

Child Soldiers Case Study – Select one of the two case studies and respond

Case Study One: Recruitment of Children

The Sierra Leone Conflict

A. RECRUITMENT INTO THE GOVERNMENT FORCES

At the time Corporal Foday Sankoh and the RUF rebels entered Sierra Leone in March 1991, the then Government of Sierra Leone was ill prepared to effectively contain the rebel insurgency. Government budget for military expenditure was not enough to afford the logistics needed to confront and defeat the RUF. The military was acutely short of recruits. To fight the war the government urgently required as many hands as possible. It was necessary to increase the military from a pre-war population of 3,000 to 13,000 fighting men. Consequently, from the period March 1991 to May 1993, the Sierra Leone military became permissive in its recruitment policies. Girls as well as boys were recruited. Recruitment into the military was not, however, forceful. Some children, after the loss of houses, families and friends, and schools joined the government militia in search of security, protection and food. Other children in search of stimulation and adventure were persuaded to join; some simply followed their relatives and friends to the war front; some children however volunteered to fight for their country, some to revenge and avenge for lost ones. In other instances, recruiters merely guessed at ages of children, in the absence of birth registrations, and entered the age of new recruits as 18 to give the appearance of complying with the National Law. The quota system was a major factor in the recruitment of children in Sierra Leone. The quota systems required senior military commanders to act as recruiting agents on behalf of the government, to meet the needs of their respective battalions. The lack of information regarding the UNCRC and of the government recruitment laws also contributed to the recruitment of children. Parents, communities and recruiting agents, not aware of the psychological and social impact of child militarisation have often seen this practice as normal. After the NPRC youth uprising which led to the overthrow of the APC Regime, the army was given an exaggerated image, and many youths already embittered and marginalised by poverty, unemployment, dysfunctional social welfare systems and illiteracy found the uprising as a chance to make a fortune and improve the quality of their lives.

B. RECRUITMENT INTO CIVIL DEFENSE FORCES

The war in Sierra Leone has resulted in the creation of large cohorts of Defense Forces all over the country. Currently a formidable civil defense force called the Kamajors has grown at an alarming rate. Using traditional forms of warfare and ritualised initiation rites, the Kamajors have developed around themselves a growing myth of magical powers and invincibility. With the traditional cults of initiation and ritual symbolism fast disappearing, the Kamajors serve a particular purpose of reclaiming lost traditional cults and religion. Consequently, many Sierra Leoneans are attracted to them including male children, who go through a rigorous ritual ceremony of initiation. It is feared in some quarters that the Kamajor cult will become a rite of passage into adulthood; and it could become customary for some families to send their children to be initiated.

C. RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN INTO REBEL FORCES

Throughout the course of the war the recruitment practices of the rebels has been forceful. Children, especially those between the ages of 10-15 have been systematically targeted. Most of these children who have been abducted by rebels are unaccompanied children, children from female-headed households, orphans and children from vulnerable families.

Discuss the similarities and differences in the recruitment experiences of the children in the three scenarios described above? What kind of impact do you think the differing recruitment experiences might have on children associated with an armed group in terms of future development? What do you think of the descriptions of children who 'joined voluntarily'? In what ways do these case studies aid an understanding of the local situation?

Case Study 2: Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Susan is 15 years old. She was a refugee living in a camp with her family for two years. While living as a refugee she began school for the first time. During studies one night, a group of armed rebels came to the camp and abducted her and five other boys and girls. The rebels made them walk for six days carrying heavy loads of looted supplies. One child collapsed and was killed by the rebels on day three. On day four another child - Susan's cousin - collapsed. The children were told to kill the boy or die. They killed him. On arriving at the camp, Susan was raped by three rebels and given to one as a wife. She became pregnant, but still worked hard cooking and carrying weapons to battle. A big battle took place with the military. There was much confusion, so Susan ran away with her baby. She was found by the military and demobilised. She wants to go home.

1. Discuss psychosocial factors that might affect this child.
2. Develop a PLAN OF ACTION for the social reintegration and rehabilitation of this child.
3. What do you suspect might be the problems/pitfalls of this PLAN?
4. How might you alleviate these problems/pitfalls?