children's recruitment is concerned, this study has found that a number of factors have shaped the forced and voluntary recruitment of Rwandan children both in Rwanda and the DRC. These include separation from or death of children's parents or guardians mainly due to armed conflicts and the 1994 genocide; the need for physical and psychological security; the need for livelihoods; the power of the "ethnicist' ideology used by the rebels (ideological mobilisation); life as a refugee; contact by relatives already in the military, to name but a few. Obviously, all these factors are related to a wartime situation and are its consequences.

With regard to the life of child combatants in the bush, the study has revealed that the child combatants experienced a harsh life. Besides the "ethnicist" ideological indoctrination that they were subject to, child combatants underwent harsh military training which did not take into account the children's physical and mental immaturity. In addition, child combatants were often obliged to participate in very difficult working conditions in the military such as fighting sometimes under heavy rains, walking over long distances, pillaging food and medicines from homes, shops and health centres; and spending some times without food, water and medicines. Many child combatants were also injured during fighting, and others used to fall ill due to harsh living conditions in the bush.

The worst thing of all was death during fighting and permanent fear of death that child combatants lived with mostly because of horrible scenes they used to witness. In the same vein, it was reported by respondents that though extramarital sexual encounters were prohibited among ALIR/FDLR group members (but not among Mai Mai), some female combatants were sexually exploited by some group commanders, while among Mai Mai groups, sexual violence was often encouraged by the group leadership as a weapon and strategy of war. The study has therefore argued that such sexual violence have not only psychological effects on the victims but are also likely to shape the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Moreover, the study, by investigating the processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, has revealed a number of strengths and shortcomings. As a matter of fact,

it was found that most child combatants used to learn about the socio-political situation in Rwanda through Radio Rwanda, BBC, VOA, Radio Okapi, and from some MONUC fieldworkers. Such information has led some of them to escape from their armed groups and report to MONUC for disarmament and repatriation to Rwanda, while some other child combatants were captured or surrendered to the Rwandan regular army during their invasions in north-western Rwanda. News about one's relatives in Rwanda and about the demobilisation process – especially of child combatants- has mainly enhanced the need to escape among many child combatants.

However, not all child combatants willing to return to Rwanda could do so because of fear of being caught and long distance from the armed group position to the MONUC office. Others (female combatants) failed to escape not only because of the above reasons, but also because some of them were already married to fellow male combatants, or feared to be stigmatised once arriving in their communities in Rwanda because of their military background. The latter reason explains to some extent why some female combatants preferred to return to Rwanda under the civilian banner, as revealed by most respondents and informants. Obviously, though the above media are regularly used to spread information among armed groups in the DRC, the disarmament phase seems to be a spontaneous way rather than planned. This is true because, until the time of data collection for this study, the MONUC stance was still that the disarmament must be done on a voluntary basis. In other words, some child combatants reported themselves to MONUC and, as argued above, other child combatants surrendered to RPA or were captured in the battlefield. This is evidence that there are not pre-established actors of the disarmament process.

However, the study has noted that despite the availability of the Child Protection Unit, when child combatants arrived at the MONUC assembly point, they are not separated from adult combatants. This is a failure in addressing specific needs of child combatants in the DDR programmes because such a failure is likely to entail former child combatants' abuse by adult ones, and may lead to the re-recruitment of the latter children.

Other major disarmament shortcomings found by the study is the detention (up to three months) by the RPA of the child combatants who surrendered or those captured during fighting; and many interviews with children by many people whose professional and ethical skills should be questioned.

Another important finding of this study is that female child combatants are not reporting for disarmament and demobilisation because of some reasons shown above. In the same vein, those former child combatants who surrendered or were captured in 2001 included nearly only male ones because, as claimed by many respondents, in 2001, their armed group (FRLR) had planned a large-scale attack and most female and weak male combatants had been advised to remain behind. Another reason for the predominance of male child combatants among those who surrendered or captured was that initially the majority of combatants in ALIR/FRLR were males.

As far as the demobilisation process is concerned, the study has revealed a number of shortcomings in the demobilisation of child combatants until January 2004. In fact, all respondents demobilised before the latter date had undergone a rehabilitation programme at Nkumba and Nkamira (at least until who surrendered or were captured in since June 2001) and at Mutobo Solidarity Centre (those who surrendered or were captured by RPA, and those repatriated from the DRC since late 2002). Those child combatants who underwent a rehabilitation programme with adult at Nkumba and Nkamira were later on (after one to two months) separated from adults and transferred to the Gitagata transit centre.

Although former child combatants in the latter centre underwent another rehabilitation programme, and, at the same time, identification, documentation, family tracing and reunification, the study has found that the rehabilitation in question was one initially intended for unaccompanied children rather than former child combatants. In other words, such a rehabilitation programme did not address real psychosocial needs of child combatants. In addition, it was found that in 2001, two female former child combatants were taken to the same centre but were quickly discharged from the centre because “they were few and there ware no relevant facilities to accommodate them”. The study has

argued that the above justification is an evidence that female combatants in the DDR programmes are still overlooked as shown by experience from other countries such as Angola and Mozambique.

Gitagata transit centre was closed down late 2002 as the reporting rate of child combatants had significantly decreased reaching zero; but the study also found that no consistent follow-up was made among those former child combatants demobilised from the same centre. After the closing down of the Gitagata transit centre, all former children combatants repatriated or captured/surrendered underwent a rehabilitation programme at Mutobo Solidarity Centre where no distinction was made between child and adult combatants, until the time they were discharged.

However, after lobbying endeavours by some organisations such as Save the Children, UNICEF, ICRC, MONUC, there was a shift in the demobilisation process because in January 2004, the Ruhengeri Centre for Rehabilitation of ex-Child Combatants (CREER) was created. Under the auspices of the RDRC, the centre receives former child combatants repatriated by MONUC. The latter children, demobilised, in theory, by MONUC, undergo a demobilisation process which includes psychosocial rehabilitation (including civic education, numerical and literacy teaching, socialising activities, psychological counselling, etc.), medical cares, family tracing, family mediation and family reunification which all attempt to address the former child combatants' specific needs. As far as family tracing and family mediation stages are concerned, it was found that there is a tendency for some relatives to deny their relationships with some former child combatants because some of the latter relatives have sold the children's property and want therefore to avoid children's claims; others are genocide suspects and believe that receiving such children (with their negative labels) would worsen their judicial case; while others used to believe that they would be arrested and put in jail because their children or brothers had killed civilian people and regular army members during the war.

The family reunification stage puts an end to the demobilisation process and, at the same time launches the long process of reintegration. For the purpose of this study, only the social reintegration has been focused on, leaving out the economic and political ones,

though the two latter are even highly related to the first one. The study has found that most former child combatants did not experience major relational problems with both relatives and communities in the first days of their arrival in the communities.

However, it was noted that relationships with relatives started degrading when some former child combatants (mainly orphans or those whose parents were still in exile) raised questions on their property (land or houses) sold by their relatives. In the same vein, relationships between some former child combatants and some community members deteriorated because of jealousy due to the demobilisation and reinsertion benefits (some utensils and domestic material, free access to education and health cares) that former child combatants had received. Besides the latter benefits, some community members were also jealous of the former child combatants because they (community members) had children, brothers or sisters who also were child combatants in the DRC but were reported dead or missing in the bush. The study has found that in some cases, jealousy resulted in poisoning some of the demobilised child combatants, though no death case was reported.

Other relational problems occurred with some community members whose relatives had been killed by Hutu insurgents during their attacks in north-western Rwanda or some genocide survivors. Because these insurgents included a number of genocide perpetrators, and they also killed many civilians, it was found that some former child combatants were also labelled by some community members as "killers", "*interahamwe*", and "genocidaires". Likewise, some community members questioned the demobilisation and reinsertion benefits offered to former child combatants, arguing that the former combatants were being rewarded by the government, instead of prosecuting them for having killed people (war crimes).

From the above relational problems, the study has therefore deduced that the reintegration process is taking place in a context where many community members are poor - especially because of war legacy; and that the DDR programme is likely to fail if it is not accompanied by other public policies such as poverty reduction, good governance, human rights promotion, etc.

On the other hand, it was revealed that most former child combatants were involved in some socialising frameworks such as church, schools, football team, and lucrative associations (potato farming) which, despite the above problems, are relevant for a successful social reintegration.

Still on the social reintegration theme, it was found that unlike the former child combatants who were demobilised at the CREER, many other child combatants interviewed who were demobilised at Gitagata Transit Centre had not benefited from the DDR education and medical schemes, as well as the financial support for income generating activities, mainly because there had not been a relevant follow-up after their discharge.

Briefly, the study has noted a number of weaknesses in the DDR programme on the one hand, but also a significant positive shift in the same processes since the creation of the CREER in January 2004 on the other hand. However, it can be argued that it is somehow early to conclude on the effectiveness (or not) of the DRR programme, especially the reintegration process, because the latter obviously takes a long time to reach its objective. For example, that some former child combatants are enrolled in formal education and vocational training is a good sign, but this does not automatically imply an effective reintegration as long as no job opportunities or entrepreneurial facilities are guaranteed to the trainees. One objective of such formal education and vocational training is to enable former child combatants, thanks to acquired skills, knowledge and competences, to support themselves and their family members financially. This can not therefore be ultimately assessed on the basis of the current education or training, though the two latter constitute a way to reaching this objective.

5.2. Policy implications

The chief aim of this study was to investigate how the specific needs of child combatants are being addressed in the DDR programmes intended to the Rwandan Hutu child combatants who fought in the Great Lakes Region. Prior to doing so, an attempt to identify factors which contributed to the recruitment of Rwandan child combatants was

made, and a number of effects of armed conflict on child combatants were understood. In addition, the study highlighted a range of critical issues in the child combatants' DDR programmes.

This section provides a series of recommendations which, if taken into account by the concerned actors, would mitigate the likelihood of children's recruitment and the impact of armed conflict on children, and would improve the quality of services provided by the child's combatants' DDR programmes.

- **Recommendations for preventing the children's recruitment**

There is a need to prevent child recruitment either voluntary or not. The best way to do so is to prevent the occurrence of armed conflict which generally entails "favourable" contexts for the recruitment of children. The Rwandan government should endeavour to alleviate poverty with a special focus on eliminating social inequalities which the experience has proven to be a source of violence and war. In addition, the government should avoid excluding any social category of the Rwandan population in order to prevent any source of frustration which would lead the excluded category to take arms and claims their rights. The above recommendations should be concretised by the government to practise good governance; respect human rights; ensure fair justice for all, and involve actively in market regulation so that the rich do not keep on getting richer at the expense of the poor.

Moreover, given that the Hutu rebels and other armed groups in the DRC still seem to be reluctant to disarm voluntarily, the United Nations and its monitoring systems should put in place consistent mechanisms to restrict the traffic of arms intended to the latter Hutu rebels as well as other armed groups in the Great Lakes Region. For example the mandate of the MONUC should include among other things ensuring that the armed groups in the DRC are not supplied with arms. An ad hoc observatory team within MONUC should be established and given adequate resources to carry out their duty effectively. In addition, all governments in the same region (mainly Rwanda, DRC,

Uganda and Burundi) should be associated in this process and relevant measures should be taken against those who are involved in or conniving with the dealers of arms.

The UN should ensure that all genocide suspects walking freely in different countries are tracked and handed to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), or are judged by other competent courts. This is relevant in that the latter suspects are likely to use arms and cause violence or war in order to overthrow the Rwandan government which is also committed to judge them. However, given that a number of the RPA members are also suspected to have committed war crimes against members of Hutu ethnic group during the liberation war and after the 1994 genocide, the Rwandan government and the ICTR should track the suspects and judge them as well. This will contribute to avoid that the Rwandan legal system, especially the "*gacaca* courts" be considered as the justice of the "war victor" over the "war loser", and therefore avoid frustration susceptible to entail another armed conflict on the part of the relatives of the victims.

In the same vein, perpetrators of war crimes (those armed people killed and women raped during the war in northern Rwanda and in the DRC)-both from armed groups and governmental forces, should be arrested and prosecuted by the judicial systems of Rwanda, DRC, Uganda and Burundi. In case the latter systems are not willing to do so, the UN should create an ad hoc tribunal to judge them. This would do justice for the victims and their relatives; would contribute to eradicating the culture of impunity and would educate populations on the culture of respect of human rights; and would avoid any frustration and resentment of justice denial, which is a potential cause of war.

Further, given that most wars in the Great Lakes Region have some ramifications and have been labelled with "ethnic identities", efforts should be made by all political leaders in the Region to ensure that all involved ethnic groups are truly reconciled; that justice is done for all, and that no ethnic group is excluded from the political power and from access to or benefit from national resources.

The multilateral organisations and governments which financially and politically support the governments of the Great Lakes Region should ensure that their support:

- is not used to strengthen the power of the oppressors at the expense of the oppressed;
- is used for the good of all citizens ;
- is not used in exchange for some hidden agenda such as political and/or economical influence against some neighbouring countries;
- is given only to the governments that are committed to ensure socioeconomic development of their countries without any exclusion;
- is only given to the governments that do not hinder/threaten the security of other countries.

The UN (for its failure to prevent war occurrence and genocide in the Great Lakes Region) and western government such as France, Belgium, USA to mention but few, and bilateral financial institutions (all for having supported politically and financially the governments and/or armed groups which caused wars in the region), should actively participate in the post-conflict reconstruction endeavours, and should stop supporting or conniving with such ill-intentioned governments and armed groups.

Lastly, given the role played by small arms in enhancing the recruitment of children for military purpose (these arms are light and are therefore easily carried by children), the traffic of small arms should be strictly monitored or their manufacturing be prohibited by the UN for the sake of mitigating the use of child combatants.

- **Recommendations for improving the disarmament programme**

MONUC and other radio broadcasting stations should keep on being used to urge member of armed groups in the DRC, including child combatants, to disarm voluntarily. Radio programmes should be as regular as possible for a permanent sensitisation of combatants on disarmament. Programmes focused on women and children should be encouraged and demobilised children and women (if any) should be given more voice on radio in order to give testimonies to their former colleagues still in the bush.

Armed force should not be used to disarm those armed groups because many combatants including children and women would be killed in such operations, while as former child combatants interviewed argued, it is not always easy to escape from the group because of fear of being killed once caught trying to do so. What should rather be done is to monitor strictly the traffic of arms in the region so as to prevent the supply of arms to the armed groups. Without supply in arms, the latter armed groups will be obliged to come out of the bush and disarm voluntarily. What is needed most is the political will of the governments in the Region and their sponsors. Governments and individuals involved in such traffic should be identified and prosecuted by both local courts (for individuals) and international competent tribunals.

Furthermore, MONUC should increase its troops' presence in the areas controlled by armed groups so as to facilitate those combatants willing to escape to do so. MONUC social workers should also be strengthened (in number, financial means and tactics/skills) in order to be much more effective in their mobilisation of combatants to disarm voluntarily. The UN should put in place mechanisms of tracking armed group commanders and/or the leaders of political wings of the latter armed groups that abduct or forcibly recruit children.

The MONUC Child Protection Unit should ensure that child combatants in the assembly point are separated from adults in order to avoid child abuse by adults and potential re-recruitment.

The police and military personnel should be trained on rights of the child in general and those of child combatants in particular, and how to protect them especially in the wartime. Such a training may be for example organised by ICRC or Save the Children which have a good reputation and experience in working with children affected by armed conflict.

- **Recommendations for improving the demobilisation programme**

This study has revealed that the creation of the CREER in January 2004 has marked a positive shift in addressing the specific needs of former child combatants. All new child combatants repatriated should therefore be taken to the latter centre for a relevant rehabilitation.

Because of negative effects of armed conflict on children, young combatants older than 18 but whose recruitment took place while they were still children, should be taken as child combatants during the demobilisation process. This is relevant in that former child combatants need specific psychosocial rehabilitation, and former combatants aged 18 or older at the time of demobilisation should also be considered for the latter rehabilitation in order to prepare them for effective social reintegration.

Should female child combatants report or be repatriated for demobilisation, the RDRC should be ready to receive them and accommodate them in the CREER for relevant rehabilitation, unlike what happened to the two female child combatants rejected at Gitagata transit centre for their being "few and the lack of relevant facilities to accommodate them".

The family tracing should start as soon as former child combatants have arrived in the rehabilitation centre, and media (radio, TV, newspapers, posters, and community meetings) should also be used to speed up the process in order not to delay the family reunification.

While the family mediation is made at the family level to prepare the family and to assess its capacities to receive the former child combatant, the above media and church services should also regularly used to mobilise the communities to receive the former combatants in general and child combatants and female ones in particular. Such mobilisation should be permanent instead of being conducted only when there is a group of former combatants ready to be reunited with the families. A particular focus of

mobilisation should be on changing the perceptions of the communities on the former female combatants.

Interviews with former child combatants in the rehabilitation centre should be only allowed to individuals whose skills or professionalism are not questionable, in order to avoid potential problems that may be caused by sensitive issues raised by interviewers. In the same vein, the social workers, the nurses and the teachers of the rehabilitation centre should be trained on techniques of interviewing vulnerable children in general, and former child combatants in particular.

Both adult and child combatants, without any distinction, should be given consistent demobilisation benefits in order to facilitate a better reinsertion in families and communities.

- **Recommendations for improving the reintegration programme**

The RDRC should ensure that all "forgotten former child combatants", that is those discharged at Gitagata transit centre and Mutobo solidarity centre are identified and cared for. A participatory approach should be used so as to identify their actual needs which should be addressed accordingly.

The Rwandan government should ensure that reintegration efforts of former child combatants go together with other programmes aimed at caring for vulnerable children including mainly those affected by genocide and the armed conflict. This will contribute to avoid resentment and frustration among the latter children and will mitigate jealousy and poisoning reported in the current study. Failure to care for all war-affected children would lead some children to enrol in armed groups, or other child refugees to report themselves as refugees in order to be entitled for the DDR benefits as it used to be in Eritrea.

The government should regulate the sale of properties such as land and houses so that properties of refugees or orphans are not sold or appropriated abusively by their relatives.

The RDRC should assist the former child combatants in vocation training to get jobs or to have access to bank credits in order to be able to use the acquired skills and knowledge to create jobs. This will help the latter children and their families to get livelihoods and therefore be more accepted, and will contribute to the country development process. Working in associations which bring together both former combatants and those who are not should be encouraged by the RDRC. This will not only enhance social reintegration of the former combatants, but will also bring together the forces, skills and knowledge of many individuals for a common goal.

Despite the training in income generating activities that former child combatants have got in the rehabilitation centre, the RDRC should assist former child combatants free of charge to formulate the project proposals to apply for RDRC funding. This is very relevant in that, as the study has revealed, some former child combatants are illiterate and are not able to take notes of what they are taught. It becomes therefore difficult for such former combatants to formulate fundable proposals by their own.

The RDRC should prepare the former child combatants who are enrolled in formal education and vocational training, and their families to be able to support medical care and children's education on their own, after the suspension of the RDRC assistance.

- **Recommendations for further research**

The current study has generated valuable data on the former child combatants' DDR programmes in Rwanda. However, the phenomenon of child combatants and DDR processes is so broad that this study has not approached it exhaustively. Research is therefore needed on life of female combatants in their armed groups; the psychosocial problems experienced by former female child combatants who reported themselves as civilians for repatriation; the studying/training performance of the former child combatants compared to that of other children without a military background; economic reintegration of former child combatants; and traffic of small arms in the Great Lakes Region. Lastly, research is needed on the experience of Rwandan children in general and young females in particular who lived in the refugee camps in the DRC.

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