

THE DISARMAMENT DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH THE FIGHTING FORCES

Lessons Learned
in Sierra Leone
1998 - 2002

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Acknowledgements

This document covers a specific part of Sierra Leone's history, which hopefully will be decisive in marking the end of its civil war and its re-birth as a peaceful, developing democracy. It owes most to those who participated in this process and were directly present during the years concerned.

Thanks are due to colleagues from UNICEF and the agencies within the child protection network (listed at the back of the document). Together we experienced the highs and lows of what may ultimately be considered a successful DDR programme (time will tell). Those still in Sierra Leone continue their work to ensure that children's rehabilitation from their experiences with the armed groups will be long lasting. Acknowledgement also goes to the Government of Sierra Leone for its constant commitment, notably the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA).

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Andy Brooks
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CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 1961** Sierra Leone is made independent of Great Britain.
- 1971** Sierra Leone is declared a Republic. Siaka Stevens is named President.
- 1978** Referendum approves One Party State – Siaka Stevens’ “All People’s Party” becomes the sole legal party.
- 1985** Stevens retires from office. Major General Joseph Momoh is elected unopposed.
- Relations between Sierra Leone and Liberia are strained after Liberian President Doe accuses the Sierra Leone Government of an attempted coup in Liberia.
- 1990** Widespread support for multi-party politics, which Momoh rejects.
- 1991** About 100 fighters made up of Sierra Leonean dissidents and Liberians cross from Liberia to Sierra Leone in an attempt to overthrow Momoh, who had been supporting ECOMOG in preventing Liberian Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) from capturing Monrovia. The fighters call themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and are led by a former photographer and ex-army corporal, Foday Sankoh.
- 1992** President Momoh flees the country believing a military coup will displace him. Captain Valentine Strasser assumes the presidency. At 26 he is the world’s youngest leader. Strasser affirms his commitment to multi-party politics and establishes the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC).
- Meanwhile some members of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), angry over poor conditions, have joined the RUF. Some are SLA by day, RUF by night and become known as “sobels” or soldiers-rebels.
- 1993** Nigeria deploys two battalions of ECOMOG forces to Freetown from Monrovia to support Strasser’s war against the RUF.
- 1994** Strasser increases army recruitment to 12,000. Some of the recruits are street children, as young as 12.
- 1995** Strasser invites a South African private security company, Executive Outcome (EO), to support the government’s fight against the RUF. EO trains government troops and defends Freetown alongside ECOMOG. EO retakes key diamond areas and collaborates with Kamajors against the RUF.
- 1996** Brigadier -General Julius Maada-Bio deposes Strasser in a palace coup a month before general elections. Despite intimidation from RUF, elections go ahead and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah is elected with 59.4 % of the vote.
- November Abidjan Peace Accord between RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone. EO is asked to leave the country.

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- 1997** Coup led by Major J.P.Koroma in May forces President Kabbah to flee to Guinea Conakry. Koroma abolishes all political parties and establishes the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). In June the RUF are invited to join the Junta rule.
- 1998** In February ECOMOG troops, backed by the Kamajors and a British company Sandline storm Freetown and oust the AFRC/ RUF Junta rule. In March President Kabbah's Government re-establishes power.
- August **DDR Phase I begins. It ends in December as tensions mount.**
- 1999** In January a mixture of former SLA/ AFRC troops backed by the RUF launch an assault on Freetown, seizing parts of the city from ECOMOG. At least 5000 people are killed.
- July Lomé Peace Accord signed between the key factions. The Accord establishes a unity government including members of the RUF and former AFRC. Sankoh is made Minister for Mineral Resources. The Accord provides a blanket amnesty for all those involved in the conflict.
- November **DDR Phase II begins and UN Peacekeepers start to replace ECOMOG.**
- 2000** In February UN Security Council expands UN Mission (UNAMSIL) from 6,000 to 11,100.
- May More than 500 Peacekeepers are seized by the RUF. Rebels close in on Freetown. 800 British paratroopers sent to Freetown to evacuate British citizens and to help secure the airport for UN peacekeepers. Rebel leader Foday Sankoh is captured and arrested.
- DDR Phase II is suspended and what is known as the Interim Phase begins.**
Many international NGOs scale down or leave Sierra Leone
- June Government ratifies a treaty to establish an International Criminal Court in Sierra Leone. The issue of trying child soldiers raises controversy as many were forcefully recruited.
- August The "West Side Boys" (former SLA, a renegade militia group and RUF) take 11 British troops hostage. RUF appoint Issa Sesay as their new leader.
- September British paratroopers storm the camp of the West Side Boys. One British soldier is killed along with 25 West Side Boys.
- November A taskforce of 500 British Royal Marines arrive in Freetown to reinforce British troops training SLA
- 2001**
January Government postpones presidential and parliamentary elections - set for February and March for six months because of continuing insecurity, which it said made it impossible to conduct free and fair elections nation-wide.

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- March UN troops begin to deploy peacefully in rebel-held territory.
- May **DDR Phase III begins.**
British-trained Sierra Leone army starts deploying in rebel-held areas.
- 2002**
- January War declared over. UN mission says disarmament of 45,000 fighters complete.
Government and UN agrees to set up the Special Court.
Disarmament and Demobilisation in Phase 3 ends.
- May Kabbah wins landslide victory in presidential elections. The Sierra Leone People's Party secures a majority in parliament.

Foreword

This paper captures key lessons learned in the children's component of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme in Sierra Leone. It documents a process that began with DDR Phase I in August 1998 and ended with the official end of the war in January 2002. Of course the long-term impact of DDR continues to be measured as children's reintegration goes far beyond their return to their families and communities. How children fare over the years to come will no doubt be the subject of future studies.

The complexity of a demobilisation and reintegration programme in the midst of ongoing conflict is apparent throughout the text. Making sense of the roles children played in the conflict in Sierra Leone is critical but complex. What emerges through contact with children from the fighting forces is a multiplicity of stories. Some volunteered, others were abducted; some were forced to murder their families and community elders, others are heroes who defended their communities. All that can be said with certainty is that there was no such thing as *the* "child soldier" in Sierra Leone¹

Many children were drawn into the ranks of the fighting forces to play roles not too dissimilar to peacetime: fetching water, cooking, carrying loads and messages etc. Often these children were already a part of "camp life" as relatives of soldiers in the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). With the start of the rebel war in 1991 younger children would be maintained in domestic functions in the SLA whilst older youth underwent extensive training. With the RUF there was systematic recruitment of children. They had learned from their experiences in Liberia that children made good soldiers. Younger children within the ranks of the CDF were considered to bring good charms or "juju" for their innocence.

¹ This paragraph has benefited from discussions with Susan Shepler, an anthropologist researching how the concept of "youth" has been affected by children's participation in conflict in Sierra Leone.

Inevitably the children most vulnerable to recruitment were the children who would be most vulnerable in any circumstances: children living in poverty; children separated from their families or with disrupted family backgrounds; and children from conflict zones with little access to basic services or a reasonable standard of living. What emerged was a pattern of risk linked to family and community attachment as well as separation; children who were steered into armed conflict through their relatives and a misplaced appropriation of family and community "honour" and "duty". There were families who sent their children to the war front believing in the cause or in the hope they would return to share the booty they would have looted. "Operation Pay Yourself" or "Jaja" brought the child the satisfaction of contributing something to the family's survival.

The graphic atrocities of the Freetown invasion in January 1999 raised the profile of children in the conflict and brought with it world wide media attention. As the rebels retreated they abducted thousands of children to carry looted goods, to act as human shields, as sex slaves and ultimately to augment their fighting forces. The visibility of children mobilised donor funds and resulted in an increased number of child protection agencies interested in providing emergency programmes for children. The focus of the programmes reflected the legacy left by years of conflict: advocacy for the release of child soldiers, medical and counselling services for the victims of sexual violations and family tracing systems for the large number of separated children. It was from this platform of programmes that the child protection network in Sierra Leone faced the challenge of managing the large numbers of children that would come through the DDR Phase II programme when it was officially launched in October 1999.

The number of children who were within the ranks of the fighting forces in Sierra Leone remains impossible to calculate. For planning purposes, based on approximate numbers submitted by the factions, the National

Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) estimated there would be 45,000 combatants to disarm. Of these, 12% or 5400 were forecast to be children.

By the end of the process in January 2002 a total of 72,500 combatants had been demobilised, of which 6,845 (92 % boys and 8 % girls) were children. The official percentage of children demobilised in relation to adults was 9.5 %. The number of children who bypassed formal systems to move from a military to civilian existence is unknown. The length of the conflict was such that the majority of children recruited, particularly to the RUF, were adults at the time of any formal demobilisation process.

UNICEF and child protection agencies continue to review their role and how best to manage children's best interests in DDR

processes. A key part of this is improving coordination with other agencies consistently involved in the process and defining clear responsibilities with governments in place. Steps to ensure this are underway and offer hope for greater attention to the specificities of children in DDR and girls in particular. This document reflects actions undertaken and the principles that guided them during a specific period in a specific context. DDR continues to be a regular feature on post-conflict agendas and is evolving and hopefully improving with the experience we are gaining. How the experience of Sierra Leone will fit and compare with others remains to be seen and it will be important to ensure other processes are also documented for constant review and adaptation of how what essentially sets out as a military and security measure can work best for children's recovery and rehabilitation.

Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CAW	Children Associated with the War
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDF	Civil Defence Forces
CEIP	Community Education Investment Programme
CPA	Child Protection Agency
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FTR	Family Tracing and Reunification
ICC	Interim Care Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
MYES	Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports
NCDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration
NCRRR	National Commission for Reintegration, Rehabilitation, Resettlement
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PDO	Pre-Discharge Orientation
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SL	Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
STD	Sexually transmitted disease
TCC	Technical Co-ordinating Committee
TEP	Training and Employment Programme
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TSA	Traditional Safety-net Allowance
UNAMSIL	United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPKO	United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSRSG	United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary General

Map Of Sierra Leone Indicating Sites of demobilisation camps and ICCs in Phase II
(Map courtesy ES/NCDDR)



Sites of Key Interim Care Centres



Sites of Demobilisation Centres

Chapter One

Sierra Leone's Civil War and Child Protection

1991 - 1997

In March 1991, a former corporal in the Sierra Leone Army, Foday Sankoh, led an RUF (Revolutionary United Front) invasion from Liberia backed by Liberian fighters loyal to Charles Taylor. This sparked a conflict in which it quickly became clear that children were being recruited as soldiers in both rebel and Government forces.

Demonstrating that it upheld the relevant articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) it had ratified in 1990, the Government handed over 370 child soldiers (including 10 girls) from its armed forces on 31 May 1993. The children were absorbed into makeshift demobilisation centres prior to planned family reunification.

In 1996, the Family Tracing Network, a decentralised system of NGOs in accessible areas of the country was created with a Secretariat in Freetown. A database was linked to the network to provide Government with a tool to monitor the status of war-affected children in line with its CRC reporting obligation. This network formed the basis of what became the Child Protection Network.

The first democratically elected President, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, inaugurated in March 1996, was forced into exile by a military coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma in May 1997. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was formed, the Constitution suspended and all political parties abolished. In June, Koroma invited the RUF to join the Junta Rule in Freetown.

The Junta period

The Coup and period of Junta rule further weakened the country's social services. Traditional forms of authority and control

were contested. Although there was no systematic reporting of child rights' violations, there were increased reports of forced child conscription and abduction. Throughout the Junta period child protection agencies continued to advocate at field level for the release of child soldiers, often at significant risk to themselves. NGOs within the Catholic Mission had a particular respect and presence in rebel-held areas that proved a huge resource. Many Junta officials had been educated within the Catholic school system and the Bishops were able to get their attention.

Between September 1997 and January 1998, 340 child soldiers from the SLA were released and a commitment made to hand over all children under the age of 15, in accordance with the CRC. The momentum in dialogue was such that the AFRC had compiled a list of 2000 names for hand over to child protection agencies.

It was at this point, in February 1998, that ECOMOG (Economic Community of West Africa States' Monitoring Group) ousted the Junta. Whilst ECOMOG's intervention restored the country's democratically elected Government, prospects for the release of additional children disappeared. As the AFRC/RUF retreated, not only did they take with them the children on their rolls (and committed for release) but they re-recruited some of the children they had previously handed over and abducted many more new recruits. In the meantime the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) continued a practice they had begun in 1996 to initiate children as both "lucky charms" and to "man" checkpoints to protect their communities. No sooner were these children positioned on checkpoints to safeguard their villages than they found themselves on the front line of enemy attacks.

January 1999 and its aftermath

On 6 January 1999, the ex-SLA and the RUF joined forces again to attack Freetown. The Peacekeeping force of ECOMOG managed to retake control of the capital but not before thousands of casualties, large-scale

destruction and a level of child mutilations, abductions and sexual violations had occurred on a scale previously unseen. The stark awakening for Sierra Leoneans and the international community alike was that many of the perpetrators as well as the victims of these violations were children. Children suspected of links with the RUF/AFRC/Ex-SLA were routinely detained by ECOMOG and the CDF, and sometimes tortured for information.

Child protection agencies advocated with ECOMOG to uphold its responsibility as a Peacekeeping Force to respect the Geneva Conventions. Notable changes were observed in their treatment of children. Referral systems were established and child protection agencies were notified of the arrival of any children. The child protection agencies liaised directly with ECOMOG in their operational areas and children were provided with clothes and medical treatment prior to being handed over to the agency.

The level of abductions and other forms of child separation led to concerted efforts to document separated children and reunify them with their families. In total, 4814 children were listed as “missing” after the Freetown incursion, of which 48% were girls. Registration points were set up to document missing children. Radio publicity appealing to families to register their children ran in tandem with radio tracing which read out the names of families for whom children had been found.

In July 1999, the Lomé Peace Accord was signed between the key factions. It established a government of national unity, including members of the RUF and the former AFRC. Lomé also called for full implementation of the DDR programme initiated in 1998. But the country's interpretation of peace became rather too closely aligned to the success of the programme. Articles that provided for the security and political framework within which DDR could operate were subsumed by the catching symbolism of combatants putting down their arms and being where people could see them. Lomé created a plethora of Committees and Commissions but only NCDDR had anything like the operational instruments in place or finances committed prior to the signing of the Accord. Unfortunately, the urgency to “operationalise” peace through a DDR programme did not fit with the time required to test the political will of the belligerent parties.

In May 2000, the fragile peace was shattered and hostilities resumed. It took considerable peace negotiations and the re-establishment of national confidence to get DDR back on track. It was not until May 2001 that DDR Phase III was officially launched but when it was the conditions for it to run smoothly were much more clearly in place. It is significant that in the 9 months of Phase III (May 2001 - January 2002) 47,781 combatants were demobilised compared to 18,898 in the 7 months of Phase II (October 1999 to April 2000).

Chapter Two

DDR in the Context of Peace Accords

The origins of DDR prior to Lomé

Although the Lomé Peace Accord is seen as the catalyst to a full-scale DDR programme in Sierra Leone, the framework for such a programme existed prior to Lomé and had been applied in a quite different context. DDR Phase I (August 1998 – June 1999) started after the Junta was ousted with the surrender of SLA factions to ECOMOG following their intervention. After registration, soldiers were demobilised and provided with a cash Transitional Safety-net Allowance (TSA) as their reintegration benefit. Children had also come into this process and, in the absence of any formal structures, were handed over to child protection agencies, which had placed them in centres or foster care closest to their areas for reintegration. Families and communities requested they be formally registered as no longer being part of the fighting factions.

The National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) was formed in July 1998 in the aftermath of the Junta period in anticipation of a negotiated peace settlement. An Executive Secretariat was established to operationalise the programme and a technical co-ordinating committee (TCC) appointed to involve key stakeholders. UNICEF was invited to participate in the TCC to discuss and advise NCDDR Government on technical and operational policies and procedures for children in the process.

The line Ministry responsible for children, the MSWGCA, did not feature on the TCC for NCDDR². Although UNICEF was able to provide an interface between NCDDR and child protection agencies and the MSWGCA, the absence of the key Government line ministry for children from the beginning of

the process had an impact in the later stages of the programme. It resulted in some delays in establishing clear links between the demobilisation of children and the provision of social services on their return to their communities.

The Lomé Peace Accord

“The role of children in armed conflict should be acknowledged from the onset of peace negotiations and children’s rights should be identified as an explicit priority in peace making, peace building and conflict resolution, both in the peace agreement and DDR plans.”³

The Lomé Peace Accord was signed on 7 July 1999. It is rightly praised for its attention to the “special needs of...child soldiers” (Article XXX), but it failed to represent the needs of *all* war affected children in Sierra Leone. Child protection agencies and civil society appealed to the peace brokers to seize the opportunity of the Accord to table children’s concerns. Specific attention was drawn to the release of girls who had been abducted and the provision of services for them. The Accord also offered the possibility for a paramilitary group, the RUF, to ratify its commitment to the CRC. By contrast, the blanket amnesty for atrocities committed prior to Lomé (Article IX) exposed a willingness to pacify, rather than hold accountable, perpetrators of abuses against children. As a result, opportunities to uphold children’s rights were missed.

Although the RUF signed the Peace Accord, there were indications that they had little intention to comply with it. As steps were put in place to increase access to rebel-held areas, the RUF continued to violate the basic principles on which Lomé was based. Although Lomé legitimised the RUF as a political party, there was no thought on how its transformation from a paramilitary

²The Ministry of Social Welfare did initially attend meetings in 1998 but their interest waned as few children entered the programme in this period.

³ “Role of UN Peacekeeping in DDR”: Report of the Secretary General to UNSC (United Nations Security Council) 11/2/00

organisation could be effected. Moving from a military to a political apparatus demands access, registration of voters, demarcation of constituencies etc. Foday Sankoh did not even return to Sierra Leone until three months after Lomé. When he did, there was little evidence that he intended to use his leadership of the RUF to comply with the Lomé Accord. By May 2000, the country destabilised to the point of hostilities breaking out again.

The Abuja Agreement

The final turning point in the war came in late 2000. The Abuja Agreement was initiated by ECOWAS, and was signed in November of that year. This set the stage for the final resumption of DDR in early 2001. The tide was turning against the RUF. A demonstration against the resumption of hostilities by the civilian population in May 2000 at the Freetown home of RUF leader Foday Sankoh is now regarded by many as a critical moment to mark the end of the RUF and the conflict. Sankoh was arrested for his own protection and remained in detention until his death in July 2003.

British forces intervened in response to the violence around Freetown in the middle of 2000. This show of strength by the international community gave added support to the Abuja Cease-fire Agreement in November between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF. This document stated specifically a commitment “to recommence immediately the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme.”

Lessons Learned

- **DDR programmes involving children, which fail to include from the outset relevant Government line ministries for children’s services, risk disconnecting the act of demobilisation from the process of long term reintegration. Child protection agencies should lobby for the presence of these line ministries, where possible**
- **UNICEF should use its role on planning and management committees to represent the views of the child protection network as a whole and take an approach based on consensus building in the development of common policies.**
- **The Child Protection part of DDR should come under a specific agreement (MOU) with the principle authority for the DDR programme and have the ability to be funded independently**
- **Peace Accords offer the opportunity to highlight the needs of children affected by armed conflict. UNICEF and child protection agencies should lobby with delegates to the discussions to ensure children’s rights are prioritised.**
- **Peace Accords should make provisions that provide amnesty for children recruited to fighting forces, regardless of acts they have committed. Those who recruit and use children for military purposes should be held responsible.**
- **The release of children from fighting forces, with specific mention of girls, should be a condition stated within the Peace Accord. The willingness of the factions to commit to stop the recruitment of children and to release them should be used as a litmus test to measure the seriousness of the engagement of the parties to the conflict in genuine negotiations towards ending the conflict.**

Chapter Three

Conditions for Mobilising DDR

Security, access and logistics

Lomé envisaged the beginning of the formal DDR process for 18 August 1999. As that date came and went, it was very clear that neither the security environment nor the logistics were in place, nor were the basic assumptions that underpinned the programme. Sankoh's absence from the country made consultation with the leadership of each party unviable; there had been little compliance with other articles in Lomé, and access to many parts of the country continued to be hindered by rebel occupation. The international Peacekeeping Mission to provide the security framework for the process had not arrived and indeed it was only on 22 October 1999 that the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1270, which authorised the deployment of the Peacekeepers. The first troops were not deployed until late November.

Added to this unstable environment were the elevated expectations of combatants who either wanted reward for defending the country or for ceasing their attack on it. None of the belligerent groups ever presented to the Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) their nominal rolls of combatants, as stipulated in Article 19 of Lomé. A symbolic disarmament ceremony was staged on 20th October 1999 but when the 15 Reception Centres and 4 demobilisation centres opened on 4th November 1999, it was clear Lomé had done little to broker trust between the factions or create faith in the DDR programme. Disarmament rang empty for communities terrorised by the persistent violations of a cease-fire that had been signed on 24th May 1999.

When combatants did start disarming, the process was hampered by political and security delays. Disarmament started before the demobilisation camps were ready and when they were, there were insufficient

military observers to register the combatants or the equipment to produce individualised identification cards.

ECOMOG registered combatants and collected weapons for destruction but there was a lack of Government control in the process. When the time came for ECOMOG to hand over to UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) in December, the transition was riddled with accusations and tensions in the leadership structures. A key aspect of contention was the non-destruction of weapons, which contravened the Joint Operations Plan. Their storage (rather than destruction) provided another security concern and led to allegations, after May 2000, that the same weapons that had disarmed the combatants had re-armed them. The weapons issue was symptomatic of a process that was fraying at the edges.

Interim Phase and Phase III

The violence of May 2000 put a temporary halt to demobilisation. The RUF was reluctant to negotiate, but an increasing foreign military presence shifted the dynamic of the war. The period between May 2000 and May 2001, known as the Interim Phase in the DDR process gave everyone a chance to reconsider their positions. Combatants were still demobilised during that year, but there was no formal system and the total number of less than 3,000 was not militarily significant.

Phase III of DDR took place between May 2001 and January 2002, and was the final and most comprehensive phase. In Phase III, DDR finally became a national process and all parties became a part of the working committees such as the Tripartite Commission, made up of Government, UNAMSIL and the RUF. This was very significant in the success of the programme.

Prior to Phase III, demobilisation was possible only when individual combatants or small groups arrived at demobilisation centres. Combatants who wanted to disarm voluntarily crossed into government controlled areas, and presented themselves

at one of the two disarmament sites. It was very difficult, often impossible, for those managing the disarmament process to determine who they really were or what fighting forces they represented. But until peacekeepers were deployed around the country, NCDDR would not attempt any national demobilisation.

At the end of April 2001, the government, the RUF and UNAMSIL agreed to re-start disarmament and demobilisation. Districts were progressively targeted as NCDDR systematically planned how DDR could achieve national coverage. Kambia and Port Loko were designated as the first demobilisation sites, and the RUF stronghold of Kailahun designated the last. Modalities were agreed upon by all the parties, which decided to demobilise two out of the twelve districts at a time. One of them would be a RUF territory and the other would be a Government territory controlled by the CDF. This provided for a largely equitable disarmament. With a schedule of two districts a month, the process was

expected to take about six months. Progress was reviewed at meetings held each month, at which plans were made for the next two districts. The planning meetings were shifted back and forth between government held areas and those of the RUF, a strategy that proved beneficial in building the confidence and understanding of both sides.

Phase Three experienced less logistical difficulties. NCDDR was responsible for the logistics of setting up the demobilisation camps, while UNAMSIL managed the disarmament sites. It took two to three weeks to get centres ready for incoming combatants. Bush had to be cleared, and provisions for food, water, lighting, and sanitation had to be made. NCDDR used old school buildings as demobilisation camps, and then returned them to the communities after demobilisation was complete. NCDDR counselled commanders on the process and what was expected of their demobilised troops.

During Phase III the SLA was dropped from the list of armed groups that would be involved in the disarmament and demobilisation. The government had decided to reform the army as part of the larger peace process. Initially the government represented the CDF, but eventually CDF representation was included on the Technical Co-ordinating Committee of NCDDR. In the latter stages of the DDR process RUF fighters were allowed to join the reformed Sierra Leone Army (up to a total of 3,000).

Information and Sensitisation

When the first combatants started to arrive in the demobilisation camps, it was clear how distorted was their perception of the process. Children especially felt betrayed by a programme they believed would provide them with a \$300 TSA, immediate enrolment in school, vocational training, or access to employment.⁴ A level of expectation existed

⁴ In response to the poor understanding and misinformation, in some cases in Phase III UNAMSIL, NCDDR and the CPAs had 10 minutes each to talk about the services to the new arrivals at the demobilisation camps.

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that could not be fulfilled. As children were demobilised, the lack of immediate benefits to the commanders deterred other commanders from bringing in children. They perceived it as weakening their “manpower” with nothing in return.

But some of the children made their own choices in this process. For older youth that had achieved rank, the TSA was a particular draw as they would be more likely to reap its full benefit and it enhanced their status alongside the adults. In some cases, children tracked into the child programme returned to the bush to find a weapon and attempted to qualify for the adult programme. The fact that the children were not entitled to the \$300 TSA acted as a disincentive for the release of additional children by their commanders.

The transfer of children to Child Protection Agencies trailed off in 2000 up until the outbreak of hostilities in May 2000, possibly due to a lack of confidence in the process and the “what’s in it for me” perspective. In a sample study done by NCDDR, the entry of child soldiers dipped from 31% of the overall population in October to less than 7% in April 2000⁵. This statistic also reflects the lack of commitment of the RUF to the Peace process at that time – a factor that resulted in hostilities breaking out again in May 2000.

Advocacy for the release of children

Child protection agencies used their existing links with the fighting factions to sustain advocacy for the release of children and clarify the child aspect of DDR. Their strategy was to target the commanders, convince them of the detrimental effects of armed conflict and appeal to their moral obligation rather than quoting and referring to international legal instruments. In 2000, 478 children were released by the AFRC in Kabala, 270 in Makeni by the RUF and 450

children in Lunsar by the RUF. Apparently, these releases were often allowed so that the fighting force could off load some of its troop maintenance burden.

Getting information to the combatants was just one side of the equation. There was little meaningful dialogue with communities about how they felt about the combatants’ return. And there was certainly no co-ordination between NGOs, CBOs and other members of civil society with NCDDR. It was clear that the information strategy relied too heavily on a vertical flow of information from Government to communities and was therefore ineffective. UNICEF funded several of its partners for “community sensitisation” but had little capacity to evaluate the impact of this work or bring agencies together to consolidate approaches.

While children were generally welcomed more willingly than adults, there were communities, particularly in the CDF-controlled south of the country, which regarded the reintegration of ex-RUF child combatants with great suspicion. Such was their mistrust of the process that they would not even register for tracing their own children who had been separated from them in the conflict.⁶

Attitudes changed significantly once the conflict ended. Nonetheless it is clear that there needs to be continuous communication with home communities. Information and advocacy on child rights and the impact of conflict on children is necessary at all levels. No level is too insignificant to be omitted. It was telling how more protected the child felt following a negotiated release that had included preparing the local community. The challenge then, as discussed later, is to ensure that the welcome “home” is connected to long term community-based programmes to support reintegration.

⁵ Sample analysis of 17,000 records between October 1999 and May 2000 of which about half belonged to CDF ex-combatants and close to a quarter each to SLA/ AFRC and RUF. (Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, NCDDR. March 2001).

⁶ Communities’ mistrust of family tracing must also be connected to their understanding of it. This will be addressed in the analysis of the programme in a later section.

With the creation of the Tripartite Commission, child protection agencies identified another mechanism to advocate for the release of children. Close collaboration between the UNAMSIL Child Protection Advisor and child protection agencies resulted in significant releases. On occasions, however the political nature of the Tripartite Commission led to releases that were more to do with positive publicity for the factions and the political negotiators than the protection of truly vulnerable children.

In May 2001, 175 children were released to UNAMSIL/UNICEF in Kailahun. The screening was carried out in Kailahun by SCF (UK). However the town was still firmly held by the RUF and SCF (UK) was in no position to refuse children presented for release. Despite concerns from child protection

agencies about the profile of the children and their eligibility for the programme there was considerable pressure to continue with the release. After screening, about 40% of the children were deemed ineligible - the majority being the children of RUF leaders who wanted their children to attend school in Daru.

The second release at Tongo Fields of 156 children a month later had more screening because the local security situation was better. Nonetheless, despite the numerous requests by the negotiators, very few girls were released. The releases set out to be a sign of good faith by the RUF but the political pressure to see the releases happen and thus give further impetus to the broader DDR programme took precedence over the best interests of the children.

Lessons Learned

- **Advocacy should operate at multiple levels. Formal dialogue between UN officials, foreign embassies and donors with key representatives to the conflict should be complemented by approaches from civil society targeted at the factions' key intermediaries.**
- **Advocacy for the release and handover of children (abductees, child soldiers, prisoners of war) has to be linked to programmes of assistance. Referral systems that link children with formal (DDR) and informal (community-based) structures of protection should be made clear to the belligerent groups and security forces.**
- **Information is vital. Lack of information and data (see final chapter) weakens the negotiation position regarding children. All significant events should be logged. All data should be gender dis-aggregated and should track abducted children, children released, children in care and children returned to their families.**
- **Peacekeeping forces are key agents in children's protection. Co-ordination between child protection agencies and peacekeepers at both the institutional and grassroots' level can protect children in the event of planned military manoeuvres or organised releases of children.**
- **The UN Mission has the primary responsibility for direct dialogue with commanders of the factions. Child protection agencies should ensure, through the Mission's Child Protection Advisor(s), that deployed peacekeepers and Military Observers have clear information on: dates and venues of demobilisation; roles, names and operational areas of key child protection agencies; understanding of reintegration programmes.**
- **All parties to the conflict need to be engaged in negotiations for the release of children, regardless of their human rights' record.**
- **"Community sensitisation" campaigns should engage in dialogue with communities, not insist they will accept unconditionally the return of child combatants. Sensitisation needs to be linked to concrete measures of community-based support (including any rites of return the community suggests) and protection for children (local welfare and protection systems).**
- **Children should participate directly in the design and delivery of messages on DDR; these should be in the local languages of the targeted beneficiaries**

Chapter Four

Demobilisation

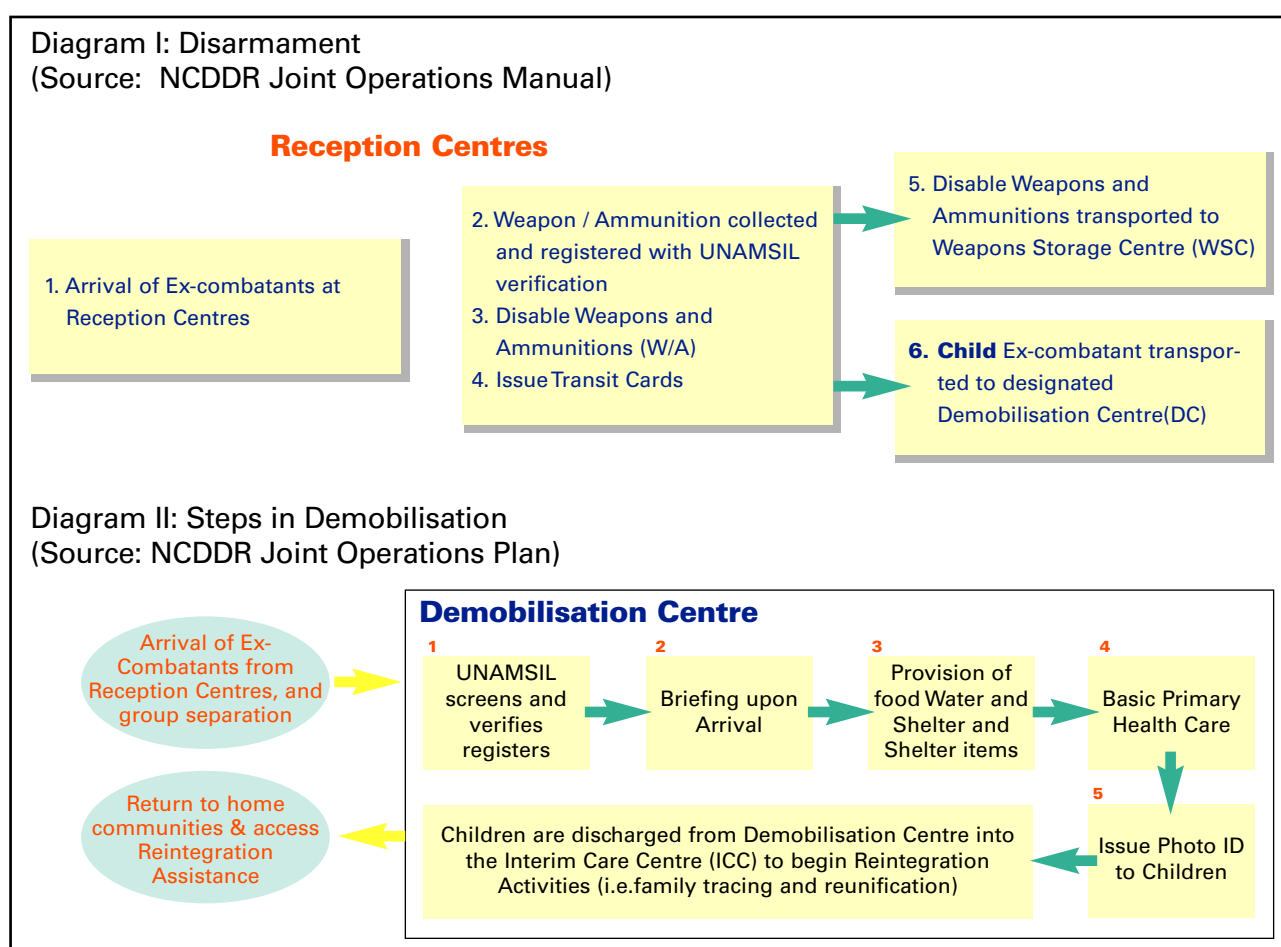
Policies and procedures

With the first set of demobilisation camps in place at the beginning of Phase II, NCDDR and UNICEF positioned child protection managers and agencies within the camps to facilitate the process for children.

The diagrams below are visual representations of the disarmament and demobilisation processes. Essentially,

ensure they were child soldiers and needed demobilisation. Within 72 hours, children were supposed to be transferred from the camps either directly to their families or to interim care centres pending family tracing and mediation prior to reunification.

The procedure in Phase Three followed the same model although there was one significant variation in practice. The children were presented at the disarmament site and identified by the Military Observers. In Phase III, in most cases, Child Protection Agencies were present at these sites and the



ECOMOG and later, UNAMSIL, transported adult and child combatants to the NCDDR-managed demobilisation centres from Reception Centres where they had been disarmed, registered and validated as either children or adults. Children reported to the children’s part of the camp and were screened by a child protection agency to

verification took place at this point. The children were then taken to the ICC on the same day as they arrived at the disarmament site while the adults were taken to the demobilisation site. The presenting faction had representatives who liaised between UNAMSIL/NCDDR and the demobilising combatants. Often these go-betweens would intervene when the CPA

staff identified a child and would argue with the Military Observers to allow the child into the adult programme. These protestations were the most prolonged when the child in question was a girl.

Children's eligibility in demobilisation

Within the above models of child demobilisation emerge significant factors that can be analysed to inform future practice.

Children entered the DDR programme through a number of avenues. Some came in via reception centres as part of an organised disarmament operation; others ran away and surrendered themselves to ECOMOG or UNAMSIL. Others still were referred to child protection agencies by the police or brought in for demobilisation by their families. Not all children went through the demobilisation camps. At times it was neither practical nor in the child's best interests to be sent to a demobilisation camp and children would be "retroactively" demobilised by mobile UNAMSIL teams at either interim care centres or agreed locations. Of the total number of children demobilised in DDR Phase II, over 500 were demobilised in ICCs. In Phase III there was a deliberate policy for children not to go to demobilisation camps but pass directly to the ICCs or, in the case of the CDF, go directly back to their communities.

In Sierra Leone children were screened by the child protection agency to determine their eligibility for demobilisation. Procedures defined those eligible as follows: aged 7 or above; have learned to "cock and load"; have been trained; have spent 6 months or above in the fighting forces. The randomness of the "eligibility" inevitably exposed some children to a process that had little meaning for them and let slip others that would have benefited. Effective screening relied on the adeptness of the child protection agencies in assessing the difference between children who had genuinely been with the fighting factions and others who saw the process as a ticket

to benefits. Given the experiences in neighbouring Liberia, the children who fell into this latter category in Phase II were surprisingly few. Social workers screened the children using institutional knowledge gained from years of advocacy with the factions and from what the children themselves had taught them. Who were their commanders? What were their code names? What kind of weapon did they use? Where was their training camp? They also interjected the codes and language of the fighting forces to check the children's responses.

In Phase III commanders arrived at disarmament sites with large groups, in a process that allowed them to decide who would complete the DDR process. In practice they often brought in those they favoured, including family members, in order to secure benefits for them. Children and girls, many of whom were not considered part of a commander's inside group, tended to be the losers in this process. While there are no accurate figures, it is estimated that there are up to 3,000 girls who suffered that fate. Currently, child protection agencies have identified almost 1,000 of such girls.

Adult versus child programme

At the point of entry to DDR, the key difference between the adult and child programme was adults needed to present a gun (or defined equivalent) while children did not. The aim for children was to minimise the conditions placed on their access to the process. Children did not receive the \$300 TSA – the value of a basic needs package of goods and food for an average family of five during a settling-in period of six months – paid in instalments to the adults. Children instead would receive "in kind" services like care, family tracing and reunification and access to community reintegration programmes. It was felt that cash benefits for children would be likely to end up in the pockets of their commanders. But, more importantly, the intention was to avoid the perception that the use of children as combatants could result in a "reward."

Child protection agencies' jobs were made more difficult by the lack of awareness of the programmes among the Military Observers and the frequency of their turnover. The absence of local language speakers at the Reception Centres and the limited level of English of many of the Military Observers led to mistakes that had to be resolved at the point of entry to the demobilisation camps. Military Observers reported feeling threatened at the Reception Centres to register children as adults and adults as children. There were Military Observers who adopted an attitude of military solidarity with the children and believed they should have the same "rewards" as the adults for giving in their guns. They led the children into the adult programme with no understanding of the long-term implications, a situation that was exacerbated with frequent turnover of the Observers. It is significant that throughout all the phases of the DDR programme, no female Military Observer was deployed in the field on the DDR programme.

In order to consolidate joint working practices and overcome the problems encountered by the turnover of Observers, monthly training sessions were introduced between the Military Observers and child protection partners. "Age Verification Centres" were proposed where UNAMSIL would bring combatants whose adult/child status was unclear. These centres were positioned at strategic points between Reception Centres and demobilisation centres. The disarmed combatant would be interviewed by a child protection social worker in his/her local language who would then recommend to the Military Observer whether he/she should be registered as a child or an adult. In this way decisions were made in co-operation and outside the tensions of the demobilisation camp. Military Observers appointed Child Focus Officers within their teams whose mandate was to link directly with the child protection agency in their operational area. In Phase III the joint working practice of interview and

documentation tended to take place at the disarmament point before the child was taken to the ICC, the adult to the demobilisation camp. This would not have been possible in Phase II where the buy-in to the process was so limited that the Reception Centres were deemed too insecure for a CPA.

Issues of encampment

The impetus in Phase II to move children through demobilisation within 72 hours was acknowledgement of the risks posed to children through continued association with their former commanders in the adult section of the camp. While a separate site some distance from the adult camp was favoured, the resource implications of the provision of separate security, logistics and Military Observer personnel were acknowledged. The brevity of the time frame for children and the priority given to their demobilisation in the official procedures reflected NCDDR's concern for their welfare in the process. But in reality, children were delayed and were not always prioritised. The slow pace at which UNAMSIL and NCDDR registered children delayed their onward movement to interim care. The 72-hour target was rarely achieved.

A lack of clarity in the management structure of the camps also impeded the process. The lack of defined lines of responsibility between key actors created additional, non-combatant related, tensions in the camp with no available troubleshooting mechanism. Inevitably the most vulnerable participants in the process, the children, suffered as a result. In Lungi, delay in providing separate facilities meant that for a long period children were dependent on the adult camp for their water and sanitation facilities. They also had to get their food from the adult camp. Both the environment and operations within demobilisation camps conspired to facilitate and enhance the very commander/child structure the process was designed to break. As one child protection manager put it, "Commanders see themselves as children's everlasting Bossmen"

Phase III adopted a “fast track” approach to demobilisation. By then, people were eager to move on and ready for peace. The RUF leadership was ready to transform their movement into a political party so they could stand for election in 2002. The only way they could qualify was to disband their military. Various qualification and security standards were relaxed, and some aspects of the process were improved.

In Phase II combatants had been given cash allowances when they turned in their guns, which allowed many to leave the centres and either buy new guns or spend money on things other than resettlement. During Phase Three former combatants stayed for much shorter periods of time than they had in earlier phases (on average adults stayed for 72 hours and children passed directly to the ICCs), and were given transportation allowances that they used to return home. It was only when they had returned home that they were able to pick up their resettlement allowance.

Camp Followers

No programme provision had been made for what came to be known as the “Camp Followers”. These were the family members of the combatants or, at least, those presented as kith and kin that accompanied the combatants into the DDR process. They were

not regarded as “combatants” so received no services from NCDDR; nor were they seen as IDPs so received no services from NCRRR (National Commission for Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resettlement). But they outnumbered the combatants 4 to 1.

Child protection agencies and human rights groups drew attention to the vulnerability of children in these conditions. As the children had not entered the process through a formal channel, it was hard to discriminate between children who had been abducted, child soldiers and genuine family members. Combatants had always regarded children as “manpower” and this mentality stayed with them in the camps. The control the fighter had lost by giving up his weapon was compensated for by keeping as many children as possible under his control in the camp. Children provided labour for food preparation, fetching water, selling in the local markets etc. Girls were kept under particular control and represented a presence amongst “Camp Followers” that contrasted sharply with their absence in demobilisation. Commanders threatened to kill them if they left. Agencies found the task of accessing children an arduous one. Resistance came from both commanders and some of the older women in the group who relied on the children’s support.

The need for a child-centred demobilisation

Clearly a child needs an environment that offers security and in which he/she can have confidence in his/her interviewer. Demobilisation should be conducted as a civilian exercise and should take place in an environment that reflects demilitarisation. In Sierra Leone the camps provided an entry point for children who had been released with adults and it made sense they should be transported there together by UNAMSIL from the Reception Centres.

But services provided to children should have been administered in interim care centres. This became the model in Phase III and should be in place from the outset in future DDR programmes. All of the ICCs were in easy reach of the demobilisation camps and provided a more child-centred context in which to explain the process and document the children. Provided the throughput in interim care is well managed, a system that exposes children to only one centre or camp environment to re-orientate them from the bush is optimal.

Not much is known of children who bypass formal systems of demobilisation — especially girls who have been sexually abused and might have a child to consider as a result of a rape. Children may also bypass formal systems through a misunderstanding of their eligibility for services. A DDR programme that focuses too sharply on disarmament as the most viable entry point can overshadow advocacy efforts for the release of abductees and children in support roles, especially girls. Research is needed to see how children fare who return directly from the factions to their communities. Is their past identity as fighters concealed by the anonymity offered by avoiding formal structures? Or does the community know who they are and mistrusts them more for having no demobilisation recognition from Government?

Both these questions demand that thought is given to the “meaning” of demobilisation. Is it a lifestyle choice to give up the gun? Or is it a ticket to benefits? Probably it is a hybrid of both and other factors. Evidence from Sierra Leone indicated that children’s key motivation to demobilise was to return to their families with the added security of having something to show they had been through a process that had changed them. At this early stage of their rehabilitation it was less significant for their perception of themselves than for how they wished others to perceive them. In 1998 after the Government had been re-instated, families insisted children of theirs who had been with the RUF/ AFRC were given I.D. cards to protect them from the CDF. The significance of the process was clear again in May 2000 when children in centres and those reunified clung to their yellow demobilisation forms as evidence, if stopped, that they were no longer part of the factions. For some children the victimisation they still suffered, demobilisation or no demobilisation, was a big blow to their conviction that they could start a new life.

Demobilisation has to be recognised as the beginning of a process, not an event that in itself will effect the child’s reintegration. Children need to continue to be supported over time to leave behind their life with the fighting forces and to build on the opportunities that demobilisation offers as a rupture from their military past. Experiences from Liberia (1997) and Angola show that if demobilisation consists of little more than registration, distribution of nominal benefits and discharge it achieves very little. In both countries children were accelerated to their communities at a pace that outstripped any available follow up and it is posited in similar studies to this in both those countries that high numbers were re-recruited.

Lessons learned

- **Mainstream demobilisation should represent an end to a military process for children. It should be a civilian exercise conducted by child protection agencies and NGOs that have the expertise to address the specific needs of children. At demobilisation, children should be given clear information on what are the next steps in the programme. As key beneficiaries, children should contribute to the development and adaptation of the process for which they are registering.**
- **Military Observers should be briefed on policies and procedures prior to deployment. Training in child rights and protection should be institutionalised by UN-DPKO as part of pre-deployment preparation for its personnel. Organisations working on child protection issues should reinforce this training in the field and have regular forums to consolidate joint working practices.**
- **The high turnover of Military Observer personnel should be avoided. Opportunities to maintain a “Core Group” of Military Observers for tours of at least 12 months should be explored to encourage consistency and continuity in working relationships with child protection agencies. Child Focus Officers should be stationed in every Military Observer team.**
- **Children can be demobilised in the midst of a conflict but there are protection issues. Security measures should be taken to ensure protection in a camp context from re-recruitment, exploitation and any forms of harassment. This requires contingency planning for camps in volatile areas and guaranteed access for children to basic services in an environment that does not place them at risk.**
- **All women and child “Camp Followers” should be screened at the point of entry to a camp and given an orientation on the programmes available to them. During demobilisation all children should be given clear information on what are the next steps in the process. Thought should be given to designing a child’s version of the PDO (Pre-Discharge Orientation) to make information on the process and programmes systematic.**
- **Administrative, technical and logistical capacity should be in place to assist children’s fast passage through demobilisation.**

Chapter Five

Girls and the DDR

Process

Difficulties in access

DDR programmes have consistently failed to attract female combatants and Sierra Leone was no exception. Finally, for all the Phases, only 8% of the children registered by the DDR Programme were girls. Although, this is much lower than the actual number it is not possible to have an accurate figure because there were no detailed studies made of the children and girls in the fighting forces. Nonetheless, it is estimated that about 3,000 girls who would have been eligible for the DDR programme did not come forward to be registered.

Despite written policies for priority treatment, female fighters were generally treated the same as their male colleagues and the implementation of the demobilisation programme was not gender-appropriate. Personal hygiene kits, separate and secure toilet and shower facilities were not provided and poor security in the camps compromised their protection. It is significant that throughout all the phases of the DDR programme, no female Military Observer was deployed in the field on the DDR Programme.

Child protection agencies tried to counter adverse environmental factors through positioning strong female staff in management roles but the camp atmosphere was inevitably controlled by and run for men. As the girl combatants moved into the interim care centres and reintegration phase, there continued to be insufficient attention to the need for separate and gender-specific services for girls. Girls slept in separate quarters accompanied by a caretaker, but programming was primarily shaped by the profile of beneficiaries, which tended to be male adolescents.

Following the January 6 invasion of Freetown, large numbers of children were

abducted including many girls. In the early stages of the aftermath, through advocacy and provision of services, UNICEF received significant numbers of girl abductees. They were generally between the ages of 14 and 17, pregnant and/or had infants. In other words, they had become a liability to their abductors. As DDR picked up in pace less girls came through the programmes. As mentioned above, a key reason for this was the lack of screening of “Camp Followers”. There was restricted NGO capacity to create separate structures for this population and limitations in their mandates to work within the DDR camps. Commanders were reluctant to give up the control they exercised over the girls and those who were willing to consider the girls’ best interests, questioned their welfare in the demobilisation structures.

In addition, girls had their own reasons to avoid DDR. There had been little sensitisation with communities on the victimisation of girls in the conflict and most feared the stigma that would come with admitting eligibility for demobilisation. They were afraid their sexual abuse and lack of “training” (i.e. in domestic chores, understanding of community values etc.) would quickly identify them as fighters. Most girls were aware of the risks of sexual diseases they carried as a result of their abuse. In addition to their fears for their health, they worried whether they could ever have children and if they would find marriage partners.

Those who did return to their communities tended to bypass formal systems, as they preferred to return anonymously. As much as this secrecy protected them it also concealed their need for special support. Young mothers were especially vulnerable; their babies were perceived as the “rebels” of tomorrow. Some families rejected the girls. Others left in shame of their failure to fulfil the roles expected of them. Some became commercial sex workers; others returned to their commanders in the bush. Many girls gravitated towards a life of going back and forth to the bush, torn between the



security offered by family and community relations and those offered by a combatant, sometimes caring and providing, other times abusive and denying.

The majority of girls with the fighting factions had been abducted and allocated to a male commander. Invariably their first introduction to bush life was rape. Girls would be raped over a period of time and by multiple perpetrators. Many of the younger girls died as a result. Those who fell pregnant were sometimes forced to abort, especially if their pregnancy coincided with the timing of an attack or operation since babies risked giving away the rebel position. Girls were moved around from one combatant to another unless he was in a commanding position. Many sought solace from regular abuse through the protection of one commander. In some cases, the girl and commander grew to care for each other.

Other girls chose the “hard line” and became frontline fighters. This was their own form of protection. Each girl coming through has her own story; stories of horrific abuse, rape and the development of various coping strategies.

Co-ordination of services

To address the needs of girls following the January 1999 invasion, UNICEF initiated a co-ordinating mechanism with the MSWGCA and NGOs in March to provide specialised services to victims of sexual abuse. For all girls coming from the bush and the many victims left behind there was access to medical screening, services and counselling. As the numbers of abducted girls coming through increased, there was recognition of the need for separate care provision.

In October, the “Conforti” Centre was developed in the east end of Freetown⁷. The centre provided a form of extended interim care to ensure the protection and development of their infants, time for mediation with the families and skills building for the young women to sustain them in their future. The beneficiaries had access to antenatal care, supervised deliveries, counselling and education on reproductive health. Unlike their male counterparts, the majority of the girls were more committed to skills training and income-generating activities than formal education.

Although well conceived, the Conforti programme suffered in two key areas: there was no clear exit strategy and the care offered compromised the mothers’ responsibility to their children. The first of these resulted in residents staying in excess of a year and the lack of any process in the programme that would provide a point for discharge into the community. Staff discovered belatedly that some girls concealed the whereabouts of families in the vicinity of the centre to hold on to benefits.

⁷The “Conforti” Centre existed prior to October 1999 but was only designated as a specialised service to pregnant girls and young mothers at this time.

The emphasis on skills building for the young mothers freed them from their child-care responsibilities to engage in training. In some cases, this had the effect of diminishing their commitment to their babies. The message they interpreted was that the agency would look after their children while they pursued their own reintegration goals. This raised child protection issues for the babies if the mothers were to care for them outside the centre.

The agency responsible worked hard to address the flaws in its programme. Outreach services in the community and the integration of child-care issues into the skills training curriculum gave the programme a strong focus on early childhood needs. This was complemented by a health clinic it ran in the same community, which included a holistic focus to their concern for children's early development. Greater responsibility for their children was placed on the mothers. One such initiative was a day care programme run by the mothers themselves so that child-care was shared between them. As alternative care evolved, the momentum of throughput⁸ in the centre increased and the programme came to offer a comprehensive and effective service to an otherwise neglected population.

At the end of Phase Three a special programme was started to assist the girls who did not go through the DDR programme. By the end of 2003 about 1000 girls had been identified. The programme found that the girls do not have family reunification as their major priority. The programme had to evolve to "family connection" with the aim of communication between the girl and her family rather than reunification. Girls' priorities tend to fall into three categories: income generation that is as immediate as possible, shelter and access to medical services. As time moves on beyond the end of DDR, the girls have found their own community support mechanisms. Similarly the programme has moved away from a centre-based approach to that of supporting the community's own support systems.

It is interesting to note that not all the local communities think that the girls were innocent victims. There is a perception that girls joined the fighting forces for the benefits, particularly as a wife of a commander. Even girls who did not directly receive benefits themselves as DDR participants, are perceived to benefit indirectly through support provided to their "husbands" who had been part of the DDR programme. Communities have raised questions about them receiving what they perceive as further benefits through a specifically targeted programme.

⁸ "Throughput" in both this context and in relation to interim care refers to the speed with which beneficiaries are moved through programmes of encampment or institutional care.

Lessons Learned

- **Child protection agencies and human rights groups need access to girls and women built into the demobilisation programme. Demobilisation camps need to provide services that are gender specific, such as reproductive health services, separate toilet and shower facilities and appropriate hygiene kits.**
- **Camp committees of combatants should include female representatives. Physical security is a key incentive to entering the system; protection can be enhanced through improved fencing, lighting and patrolling by security forces.**
- **Female Military Observers should be deployed throughout the DDR process.**
- **Young mothers and their children are particularly vulnerable. Services that provide for their care need to monitor and respond to child protection concerns. Linkages of mothers to independent living programmes associated with livelihood options should be supported by access to community health services and follow-up social work support.**
- **It is now known that the numbers of girls who access DDR programmes will be small compared to the actual number. Child protection agencies should a) design an advocacy campaign that targets the release of girls b) pre-position services specifically for girls and c) engage in dialogue with communities to develop strategies to assist girls' reintegration.**

Chapter Six

Interim Care

The framework of interim care

A few Interim Care Centres (ICCs) had been first established in 1993 in response to the demobilisation of children from the SLA. The child protection programme built on its existing programme structure and set up additional ICCs to be strategically positioned to link with the demobilisation centres (See the map on page xii). The majority of the ICCs were new structures to respond to the DDR programme. Managing all the centres to provide a care that was “interim” and not institutional was a key challenge in the development of the programme.

The ICCs were recognition that, with the exception of the CDF, the majority of the children associated with the fighting forces had been separated from their families. The centres were designed to provide a “cooling down” period for children coming from the bush and a re-orientation towards civic and family life. Children were transferred to the ICC closest to their area for reintegration at the earliest opportunity. Family and community mediation was likely to be more effective if the child and family were in reasonably close proximity⁹. ICCs were construed as a “bridge” to children’s reintegration, a measure that would give them a firmer footing on their return to their family and community. They catered to all separated children. Children who did not “qualify” for demobilisation were not rejected but provided for in an inclusive care system.

Management and co-ordination

The success of the child protection programme was built on the strong management and co-ordination systems that had been established since 1996. The Child Protection Network under the chair of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) and supported

by UNICEF, brought together child protection agencies. The Network was able to build a system that connected the agencies that were dealing with distinct parts of the child protection chain: ICC - alternative care – family tracing and reunification – CEIP – TEP (Training and Employment Programme). The responsibilities were divided either by activity such as family tracing or by geography. In general an agency would be responsible for a number of activities in some specific districts.

The Network has remained vibrant and relevant beyond the DDR period to deal with post-DDR protection issues like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court. The main weakness in the system has been the inconsistent or late reporting by child protection agencies and a lack of continuity due to a high turnover of international staff. This said, a core group of international staff remained throughout the DDR process and were ably assisted by national staff in management positions who liaised closely with their staff in the field.

Core Management Group

In addition to the broad Child Protection Network, a smaller forum was put in place to address specific policy and programme issues in DDR. This became known as the Core Management Group. Its focus initially was interim care but it continues to meet regularly to discuss specific strategic issues related to child protection.

The first task of the Core Management Group was to tackle difficulties arising in the ICCs. Standards between agencies were variable and there was a lack of consistency in the delivery of an “interim care” service. Children quickly picked up on the cracks in the system and strategically manoeuvred their way around the centres, leaving one centre for another they perceived to offer better benefits. In the process, the aim of facilitating their reintegration to their communities was de-railed and the programme risked institutionalising the children.

⁹ However, the distance between centres coupled with limited logistics did make effective contact between families prior to reunification difficult.



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The Core Management Group initially met fortnightly to articulate and consolidate a set of guiding principles and minimum standards for interim care, and agreed on core activities to be included in the programme. The optimal period for interim care was framed as six weeks. Having established a framework in which to work, more specific issues like the quantity and quality of food, distribution of non-food items and protocols for transfer of children

between centres were agreed upon. The regularity in which the forum met allowed for a framework that not only consolidated practice that was consistent but was able to adapt to changes in security and introduce contingency planning.

The Core Management Group provided some cohesion in the practices of agencies in interim care but was constrained by certain factors. The high turnover in personnel from international NGOs resulted in many co-ordination meetings being spent re-iterating agreed policies and procedures. The meetings were held in Freetown, which provided national partners in the south and the east with little scope for their input at the meeting and regional differences were not always taken into account. Another key constraint was the failure of Programme Managers to cascade information to their staff in the field. Therefore, caregivers, tracing agents and social workers often demonstrated minimal understanding in their practice of agreed policies.

Attention to training and staff support

The minimal training many of the front line staff received exacerbated the dislocation between policy and practice in the field. The majority of caregivers, particularly, had little experience of working with children. Training was a very weak component of all aspects of the DDR programme for child protection agencies and should certainly be a priority in future DDR programmes.

Adding to this inexperience was the tendency for the lack of recognition from employers of the stressful environments in which staff worked. On top of all this, practically all agency personnel had suffered in their own lives as a result of the war and carried extremely mixed feelings towards the children for whom they were being paid to care. They were generally not given opportunities to share or make sense of these feelings.

Child participation

The key principles of the interim care programme were to provide children with a structured environment that involved as short a stay as possible, non-discriminatory practice, was culturally appropriate and offered adequate protection. Cutting across all of this was recognition of the need to promote children's participation. The atrocities with which the children were associated initially resulted in a level of caution and control in the centres that allowed little room for children's expression. Added to this was a cultural resistance to children making decisions about their lives. For children who had come from commanding positions in the fighting forces it was humiliating to find themselves "commanded" by "civilians".

The strategy that seemed most effective in engaging children's participation was an approach that promoted both their rights and *responsibilities*. Most children in Sierra Leone take on some responsibility for the welfare of the family from a young age. Children who had been part of the fighting

forces often found themselves in positions of significant responsibility. Agencies who recognised that within this distortion of a child's role lay enormous potential were the ones who promoted true participation most effectively. Skills of leadership and strategic planning that had been learned in the bush could be re-deployed to promote management of children's activities by children and develop children's own mechanisms for conflict resolution.

The involvement of children in radio broadcasts for peace education and child rights was particularly effective, as was the responsibility placed on older children in the centre to care for and provide an example for younger children. However structured the centre's activities were, agencies began to realise that rehabilitation was not just about the psychological process of "de-traumatisation" or a process of education or skills training for a new way of life. Children who had spent time attached to armed groups had to work out ways of forging new social identities for themselves in post-conflict Sierra Leone.

"Psychosocial"

Interventions to assist children's adaptation to a non-militarised environment were positioned within the broad programme area of "psychosocial". The term evolved to counter-act "trauma" focused approaches that assumed children's experience in war necessarily left them in need of in-depth psychological support. The emphasis was on promoting adjustment through activities that created an environment that was "normal" for children and would equip them to return to civil society. Education, skills training, sport and cultural activities were encouraged as group activities, which developed children's relationships with each other, staff and the community around the centre. Drama and dance were aspects of centre life that children particularly enjoyed as it gave them a vehicle to act out some of the anxieties from their life with the factions in a way that tuned them back into traditional forms of expression.

Within this framework inevitably there were children who needed special attention. Many of the children spoke of being forced to take drugs prior to combat. The recollection of atrocities they subsequently committed haunted them in an environment that did everything to persuade them that this was not the norm. The effect was less a manifestation of drug addiction than a sense of complete helplessness on how to cope with these feelings. As much as the programme succeeded in providing a stable adaptive environment for the majority, there was a minority of “high risk” children who required more specialised services. Secondary counselling support was provided by two international NGOs with trained psychologists, but this support was available only in Freetown and was not sufficient.

Health

The lack of appropriate emotional support services had a direct impact on mainstream health services. Doctors attached to the centres reported high numbers of children at the clinics with physical complaints that revealed no apparent ailment on examination. Indeed this was a phenomenon that was rife throughout the country. The conclusion drawn from one doctor was that the war had left the whole country in a state of “hypertension” and a large number of the referrals to health clinics constituted a somatisation of emotional difficulties. All of the ICCs had routine health checks and treatment for the children. Children’s ailments typically reflect what would be expected from exposure to difficult living conditions: malaria, respiratory tract infections, skin infections and sexually transmitted diseases. The children’s bodies were often scarred or burned both as a form of torture from their commanders or from injuries picked up in battle. Their physiques and complexions were a sorry legacy of the hazards of carrying heavy weights, inhaling toxic substances and engagement in long and gruelling marches.

The number of children with disabilities who came into the child protection programme

was very low. As with the girls, the low numbers of children with disabilities reflect the limited access to programmes of children with disabilities and their risk of increased mortality in a bush context. Children with disabilities tended to be left behind by the factions on manoeuvres and left to make their own way back to their communities.

In a report from “Physicians for Human Rights”¹⁰, it was estimated that 70 to 90% of rape survivors tested positive for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Girls and women who had been abducted were at particular risk due to the probability of recurrent sexual violence. Girls were routinely checked for vaginal infections and boys for urethral infections. The incidence was notably high in adolescent girls but still significant in boys. Whilst girls repeatedly spoke of rape and sexual abuse, boys rarely made any such disclosures.

For both girls and boys the psychological impact of sexual abuse is compounded by the social stigma attached to it. In an environment where access to treatment is extremely difficult, the social implications raise the risks of infections being spread even further as patients avoid follow up treatment and acknowledging their diseases. This was a particular concern for agencies when children left the ICCs to return to rural communities with minimal health services and entrenched taboos about children’s sexuality.

Education

A re-orientation to education was a priority aspect of the interim care programme. The academic level of the children varied enormously but all of them had had their schooling disrupted in some form.

The education component of the programme was greatly helped by the Rapid Response Education Programme (RREP).

¹⁰ “Preliminary findings and recommendations on the health consequences of human rights violations during the civil war”. Physicians for Human Rights. (Unpublished. March 2000)

The curriculum incorporated both academic aspects of education such as literacy and numeracy as well as life skills like personal hygiene, and sexual health and conflict resolution.

The time frame of the RREP in interim care was sufficient to assess children's progress in the centre prior to linking them to the appropriate grade in schools in their home communities. For children who could not go home it also offered a bridge of continuity between life in the ICC and their placement in alternative care. Another advantage was that it had been developed with the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports (MYES) and was designed to link directly with the formal school system.

Skills training

The development of skills training activities was targeted primarily at older youth that did not identify education as part of their personal reintegration strategy. This aspect of the programme faced the same challenges as education in terms of providing a curriculum that would be a useful orientation but would not keep children in the centre for the sake of completing a particular training course. An additional factor was the lack of foresight on the part of some agencies in placing youth on skills training courses that bore little relevance to their community for reintegration.

As the skills training component took shape it focused more specifically on using children's time in interim care to expose them to a number of different activities within the care time frame. After such an orientation – and as the outcome of family tracing became clearer – the youth could make an informed choice about which skill would be most useful to pursue as part of their reintegration plan based on aptitude and usefulness in a particular geographical area.

Throughput in ICCs

All of the components within the interim care programme endeavoured to make children's stay in the centres meaningful but as short as possible. However, too many children stayed for too long. The insecurity in the north and east of the country meant tracing for the children's families was not possible and the search for extended family took time. A second factor was the commitment of tracing agents. Standards of documentation were extremely variable and collaboration between tracing agents and social workers/caregivers in the centres was often minimal. The lack of human resources and technical capacity within the tracing network left some children waiting a long time with no outcomes. As a result of this, some children lost confidence in the tracing process and resigned themselves to institutional care.

Other children genuinely had no interest in leaving the centres, either afraid of returning to communities in which they had committed atrocities or mindful of the lack of care they had known in their families prior to their separation¹¹. But the overriding reason children became stuck in the ICCs was that the network that provided care for children in centres had not pre-positioned alternative care placements for children who could not be reunified. Other than family reunification there were no exit strategies for children in centres. These were only developed in the second half of the year 2000.

The centres were designed to be a short stay centre - both for the children and for the centre itself. But it proved a slow process to finally close the centres. At the end of 2003, there were still three centres remaining (out of an initial total of 11)¹². By the end of the DDR programme in 2002, a total of 7,141 children had been provided with care in an ICC. Of this number 5,038 (70%) (4,585 male

¹¹ Demobilised boys took the longest time to place/reunify.

¹² These centres proved useful for separated children from neighbouring countries, pending repatriation.

and 453 female) were demobilised child combatants and 2,103 (30%) (1,473 male and 630 female) were otherwise separated children. Of the total children placed in interim care, 6,977 (4,894 demobilised and 2,083 otherwise separated) had been reunified with their families by December 2002 (98 %). A total of 299 were reported to have absconded from the ICCs but a significant number reappeared to another ICC and were finally reunified.

Monitoring and evaluation

Agencies were mandated to carry out internal reviews of every child in their centre every six weeks to ensure children were not drifting in care. The review demanded multi-disciplinary assessments on each child to chart his/her progress in core areas like health, education and family tracing. The MSWGCA and UNICEF ensured that agencies were conducting internal reviews and carried out their own reviews with the children and staff.

The review meetings gave the agency staff an opportunity to come together with the children's teachers, nurses and tracing agents to reach a holistic view of the child. It also provided children with a forum to express how they felt about life in the centres and what they would like in their futures. Sometimes the review was the first time children heard exactly what they could realistically expect from their reintegration plans. This could be upsetting but children demonstrated they could generally accept and work with worst case scenarios much better than adults give them credit for. While useful, implementation of the practice varied widely among the Child Protection Agencies and was difficult to sustain.

Security in the ICCs and emergency response

The establishment of ICCs brought with it significant security concerns. Centres had been a target for re-recruitment in the post-Junta period. Due to widespread poverty, the children's home communities themselves were vulnerable and did not always welcome the children. For many, the

children represented the very reason their livelihoods had suffered. They resented the ease with which "rebel children" accessed education, food and clothing when they struggled to provide for their own children. On occasions the security forces themselves presented the greatest threat to children. In general, the security forces were extremely antagonistic to the children and shared the mentality of some community members that these were "rebel" children.¹³

The key to protection was closer collaboration with community structures. In fact, funding for ICCs cannot be channelled in a narrow centre-based direction, but rather must be extended to be inclusive of community projects. Partnerships between child protection agencies and communities in school rehabilitation, micro-credit lines and investment in workshops all worked to improve relations. Community and centre children interacted more freely and community children came to the centre to play football or attend classes. Community leaders were invited to the centre to talk about cultural traditions and responsibilities and children from the centre participated in community work like cleaning and road maintenance.

In early May 2000 security in the country deteriorated dramatically. A plan of emergency response in the event of such a situation had been developed. This had been instilled as part of the contingency planning within the structured framework of the Core Management Group. Priority risk areas were the centres in the northern and eastern provinces as they were closest to rebel held areas from which the most immediate incursions would be likely to come. Plans were put in place to move the children from Daru to Kenema and Bo and for the children from Makeni and Lunsar to come down to Freetown.

The south of the country was identified as the area most protected from rebel attacks due to the strong deployment of CDF and

¹³ In an ICC in Kenema, security became a particular issue when a Zambian battalion was stationed just behind the centre. Some of the Peacekeepers had been abducted in the May events and recognised children in the ICC who had been party to their abduction.

being of less strategic interest than Freetown. But this did not translate into security for the children in the centres. Their past affiliations with the RUF made them targets and plans to move other children from areas perceived more vulnerable were put on hold. Agency staff mounted concerted sensitisation campaigns with CDF commanders to safeguard the children. They did so at considerable risk to themselves and often succeeded in protecting the children but becoming targets themselves.

The May crisis demonstrated the resourcefulness and resilience of both the staff and the children in the centres. Only a few children from the most volatile areas (Makeni and Lunsar) were re-recruited to the factions in spite of considerable pressure to fight. The programme had succeeded in giving children an alternative to the gun and the trust between the agencies and the children was much stronger for the solidarity that emerged during the hostilities.

Lessons learned

- **Newly arrived international staff for UN and NGO child protection agencies should be properly briefed on policies and procedures prior to and upon arrival. National staff should be empowered to promote consistency in operations. Training to all field workers in basic child-care issues and protection is essential. Training should be an integral part of programme proposals with budgets that reflect costs of facilitators and a depth of personnel that allows for staff rotation for training, in-service training days etc.**
- **ICCs are stressful environments. Agencies should introduce effective stress management systems: support groups for ICC Supervisors and supervisory structures between caregivers, centre supervisors and Programme Managers. Attention should be paid to the number of hours worked per week, particularly by caregivers.**
- **The risk of sexual exploitation and abuse exists in all forms of care. It is essential to establish a comprehensive system of protection that includes: staff recruitment procedures, agency human resources regulations that specify a code of conduct on sexual abuse and respective punishments, staff training, regular assessment and monitoring and a reporting system to which children have access.**
- **Child protection agencies should ensure the needs they identify for children in interim care are followed up on their return to their communities. For example, the programme curricula for education and vocational training must be linked to mainstream schools and technical institutes.**
- **Children's rights to participation go beyond their involvement as beneficiaries. They should be included in planning and evaluation of the ICC programme.**
- **ICC populations cannot be treated in isolation from the surrounding communities. Child protection agencies with strong roots in the communities of ICCs offer optimal opportunities for an interim care programme that is community-based.**
- **Children should be transferred away from the zones of their commanders at the earliest opportunity. ICCs should be as far from the front line as possible. Vulnerable groups should be prioritised. Transfers of children should be effected under a civilian umbrella.**
- **Contingency planning for removal and evacuation of children from ICCs relies on close co-ordination and strategic planning with local security forces – police, peacekeepers, community representatives etc. Focal points within security forces and child protection agencies promote good information sharing and a cohesive response in emergencies.**
- **Monitoring of children's movements should be tightened at times of security concern. Children should be involved in discussions around potential movements and be clear on their own personal contingency plan in the event of deterioration.**

Chapter Seven

Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR)

Constraints in the framework

The Family Tracing and Reunification Committee had been established in 1996 and consolidated within the framework of the Child Protection Network. For each of Sierra Leone's four provinces there was a focal agency responsible for co-ordinating tracing activities at provincial level and linking this into the national database in the Child Welfare Secretariat of the MSWGCA. The focal agencies' effectiveness was greatly restricted by their lack of control in their provinces and the weak links between them and the Child Welfare Secretariat of the MSWGCA.

Training in tracing methodologies and collation of information was given but hampered by the way in which the family tracing system was organised. Family tracing was plagued by agencies vying for territory. Often they were delegated zones to cover by the Ministry that were well beyond their logistical capacity.

Positive innovations

Within these constraints a number of positive innovations should be noted. One agency took the initiative of contacting the displaced Paramount Chiefs of communities in areas that were still occupied by the rebels. This led to children being placed with relatives who had been displaced and for whom tracing based on the information documented from the child would not have worked. It also served to re-affirm the Paramount Chief's role as custodian of his people at a time when community structures had all but collapsed.

Active tracing and mass tracing were also effective. Children from areas of high displacement were taken to IDP camps to see if they could recognise (or be recognised by) family members or friends from the part of the camp sectioned for their

community.

In some centres children who had been reunified were encouraged and supported to make visits back to the centre. This worked to reassure children from similar communities that they would not be targeted on reunification and provided children in the centre with access to information about relatives or friends.

Linkages in FTR

Much was made of children deliberately giving false information to tracing agents or not being able to remember their place or person of separation. Whatever substance there was in this, the reviews in the ICCs exposed a lack of interaction between agents, caregivers and children. Better collaboration between agencies responsible for care and those responsible for tracing would have given the children more confidence in the process. If children had seen this link working they might too have believed there would be follow-up support post-reunification.

The circumstances in which a child was separated were significant: the more involuntary the separation the better generally the prognosis for reunification. On occasions it was clear that the child's idealised recollections of family life were very different from those of the family. Failure to make these connections through joint working between tracing agents and social workers in the centres was likely to place the child at risk.

As agencies learned more and developed their systems, they made changes. A system that had been developed along provincial operational areas converted to working on a district level. This tightened the focus of the searches. When tracing began, if a child was found in one region but had come from another, the information was sent to the region of origin so the family could be located. Often nothing happened, until those running the tracing network started sending the children back to their home areas. Then partner agencies had an actual child to deal with, and were



provided with greater motivation to find his or her family. But not all families could be located.

In many cases, child protection workers who did family tracing for individual children found that families were dead or had moved, or that their family homes had been destroyed. In such cases, if they never succeeded in finding the child's real family, they did succeed in placing the child with another part of his extended family or with a foster family. Many cases were left pending with the names kept on mass tracing lists. No one was eager to declare a case closed; there were still large movements of people around the country and there was always hope that someday some of them would be found.

Child protection workers note many highly emotional reunions between children and families. Many families had given up hope that their children were still alive, and many children may have been away as many as six or seven years. Some had turned from young children into adolescents during that time.

Even after children had been reunited with families, however, their futures were not always certain. There have been a number of cases in which families sent their children back to their commanders, or of children deciding to remain with foster parents even after their families have been identified and found.

Lessons Learned

- **The child should be at the centre of all efforts to trace his/ her family. Caregivers, centre supervisors and tracing agents have a responsibility to keep family tracing firmly on the child's agenda. The child should be kept informed of any feedback from tracing efforts and can be a key actor in field trips to search for his/ her family provided his/ her protection is safeguarded.**
- **Child protection agencies should facilitate contact between children and their families through direct support to families to access their children and through ensuring an interchange of information to support a child's reunification.**
- **Staff involved in family tracing (caregivers, tracing agents, follow-up social workers) need ongoing training in FTR. A particular focus should be on understanding the "cause of separation". Understanding the cause will inform hugely how best to mediate a plan for reintegration support and is therefore a key strategy in prevention of re-recruitment.**
- **The database should be used systematically to collect and analyse data related to causes of separation. It should be an effective monitoring and evaluation tool for strategies of prevention of recruitment and institutionalisation by monitoring length of stay in ICCs, follow up and services provided. A concrete output could be the development of a list of "difficult to place" children for whom concerted efforts could be made in tracing and identification of an alternative care placement.**

Chapter Eight

Alternative Care

Identifying a need

The level of displacement and conflict in Sierra Leone made it inevitable that a significant proportion of children would not be reunified with their families. Some children did not even know who their families were; never mind where they were. Others remembered all too clearly their place of separation and the atrocities they had been forced to commit to sever their ties with their communities. The majority of people in Sierra Leone had been made to uproot at one time or another during the decade of conflict. No child who had been separated from his/her family for any period of time could be confident on their whereabouts or the circumstances in which they would find them.

It was estimated that 40% of the separated children in care programmes would need to be placed in alternative care situations while their families were traced. This called for development of foster care facilities, group homes and independent living structures. But the partner agencies could not keep pace with managing the development of their programmes into alternative care structures *and* coping with the children they had coming into their ICCs. The crisis in May 2000 actually created a hiatus in the flow of children into the centres. It halted the hand over of children from the fighting forces but created time and space to plan constructively for the onward movement of children who had already come into the centres.

Issues of agency support

The issue of how much material, financial and social support to put into alternative care placements varied significantly from agency to agency and from region to region. There were recommendations in the guidelines but the organisation's philosophy usually dictated the terms. Some agencies had a policy of support in which the foster carers recruited received standardised inputs of materials, food and clothing. Other

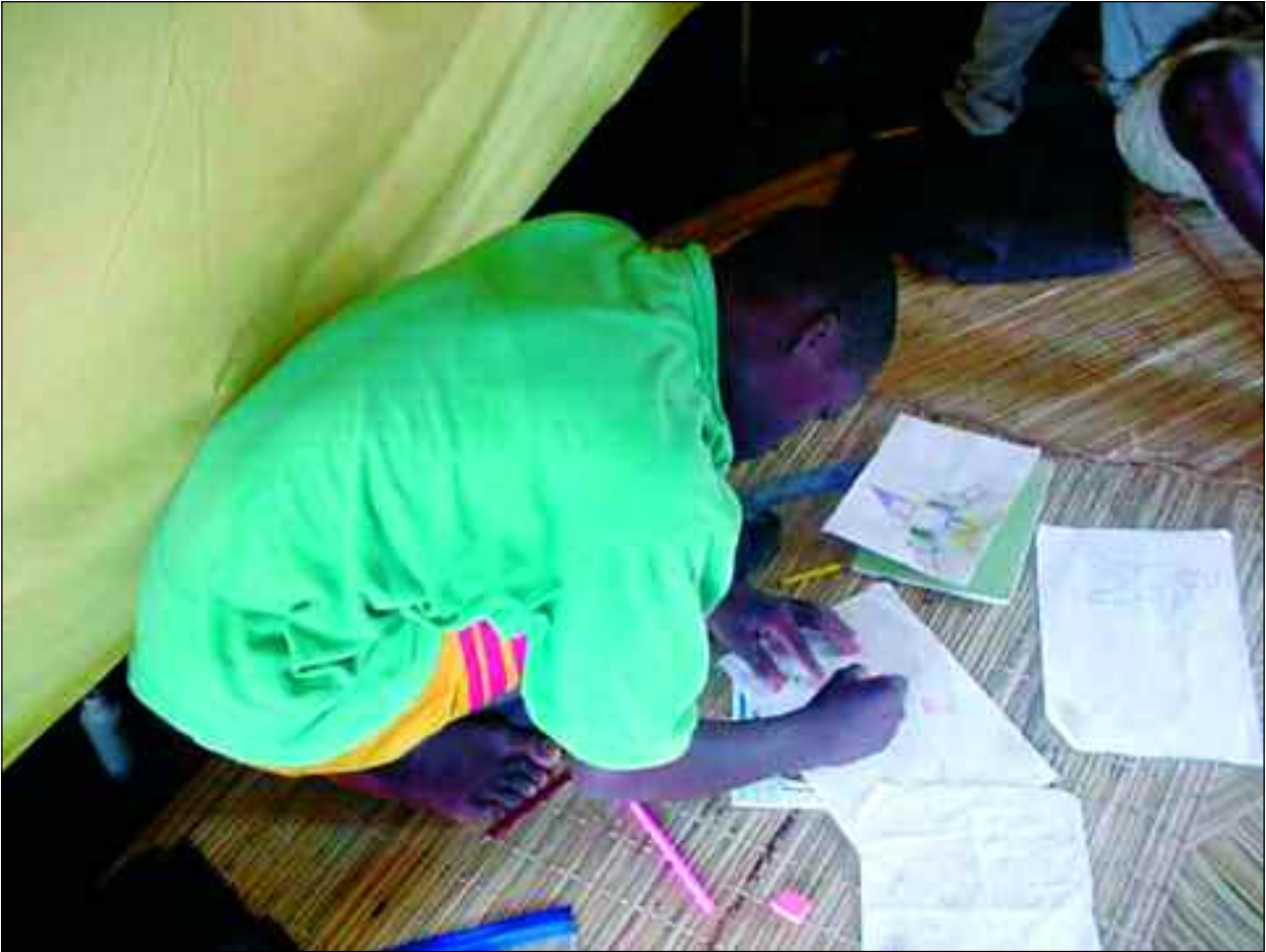
agencies adopted the approach of placing the children's care firmly in the hands of the communities and shored up foster placements through ensuring carers' good will and commitment.

Like most West African countries, children in Sierra Leone can expect to spend their childhood in the care of a number of different adults. The practice of "fosterage" or "child circulation" is a means by which parents will place their children in the care of relatives or associates on either a long or short-term basis. Arrangements drawn up between adults for children's care do not necessarily fit with what might be in the child's best interests. The family's survival is often the crux. According to the circumstance, a child can be perceived as an asset or a burden. Children are expected to take on domestic responsibilities and chores as part of a system that promotes interdependence within household and community relations. Parents who fail to place certain responsibilities on their children can be perceived as failing to teach the value of communal co-operation.

Fitting this dynamic into a child rights framework is extremely fraught. Agency fostering sought to build on traditional mechanisms of shared care within communities but the very interface between communities and agencies distorted matters. Instead of maintaining a system of inter-dependence in household relations, some interventions propagated models of fostering that were adult-centred and over-influenced by Western notions of family structures. Agencies' concern to ensure children's rights were upheld in non-family placements ran the risk of recruiting foster families interested in the perceived benefits rather than those with a genuine commitment to children.

Linking reintegration to alternative care

The alternative care programme helped extend agencies' understanding of reintegration as something more than a child returning to his/her area of origin, to the carer from whom he/she had been separated. Twenty-seven per cent of the ICC



children in Phase II went into alternative care. Alternative care gave children openings to develop relationships in a community setting and to embark on education and vocational schemes that would shape their futures. As children saw their peers being moved from the centres to community alternative care placements the momentum in centre throughput dramatically increased. It was clear that the lack of viable alternatives had maintained them in the centres. In fact the majority of the children were fed up of living in centres.

Centre caregivers had to be trained to support the children they had cared for in the centres in community settings. Staff development needed to reflect the shift of the programme from centre-based to community outreach. Had comprehensive social work training been in place from the outset this transition would have been easier and centre staff's fears about losing their jobs when the children left would have been greatly allayed.

Alternative care was in some cases an alternative to family reunification, since for many it took weeks or months before their families were located and agreed to take them back. For others, primarily those children between 15 and 18 years of age, alternative care offered acknowledgement that they were no longer children and needed to be prepared for their future lives as adults. Many of them were placed in apprentice programs and group homes, or placed in independent living arrangements.

Although standards and guidelines were established the monitoring was insufficient to maintain the standards. Once in alternative care the efforts to trace the families diminished and children stayed too long in their alternative care. The majority of children in alternative care indicated that foster care and skills training apprenticeships were the most successful types of alternative care.

Children's fears of alternative care

Generally the children were afraid of foster care. Many were voicing anxieties based on their experience of non-family placements. They perceived their lack of care as being a direct cause for their abduction into the fighting forces and were expressing a fear of this being repeated. As much as institutionalisation is recognised as detrimental to children's welfare, placement in sub-standard alternative care for "children temporarily or permanently deprived of their families" (CRC Article 20) is no less a violation of their rights. Time will tell whether the speed with which some agencies emptied their ICC caseloads into foster care protected the children's rights to proper care and protection.

A key concern for children as they moved into alternative care was that they would be forgotten by the agency. It also represented reduced prospects for family reunification. Their contact with agency personnel inevitably reduced and, in the context of trying to settle into a new "home", family memories and relations become increasingly distant. It is unclear how this impacts on a child's sense of security in alternative care but it is an area that should be further researched.

What is clear from other countries' experiences is that family tracing activities reduce as children are placed outside agencies' direct care responsibility. In Sierra Leone a key factor is the perception of the foster child and carer by the community. If he or she is perceived as a "rebel" child and the carer is slighted for bringing him/her to the community, the pressure on the foster family is enormous. In the context of fluctuating emergencies and swings in opinion towards children from the fighting forces the risks of the child being rejected have to be carefully monitored. Such situations underline the importance of post-placement support to families and not just material benefits.

Alternative Care Models

Outlined below are four of the structures within the alternative care programme.

(a) Foster Care

Child protection agencies targeted their recruitment of foster carers through the links they had established from their interim care programme. The realisation of communities as the core of centre activities provided an entry point for children whose families could not be traced. Carers were recruited through respected community elders and appeals to congregations in churches and mosques. All potential candidates were vetted by structures within the communities that managed their affairs. The agency would then do its own assessment. Integral to this was the home conditions, the number of children in the home, the willingness and motivation of foster carers, the attitude of other children in the household, and a commitment to facilitate the child's reunification if the family was found.

If carers passed this screening a workshop was arranged at the centre where children in need of foster care could meet potential carers. Children were prioritised for placement according to their age (higher priority for younger children), length of stay in ICC, and accessibility of area for reintegration (those from inaccessible areas were higher priority). Once a "match" had been made, the agency negotiated what assistance was appropriate from the following options: food, clothing, medical support, education support, and within the framework of the foster care associations, income generating activities through "soft loans" and micro credit. Social work support was provided through a minimum of a monthly visit. In addition, focal points were identified within the community who acted as the community's interlocutors with the child protection agency. Social workers were mandated to talk to children alone on their visits and reported these conversations separately from their overall evaluations.

(b) Group Homes

Group homes had no traditional roots in Sierra Leonean culture but were a logical response to a specific caseload that got stuck in the centres. These were youth aged between 14 and 18, usually male, who had been separated from their families for long periods in areas that continued to be occupied by the rebels. Their experiences in the fighting forces had conditioned them to living and operating within group structures that alienated them from an environment based on family relations. Beneficiaries were identified on the basis of having a reasonable capacity to care for themselves (cook, clean, personal hygiene etc.) but were placed in a rented house with adult supervision. The adult was usually a caregiver from the centre that knew the children and worked with them on their life skills in a community setting.

The investment costs of group homes were considerable. Children were given clear conditions for staying in the homes based on their attendance at school or training centre, conduct in the community and respect for the "house rules". The endgame was to provide children with concrete skills and opportunities within a one-year period to move into reunification or independent living. To better manage the costs of group homes agencies set up the youth with income generating activities (mainly petty trading) so they could provide for their own everyday needs. The accent on self-sufficiency was complemented by a re-socialisation to community life through friendships with peers in the community and an identified elder in the compound to whom the children could go for advice outside of the agency.

(c) Apprenticeships

Agencies reported apprenticeships as generally the most successful of their alternative care ventures. The placement of youth with trainers to learn a trade had been a long-standing tradition in Sierra Leone. In return for the apprentice's contribution to the workshop, he received lodging (usually at the trainer's house or in the workshop), food and the odd cash hand out from the

trainer. The investment from agencies took the form of tool provision for workshops. Key concerns expressed by children related to a feeling of being exploited as cheap labour and no clear programme to their training.

Of all the interventions it was the one that relied least on continued links between the youth and the agency. Care was provided by the trainer, friendship through fellow apprentices, and future opportunities through contacts made on the job. Feedback from the youth involved showed a high level of motivation and commitment to their own reintegration goals.

(d) Independent Living

"Independent living" was a term used to describe the programme for youth that were ready to leave the agency's care and live independently. Interim care or alternative care placements demonstrated life skills and competence to manage without agency support. A room and parlour would be rented and furnished for them by the agency for a year. The agency provided food for three months and made the initial investment to set the youth up in an income-generating activity that would be self-sustaining after a three - month time frame. The striking factor emerging from this programme within the first six months was the social support needed by the youth. Independence often meant loneliness. Youth who had been used to the camaraderie of interim care, or even within their former military unit, felt isolated in communities. Social workers reported that as much as the children could support themselves materially after three months, they continued to need emotional and moral support.

Statistics

In total 1216 children had been placed in alternative care up until the end of 2001. By far the majority of these children were placed in foster care. The alternative care models that were employed to start the process of reintegration for former child combatants continued during Phase Three, but by early 2002 the support for alternative care had already shifted to a broader support for activities that encouraged a fuller reintegration into communities. By October 2003, only four children from the DDR programme remained in foster care.

The situation of family tracing changed considerably after the end of the war. Caseloads fell rapidly. Total access in the country and the comprehensive deployment of UNAMSIL facilitated tracing for children who had been stuck in care situations. Currently 98 percent of registered separated children have been reunified with their families.

Lessons learned

- **Children should be at the core of the planning for their alternative care placements. Pre-placement visits and preparation are essential foundations to a positive placement. Responsibilities between carer, agency and child should be defined in a Placement Agreement prior to placement.**
- **Follow-up to children should ensure the Placement Agreements is upheld and the child has access to basic services. Children's views should always be recorded and follow up should ensure that the child is spoken to separately.**
- **Placement in alternative care does not mean the end of family tracing. As access improves and data management systems develop, systematic measures to prioritise tracing for children whose families had been in rebel-held areas should be implemented.**
- **Child protection agencies can take steps to ensure their staff makes the transition from centre-based care to community based follow up. Staff should be given an orientation in all aspects of the child protection programme so they can identify the linkages. Staff rotation to provide fieldwork practice across multiple activities provides them with increased capacity and thereby improved job security and readiness to adapt as the programme's priorities change.**

Chapter Nine

Reintegration

Family reunification and agency follow-up

The majority of children who entered the programme as separated children have been reunified with their families and relatives. A conviction that children's best prospects for sustainable care lie with their families underpins all child protection activities. But within this central tenet of the CRC is the rider that the family should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

There has to be a "bridging" period between the agency's care for the child and that of the community. Children are often at their most vulnerable immediately after reunification. The families they return to may struggle to sustain themselves. Communities may be suspicious of their return and resentful of their role in the conflict. And the child himself/herself might have difficulty in conforming to an environment so starkly at odds with his/her immediate past. All of these factors increase the potential for re-recruitment. Effective follow-up is the key to prevention of separation and re-recruitment to the fighting forces.

The best practice is one that positions itself firmly in the community, not as a go-between between agency and community. Some social workers recognised their role was to mobilise community resources that would protect children, not base their practice on a series of individual visits over a long period of time. Organisations that had strong roots in their operational areas were particularly effective at engaging networks that were committed to children – teachers' associations, women's groups and youth groups. These organisations had a tradition of humanitarian support within the communities. Out of these structures Child Welfare Committees or Child Protection

Committees were established at community level to serve as the local custodians of children's welfare.

The role of child protection in DDR

In a country as poor and decimated by conflict as Sierra Leone, the demand for reintegration assistance as children returned home was extremely high. Reintegration programming provided agencies with significant difficulties. There was confusion between services for children in their care who were "separated" and those "demobilised". Communities constantly challenged NGOs to extend their assistance beyond the reunified child to other children. The lack of a clear framework and strategy led to vast differences in the quality of services children received based on where they lived.

But the child protection network was able to address the challenges of reintegrating child ex-combatants as the children came through the interim care programmes. The existence of forums for discussion facilitated exchange of ideas and experience. Partners did not stand still as children returned to their communities. They built on their links in communities to connect children with schools, training workshops and livelihood opportunities.

Programmes of reintegration took child protection agencies a big step beyond reunification, the goal of which was to find the child's family and reunite him or her with it. Reintegration demanded continued monitoring of how well the child was getting along in the family, and whether he or she had enough support services.

Community - based reintegration

The goal of the community-based approach is to strengthen community structures to support the reintegrating children. The main mechanism of support is the Child Welfare Committee (CWC).

This committee is formed, trained and supported by the programme in such a way that

it is sustainable after the programme support has stopped. Through the CWC the child protection agency can support the child in her/his home community setting in such a way that incorporates them into the local society and does not set them apart. In the initial period the Child Protection Agencies (CPA) are responsible for follow-up support on a caseload basis. As the CWC builds its capacity the CPA will phase out. By regularly visiting the children over a long period assistance can be tailored to the needs of the child at that time.

The Child Protection Programme was faced with the task to facilitate the transition from emergency-orientated centre-based care to development-orientated community-based care. This required a change in perception, attitudes, modus operandi and skills on behalf of the operational CPA. The centre-based system had become well established in the minds and actions of the CPA. For 5 years child protection had focused on children who were either ex-combatants or abducted and given them

immediate care and family tracing. This had become a well-established system with, at its peak, 11 ICCs. Centre-based activities tended to dominate the work of the child protection agencies. There was a general tendency to keep the children in the centres longer than the six - week limit that the agencies had agreed upon. From the middle of 2001 it was clear that the peace process was building momentum and that the country would gradually open up. The programme had to change to take advantage of the changing situation. This meant closing centres and providing care and protection in a community/home setting.

Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP)

Regardless of the child's status as "separated" or "demobilised", the recurrent appeal from children was "I want to go to school". Only about 42% of Sierra Leone's primary school-age children were in school when

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DDR was at its peak.¹⁴ Previous programmes to support children's access to school in Sierra Leone relied on paying school fees. This approach was discouraged as it created a stratum of "war-affected children" who received support and did little for education services as a whole in the community. Instead CPAs negotiated with community schools the admission of their beneficiaries through the provision of materials and school reconstruction.

Child protection and specialist education agencies took on the responsibility for funding and co-ordinating the implementation of the CEIP. The programme hinges on war-affected children being admitted to schools without payment of fees or other costs to schools through the provision of supplies for the school. Supply packages went to schools where former child combatants were now students, but was designed to assist all the children at the school whether they were former combatants or not. There was a package that was designed to supply 200 students, another for 20 teachers, and a recreational package that was for the whole school. Schools could decide which package they needed the most.

CEIP is an easy and cost effective way to get children back in school. It gives families a year to absorb the child back into the family budget without having to pay for school supplies. In addition it helps schools deal with their desperate need for supplies and it provides some educational assistance at a time when the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is not able to institute national education.

The programme depends on timely referrals from the child protection agencies that are reintegrating the children to the agencies responsible for the CEIP. Monitoring is not just directed to the supplies but to general school enrolment and the individual child's attendance and performance. MYES School inspectors are linked with CEIP agencies to

promote Government's role in the programme for which they can eventually have full control.

A total of 2,788 children had been registered by December 2002. For the first school year of CEIP, from September 2001 to May 2002, the programme provided a variety of learning, teaching and recreational materials to schools. Up until December 2002 the programme has covered 348 primary and secondary schools, and assisted 6,049 teachers and almost 250,000 children.

CEIP was originally intended only to serve children who had DDR numbers, but a number of implementing partners wanted to expand the programme to include other children who were also reintegrating. As a result, the program was altered to provide educational access to 10 percent who were not ex-combatants.

While CEIP is innovative and relatively easy to implement, it is being administered in a context of larger and potentially more expensive challenges. By 2002, of the just over 3,000 primary schools in the country 87% of the classrooms required renovation or rebuilding. Teacher distribution is very uneven. The majority of teachers prefer the capital city and main towns rather than the rural areas. Pupil teacher ratios range from 23:1 to 82:1. Half of the teachers are untrained and unqualified. The re-vitalisation of the education services so that it will provide quality education remains a major challenge.

Skills training and income generation

Children who had been with the factions for long periods and had had little exposure to education tended to opt for opportunities to learn a trade or skill that would sustain them. The potential to be a breadwinner was seen by children as a means of assisting their family and giving them a viable alternative to the gun. Orientation towards skills training and income generating schemes started in the ICCs. It suffered from

¹⁴ GOSL Central Statistics Office, "Survey Report on the Status of Women and Children in Sierra Leone", November 2000.

a lack of foresight in linking children with activities that would be relevant in their communities for reintegration. CPAs had little technical experience in delivering practical training or reading the market to assess how sustainable a particular skill would be.

Through an institutional agreement developed between UNICEF and the NCDDR, the latter became responsible for skill training and job creation for demobilised youth. UNICEF was appointed as a member of the Project Approval Committee (PAC) to ensure co-ordination with the child protection network. This allowed child protection agencies to concentrate on social work activities and developing community structures to protect children. The demarcation in responsibilities between education and skills training enhanced the children's programme as children could access skills training run by agencies with some expertise in their chosen reintegration activity.

Beyond Skills Training

Many children have been given skills training – in carpentry, masonry, tailoring, or weaving – but a key question remains: is

there any economy with which to link the skills they have learned? NCDDR provided support to child ex-combatants through the Training and Employment Programme (TEP), which gave skill-training opportunities for 1,441 children (15-17 years old). Whether the training will make the children self-sufficient economically depends on larger forces governing future economic development. By the end of 2002 the country's economy was still devastated by the war and years of poverty. But while the experience of children in skills training programmes varies greatly, in general such programmes are too short (six months) and do not either support job placements or give adequate material support or training to those who want to start a business. Girls, particularly those with babies, tended to opt for income earning opportunities that would bring immediate cash. They did not feel they had the luxury of long-term skills training and preferred an assured income in the short term. A common choice for girls was the marketing of cash crops. Business skills training would greatly enhance the girl's requirements.

Lessons learned

- **Planning within DDR needs to set out from the beginning the whole child protection programme from the disarmament stage to the long-term community based reintegration. Child protection goes beyond disarmament and demobilisation. Donors need to be encouraged to target long-term community reintegration measures to prevent recruitment and re-recruitment**
- **Actions to prevent recruitment must be an integral part of strategies to strengthen capacities of communities and authorities to protect children and promote rights.**
- **Centre-based care should give way to community based reintegration support as soon as possible. The shift from centre-based to community-based care is not automatic and needs targeted capacity development for both child protection agencies and communities.**
- **Education is the priority concern for children's reintegration. A strategy that links demobilised children to education and builds the capacity of schools in the country is effective for both increasing the institutional capacity of education in a post conflict country and reducing the stigma attached to former child combatants. The strategy allows the children to bring something "back" to their communities.**
- **Opportunities for skills training and job opportunities should be closely co-ordinated with the adult component of DDR. NCDDR, or equivalent, is likely to attract partners with more experience and expertise in this area than child protection agencies whose effectiveness will be reduced through trying to provide services in which they have limited competence.**

Chapter Ten

Strategies of prevention: ending the cycle

Community mediation and reconciliation

Communities that have been left in tatters struggle to accept they should forgive and forget the acts of returning combatants. Community mediation requires dialogue. Child protection agencies brokering for children's return to communities discovered significant resistance. Some children were rejected outright by parents and communities who failed to see the child they had before the conflict as the one returning to them. Tensions were highest in communities that had suffered the most and where the specific children returning were directly identified with atrocities committed.

In other post-conflict contexts in Africa, much has been made of "acceptance" or reconciliation ceremonies. Agencies were encouraged to explore how ceremonies could facilitate children's reintegration but little seemed to emerge in terms of actual processes during this time period. One view was that whilst traditions existed, they were less in evidence than before due to the death and displacement of community elders who had orchestrated the ceremonies.¹⁵

Recognising children themselves as key agents in their reintegration is the crux. However willingly communities accept children back, experience has shown they will continue to be mistrusted or perceived as spies so long as national security is shaky. Western equations of child soldiers with innocence are at odds with how they are perceived locally. Children can be

supported to belong to communities by being given roles for which they feel accepted and useful. They represent a resource neither communities or child protection agencies have fully harnessed.

Justice for children

Article XXVI of the Lomé Accord called for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to be set up to address the violations committed in the conflict. Learning from experiences in South Africa, the TRC was envisaged as a body that would establish an impartial historical record of what happened during the conflict and promote healing and reconciliation. Sierra Leoneans had suffered enough — a mechanism that might provide a catharsis for the violence and prevent future violations and abuses was vital.

The events of May 2000 prompted the UN Security Council to call for the establishment of an independent Special Court for Sierra Leone to prosecute those "bearing the greatest responsibility" for crimes against humanity, overturning the amnesty for atrocities committed between March 1991 and the signing of the Lomé Agreement.

Included in the draft statute of the Special Court was the possibility of prosecution of children who were between the age of 15 and 18 at the time of the crime falling under the statute of the Court. Child protection agencies advocated strongly against prosecution of children in the Special Court. The solidarity between agencies and co-ordination between their local and international representatives put enormous pressure on those who framed the process. The prospect of prosecution instilled fear in many child ex-combatants. Commanders stopped releasing children in their ranks, afraid the children would give evidence against them. Children already reunified were unsettled by the thought of being hauled into a judicial process. Children behind the lines had even less reason to come forward. In addition, the Special Court would be the first tribunal of an international character to prosecute children. And this at a

¹⁵ There was more evidence of reconciliation ceremonies being solicited and being successful after the war was over and there was increased access in the country for populations to return to their communities of origin.



time when many countries, including Sierra Leone, have ratified the statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) with an 18 year age limit.¹⁶

Following May 2000, children were routinely held in detention if they were suspected of having affiliations with the RUF. Regardless of their age, they were detained in adult prisons. The MSWGCA and the Freetown City Council monitored children in detention but their access was restricted as the prison population took on a more political character. The politicisation of offences

¹⁶ After much deliberation and consultation, the Security Council retained the possibility of prosecution for crimes committed by a person who was between 15 and 18 years of age at the time of the alleged commission of the crime. But the high threshold of responsibility required to proceed with a prosecution led Council members to note that it would be extremely unlikely that juvenile offenders would in fact come before the Special Court and that other institutions such as the TRC are better suited to address cases involving juveniles. Eventually in 2002, the Office of the Prosecutor of the Special Court made a statement assuring that no child would be charged by the Office of the Prosecutor as children did not bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities in the Sierra Leone's civil war.

committed by children in the conflict undermines legal safeguards accorded to children under the CRC.

Magistrates report that the nature of juvenile crime has changed as a result of the conflict. It has moved from minor delinquency to what one magistrate called a more "military" character: rape, murder, arson, wounding. Children that have been with the fighting forces are particularly likely to come into contact with existing judicial services. Some struggle with the adjustment to civilian life and commit offences, others are labelled as delinquents for their pasts and pick up the blame for any wrongdoing in their communities. Children's exposure to juvenile justice impacts on their perception of their own protection living in vulnerable situations. Ruthless handling by police, protracted detention periods without trial or legal representation and sub-standard remand facilities offer little in the way of rehabilitation for children.

Child protection: legislation and services

The shortcomings in juvenile justice are symptomatic of weak legislation and infra structure to protect children throughout Sierra Leone. The Government has tried to revive and re-draft a "Rights of the Child Bill"; which has struggled to gain Parliament's attention since it was written in 1996. Reduced attention to children's issues is a by-product of political instability. Sierra Leone is another example of a country whose ratification of the CRC has failed to translate into laws and practices that conform to the Convention's standards. The Bill endeavours to bring Sierra Leone's statutory framework for children in line with the provisions of the CRC and there are ongoing efforts to bring it into law.

To complement legislation, the Ministry responsible for children's welfare, the MSWGCA, needs appropriate funding and support. Ministries of Social Welfare are consistently under-resourced. The lack of capacity within the MSWGCA gives it little

credibility with other line ministries and affords scant inter-ministry collaboration on matters of child protection including between the MSWGCA and Ministry of Justice to address issues of children in conflict with the law.

Human rights groups have highlighted the violation of children's rights in a decade of conflict. But more attention needs to be paid to training and programming if reporting of violations is going to be linked to substantive action. As Graça Machel has said, positive action against child rights violations demands communities where there are no "silent witnesses."¹⁷ In its monthly national child protection meetings, the MSWGCA would record the types and numbers of violations committed against children throughout the country with little thought or capacity to respond. Unless there is a systematic link between a violation being documented and its perpetrator being held accountable the cycle of abuse is unlikely to be prevented.

Military training

The biggest single reason children join paramilitary groups is their fear of their national security forces. This fear is not only of conscription by their military but their disregard for international conventions that protect children during conflict. Such associations make national militaries prime candidates for training on child rights and protection. At the regional level, ECOWAS (with the support of Save the Children, Sweden) is co-ordinating child rights and protection training for its military forces in all its member states.

Children in Sierra Leone have more reason than most of the world's children to be afraid of soldiers in uniform. The identity and allegiances of the national army have shifted so frequently during the conflict it was hard to distinguish them from paramilitary groups, all who recruited children and violated their rights.

The Child Protection Unit in Defence Headquarters serves to institutionalise the

¹⁷ Macha, Graça, "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children", September 2000, Winnipeg, Canada.

Government's commitment to children and consolidate the links with child protection agencies. The training programme in child rights and protection has been opportune in coming at a time when the national military is being re-structured and there is a commitment to change. Politically, the country is anxious to cut the links between its military and issues of child recruitment and violations. There is also recognition that failure to prioritise children in the conflict will perpetuate the conflicts; today's child soldiers are tomorrow's adult soldiers with no education to do anything but wage war.

Sierra Leone was one of the two first Peacekeeping Missions to introduce Child Protection Advisors.¹⁸ The Child Protection Advisor's mandate was "to ensure the rights and protection of all children are a priority throughout the peacekeeping process"¹⁹. The Child Protection Advisor offers child protection agencies a direct link for advocacy to the Secretary General's Special Representative who could take up issues of recruitment of child soldiers, release of abductees, children's access to basic services, advocacy with donors for sustained reintegration support, etc. The Child Protection Advisors have an important role to play in educating and monitoring peacekeeping missions on child protection issues and clearer and stronger links should be built between them and CPAs.

Lessons Learned

- **International human rights groups should combine an approach that reports on violations directly as well as builds the capacity of local groups and coalitions to monitor, report and channel advocacy on human rights abuses.**
- **Donors and foreign embassies engaged in re-structuring armed forces should lobby for ratification of international legal standards in the militaries of the Governments they support (e.g. Optional Protocol, protection of children in armed conflict).**

¹⁸ The other country is the Democratic Republic of Congo.

¹⁹ UN General Assembly Security Council. A/55/163 – S/2000/712. (19/07/00).

Chapter Eleven

Data collection and Analysis

Two databases

Data has played an important role in providing accurate statistical information on war-affected children. Two databases were developed: one by the NCDDR for all combatants passing through DDR (including children) and one by the Child Welfare Secretariat of the MSWGCA for all separated children, including demobilised children. There were difficulties, at times, harmonising these databases to assure reliable information.

NCDDR Database

The database of the NCDDR was used to compile and analyse information on demobilised ex-combatants. The aspects considered when developing this database were:

- A unique Personal Identification Number which was 14 digits
- Personal details of individuals (bio-data and location of origin prior to the commencement of war).
- Fighting force to whom attached.
- Category of ex-combatant with respect to age as stated in the CRC.
- Intended reintegration activity for which ex-combatant wants training.

This information has greatly assisted the NCDDR in strategic planning and seeking funding. Table I (below) shows statistical information from the NCDDR data base.

Child Welfare Secretariat Database

This database was designed to register all the children that had been separated from their families during the conflict and was linked primarily to the FTR network. Each registered child was given a unique PIN (called FTR code) that was used to track the child as he/she went through the FTR process. The family tracing documentation provided the following basic information:

- Number of children in the fighting forces
- Role of the children in each of the fighting forces

- Types of abuse inflicted on the children by the fighting forces
- Cause of separation of child from his/ her family
- Expected types of care required
- Expected numbers for demobilisation and care
- The location of families and tracing needs.

Table II shows the key data arising from this database.

Difficulties in data collection

A number of problems were encountered in developing the children's databases.

- The fact that two separate databases were developed for children affected by the war (i.e. NCDDR and Child Welfare Secretariat) created problems related to duplication of information. This was due to the fact that the unique PIN coding used by the NCDDR was different from the FTR code used by CPA partners who were providing the data on children to the CWS- MSWGCA.
- CPAs misunderstood the reasons for coding. This resulted in re-registering of already registered separated children. The main cause for this duplication was due to the fact that registered separated children had no form of identification other than the FTR documentation form. Further, this FTR form had no picture to verify the child and children had no idea of the FTR code given to them.
- Children often gave information to CPA during registration which they later changed. Later changes were never translated to the CSW- MSWGCA. Instead, new registration was done by CPAs and entered into the database.
- Other constraints included: poor training of data-entry clerks, poor monitoring of data entering, the FTR structure, format and length of the questionnaire and poor training of CPAs in interviewing techniques.

Tracking demobilised children as they came into interim care also proved a challenge. ICC populations included both demobilised and non-demobilised children. Reporting instruments were adjusted for tracking children into reintegration.

Children lost in the process

A significant number of children did not obtain their DDR registration despite being eligible for the programme and being present at the entry point of the process. In all Phases a photo ID card was made for each person. The photograph was taken in the demobilisation camps but was rarely ready prior to the child being moved to the ICC. In some cases the children quickly left the ICC to be reunified with their families. In these situations it was difficult for the system to catch up with the child, particularly if the child lost his/her receipt of the DDR registration.

In addition, it was clear that there were many children who were indeed part of the fighting forces but either never came into the DDR programme or arrived too late. The fate of these children who were eligible for the reintegration benefits but did not have the administrative “proof” of their eligibility troubled a number of child protection workers. Without registration the children could not access reintegration services including FTR, CEIP and Training and

Employment Programmes (TEP). Given the importance attached to reintegration and prevention of re-recruitment, UNICEF and NCDDDR agreed to allow access to the reintegration programme to a number of children who did not have the official documents. A quota of 10 % of the official total of demobilised children was agreed to allow access to the “unofficial” child combatants who did not have a DDR registration number but were able to give sufficient evidence of having been in the DDR process at some stage.

On reflection, the databases were more aligned to managing the DDR programme for both adults and children than using data to critically analyse children’s protection. There was no database that kept chronological record of all the significant events of the conflict as it related to children. Also there was no systematic series of studies or intelligence gathering that could be used to create a picture of the numbers, use and abuse of children by the fighting forces.

Tables of Statistics

Table I - Status of Disarmament and Demobilisation in all Phases²⁰

Category of Fighting Forces	Phase 1 (Sept.- Dec. 1998)	Phase 2 (Oct' 99 - April 2000)	Intérim Phase (May 2000 - 17 th May 2001)	Phase 3 (18 th May 2001 - Janv. 2002)	TOTAL
RUF	187	4,130	768	19,267	24,352
AFRC	0	2,129	445	0	2,574
Ex SLA	2,994	2,366	593	0	5,953
CDF	2	8,800	524	28,051	37,377
Other	0	1,473	298	463	2,234
Total	3,183	18,898	2,628	47,781	72,490

Total Disarmed Children and Adults

Category of by Group	Phase 1 (Sept.- Dec. 1998)	Phase 2 (Oct' 99 - April 2000)	Intérim Phase (May 2000 - 17 th May 2001)	Phase 3 (18 th May 2001 - Janv. 2002)	TOTAL
Children	189	1,982	402	4,272	6,845
Adult	2,994	16,916	2,226	43,509	65,645
Total	3,183	18,898	2,628	47,781	72,490

Table II - Status of Separated Children (Child Welfare Secretariat, Octobre 2003)²¹

Age, Sex Distribution for cause of separation

Sex	Age Group	Not Stated	Abandoned byparent/ Caretaker	Adducted by RUF	Enlisted with the Fighting Forces	Lost contact- with Parent	Not war related	Others	Parent or Caretaker abducted	Parent or caretaker dead	Total
Female	Not stated	1	18	109	3	109	5			1	246
	0-5		28	9	1	97	1	1		13	150
	6-11		41	79	10	364	12	1	3	29	539
	12-17		20	327	37	335	11	2	2	12	746
	18+		3	51	14	37	2				107
Male	Not stated	7	12	574	49	238	27	2		4	913
	0-5		27	13	1	76	3	3	2	15	140
	6-11		39	319	82	436	13	1	2	27	919
	12-17		52	1277	309	767	30	6	6	47	2494
	18+		1	53	10	63	2	1		1	131
Total		8	241	2811	516	2522	106	17	15	149	6385

²⁰ Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, NCDDR

²¹ The figures from the Child Welfare Secretariat are different from the overall figures given for children placed in interim care (provided on p. 24/5). This is an example of the constraint of having two different data collection systems (NCDDR/ Child Welfare *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children: Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone*

UNICEF Child Protection Partners, Sierra Leone

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
Caritas Kenema (formerly KDDO)
Caritas Makeni
Christian Brothers
COOPI
Council of Churches Sierra Leone
Don Bosco Fambul Homes
Freetown City Council
GOAL
Handicap International
International Medical Corps (IMC)
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Leonenet
Mercy Ships New Steps
Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA)_
National Forum for Human Rights
New Frontiers International (NFI)
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
Planned Parenthood Association Sierra Leone (PPASL)
Save the Children UK (SCF)
Xaverian Fathers/Family Homes Movement (FHM)

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