Comparative International Experience with Reintegration Programmes for Child Soldiers: The Liberian Experience

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Abstract

The changing nature of armed conflict has been characterised by the use of children as soldiers, and the reintegration of these children back into society has become a matter of primary concern for post-conflict countries seeking to achieve sustainable peace and security. While measures of reintegration have been similar in various post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives, the experiences and outcomes differ widely from one country to the other. Therefore, this paper focuses on comparative international experience with reintegration programmes for former child soldiers. It discusses the aspects of reintegration, how it is being practiced from one country to the other and the lesson therein for Liberia.

Data for this work were derived from a fieldwork conducted in Liberia and from the results of similar studies undertaken elsewhere, leading to the conclusion that it is important to examine the social context of a society before adopting particular reintegration measures and to encourage collaboration between relevant stakeholders so as to promote qualitative reintegration. The mainstreaming of child rights by state actors, the enforcement of strict measures against child recruiters, and the prioritization of child welfare would help to curb the menace of child soldiering in the future.

Introduction

Reintegration programmes have become synonymous with post-conflict countries like Sierra-Leone, Uganda, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola, and Liberia. Reintegration is an aspect of a trinity – Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR), though reintegration can only be achieved when the two other components are well implemented. The trinity is inevitable in post-conflict countries if the society is to achieve sustainable peace, security and development as a successful DDR programme for ex-combatants is the key to an effective transition from war to peace. The success of this first step, following the signing of a peace accord, signals the end to organised conflict, and thereby provides the security necessary for people affected by war to reinvest in their lives and their country (Tom, 2005:1).

The reintegration component of the DDR process is more difficult when it involves former child soldiers. The task of reorienting and readjusting children who have lost childhood and have had their personality shaped by knowledge of crime and atrocities cannot but be daunting, however, a procedure of returning former child soldiers to civilian lives is necessary in view of their training in the use of arms and the negative values they acquire during the war years. Failure to engage them in proper rehabilitation and reintegration would portend grave consequences and loss of human capacity for the affected society anywhere. It is usually within this context that the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of child soldiers are built into peace negotiation and resulting peace agreements in many countries emerging from conflict.

Most post-conflict societies across the world have found the reintegration of former child soldiers to be a serious challenge, and the methods adopted have varied from one country to another. While some restricted the process to keeping former child soldiers in school or in vocation, others have gone a step further to provide psychological support to those traumatised by years of involvement in heinous crimes. Consequently, there is no clear-cut standard employed in the implementation of the process so far, especially in post-conflict African countries. This paper, thus, focuses on the comparative international experience with child soldiers' reintegration. This is done with a view to identifying gaps and prospects in the process as implemented by different post-conflict States. Data for this work were derived primarily from fieldwork conducted in Liberia between May and July 2006, and from the results of similar studies.

Aspects of Reintegration

For a successful reintegration programme of former child soldiers, it is expected that adequate measures be put in place that will provide for the needs of children. Generally, the reintegration of former child soldiers should emphasise three components: family reunification; psychosocial support including traditional rituals and family and community mediation; and education and economic opportunity (Dissemination Notes, 2002:3). These components have become dominant in the view of how programmes for the reintegration of former child soldiers should be carried out. However, the effectiveness of these measures is debatable.

The essence of family reunification is to reunite and reconcile former child soldiers with relations. Family reunification or alternative family-based living arrangements, rather than centres, are considered the most effective strategy to reintegrate child soldiers into the community (Dissemination Notes, 2002:3). The emphasis on the family is not misplaced. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, for instance, regards the family as the fundamental group of society and natural environment for the growth and well-being of its members. The Convention further affirms that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding (Preamble to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

A situation may arise, however, where efforts to trace a family fail or an entire family has perished in conflict, or has been rendered incapable of providing the physical means of sustenance, happiness, love and understanding necessary. In such situation, it is suggested that other care-giving arrangements be provided that meet the child's physical, social and emotional needs (Brett & McCallin, 1998:122-123). The successful implementation of this component requires concerted collaborative effort from international donor agencies, government, local and international non-governmental organisations, religious bodies, private organisations, community based organisations, community leaders and other relevant stakeholders. This approach should not be used as by default, however, since former child soldiers are not generally considered to have been reintegrated until they have been reunified with their family or home community.

Traditional healing rituals/ceremony is another important measure often cited as vital to the reintegration of former child soldiers. Verhey (2001:3) provides insight into this aspect when he examined the place of culture in the process of addressing the psychosocial impacts of conflict on child soldiers in areas that have suffered from armed conflict such as Angola, Uganda and El Salvador. In his view, the rituals provide for the acceptance of the child, assuaging the ill spirit associated with the child soldier's activities during conflict, and reconciling the child with ancestral spirits. Similarly, Utas (2004) emphasises the importance of the psychosocial component of the reintegration process in his reiterating the difficulty of rebuilding social solidarity. To him, it is necessary that we know and engage the social environment in the process of peacebuilding. Furthermore, Williamson and Carter (2005:13), in their review of the progress made by the International Rescue Committee in the implementation of a reintegration project for Liberian and Sierra Leonean child soldiers, recommend traditional cleansing ceremonies, traditional healing, and religious support as measures essential to the successful reintegration of former child soldiers. The effectiveness of these measures in transforming the lives of former child soldiers for the better, however, requires further investigation.

Educational support and skill acquisition have featured prominently in the reintegration programme for former child soldiers. Massimo (2000:4), for example, is of the view that lessons learned from past DDR experiences suggest that child soldiers are best served when they are provided with education and professional training. Such

measures, he argues, offer children with no professional experience an opportunity for a sustainable livelihood. Some of the challenges that have confronted the reintegration process have been an acute shortage of relevant skills to support sustainable livelihoods, and the fact that many ex-combatants are not able to take advantage of opportunities in post-conflict reconstruction. This is due to their limited educational background and lack of marketable skills which makes their absorption into the formal sector, including the civil service, less feasible. Skills development, on the above account, has been a key targeted area in terms of economic reintegration.

Educational support and skills acquisition are often linked to the psychosocial component or reintegration because the task of establishing a new identity for the child soldiers will depend on the availability of productive activities and new learning opportunities. In implementing this measure, some programmes have included the payment of sustenance allowance to children undergoing reintegration. It is essential that a balance be struck between the child soldiers' needs to earn income immediately and the need to resume education or acquire vocational training. Unfortunately, access to education is one of the most often requested support by child soldiers but often forgone for economic reasons (Dissemination Note, 2002:4). If the objective of economic reintegration must be achieved, it will definitely be dependent on the rehabilitation of basic social, economic and physical infrastructure and the revitalisation of social services.

The measures discussed above have remained the foundation on which reintegration of former child soldiers is practiced in post-conflict countries.

International Experiences with Reintegration

Reintegration programmes have become a common feature of post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives to transition former child soldier to civilian life. In West Africa alone, over 8,000 children were still fighting in 2005 and over 20,000 were involved in demobilisation and reintegration programmes (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2006:3). Considering the level of usage of child soldiers in recent conflicts, this figure indicates a larger number of former child soldiers waiting for reintegration programmes in post-conflict countries in Africa.

While the reintegration needs of these children are similar everywhere, the experiences and challenges of reintegrating them differ from one country to the other. The **Angola** exercise, which lasted from 1995 to 1997, was one of the most extensive in the history of the United Nations. It was perhaps the first time that children were specifically included in a peace process. Even though the position of children was not made explicit in the Lusaka Protocol, their demobilisation and reintegration was declared a priority in the first resolution adopted by the Commission set up to implement the peace agreement. Furthermore, partnership was forged with local civil society networks in ensuring that many children return to their homes (Verhey, 2001:4). The accompaniment and family reunification was adopted as a strategy to prevent re-recruitment. The Angola programme also featured an extensive community-based society network with members accompanying child soldiers from demobilisation through family reunification. The strategy could be said to be effective, because some officials of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebel forces acknowledged that family reunification obstruct their recruitment strategies unlike in Northern Uganda, where families feared that reunification with former child soldiers would attract the attention of rebels in future attacks. Furthermore, the Angola framework on child soldiers included a provision that child soldiers would not be subjected to Angola's compulsory military service regime. In addition, the legal framework included a provision that child soldiers could receive demobilisation documents and benefits outside of the formal demobilisation assembly areas (Verhey, 2001:4.).

Cultural values are often mainstreamed into reintegration programmes. This was true in the Angolan case, as local culture was explicitly employed as a tool for addressing the psychosocial impacts of conflict. Such was reflected in traditional healing rituals for former child soldiers. The rituals provided for the acceptance of the child, assuaged the ill spirit associated with the child soldier's actions during conflict, and above all, reconciled the child with ancestral spirits (Verhey, 2001).

In **Mozambique,** the war that pitched the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) against the country's Government ended in 1992. During the war, nearly all the parties were involved in the use of child soldiers. Militia groups such as Naparamas, a military-religious movement, conscripted children and used them to fight, and substantial numbers of child soldiers are also believed to have fought on the side of RENAMO. Although, Frente de Libertacao Nacional (FRELIMO), the government forces, and the RENAMO rebels signed a peace accord in 1992 and

organised democratic multi-party elections in 1994, there was no doubt that the conflict took a psychological and material toll on children, their families and communities (Mozambique Country Profiles, 2005:1-2). However, access to child soldiers after the conflict was restricted, making it difficult to implement reintegration measures.

In February 1994, UNICEF initiated negotiations with the RENAMO authorities after which UNICEF representatives were able to visit a group of 60 children living in RENAMO's base at Jordao, Maputo province. In another meeting with UNICEF, RENAMO agreed to grant full access to their military bases so that UNICEF and other partner organisations could proceed with the registration of children and their relocation from military to civilian areas. Following the agreement, UNICEF registered about 850 children in 19 military bases around the country. Photographs and basic information about the children's identity were collected and their health and nutritional status was also assessed. Family reunification was the major hallmark of Mozambique's reintegration programme (Cindy, 2000:1).

The reintegration of child soldiers in Mozambique was equally facilitated by the reactivation of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution. Former child soldiers were welcomed and considered as returnees like most of the rest of the community. Religious leaders and *curandeiro* (traditional healers) systematically organised special purification ceremonies for child and adult ex-soldiers who were re-entering the community. The aim of these ceremonies was to help the children cope with their past. The ceremonies were also a process of forgiveness by the community. The implicit consensus was that whatever happened during the war must be forgotten (Cindy, 2000: 2). The Mozambique strategy represents an initiative to fully involve communities in reintegration processes. However, other recent DDR operations have sought to identify local and regional implementing structures, strategies and mechanisms to ensure the representation and inclusion of communities (including youths, women, elders and combatants) in DDR dialogues, design and implementation.

It was not until 1997, three years after the genocide, that the **Rwanda** government set up a Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission for the social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants (IRIN News, 2004:1). The demobilisation and reintegration programme was designed to help foster reconciliation among Rwandans after the 1994 genocide and to contribute towards poverty reduction and the strengthening of peace within the Great Lakes region. Unlike other experiences discussed earlier, the Rwanda programme was designed in phases. The demobilisation of child soldiers occurred in the second phase during which about 454 of the ex-combatants under the age of 18 years were demobilised. Children were given special help and were separated from adults in the demobilisation process. Other aspects included tracing their families towards effecting reunions, and providing them with trauma counselling, psychosocial care, and access to education. Most of the returning children were taken to schools. Those who had completed primary education were either enrolled in technical schools or advanced to the secondary school stage (IRIN News, 2004:1).

The mode of recruitment of children into armed groups in **Burundi** followed the pattern of adoption, while others joined after seeing their parents, relations or neighbours killed. According to Amnesty International (2004), children as young as ten years old were used as domestic labour, porters, and spies as well as in combat in Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo by the government armed forces. Other children were knowingly exposed to danger by government soldiers who forced or bribed them to provide intelligence on activities by armed political groups opposed to the government. By and large, all the armed factions in Burundi were guilty of using children as soldiers. In October 2001, the government and UNICEF signed an agreement on a programme for the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers (Amnesty International, 2004). The programme involved the participation of the Ministries of Human Rights, Defence, Interior, Public Security and Social Action, as well as the indirect involvement of the Education, Crafts, Labour, Health and AIDS Ministries. UNICEF information (May 2004) cited in the Child Soldiers Global Report (2004:3), indicates that the reintegration programme was aimed at providing sustainable support to each family through appropriate assistance decided on an individual basis, including the possibility of provide vocational and professional education for an 18 months period. Psychosocial support and medical care were provided for those with severe illnesses and injuries. According to a United Nations Report, over 500 child soldiers who fought on government side (some as young as 11) were demobilised by late March 2004, and most of them were reintegrated with their families (UN, 2004:16-21). The programme initially targeted only child soldiers from the government, civil defence forces and the CNDD-FDD (Ndayikengurukiye) and FNL (Mugabarabona). Child soldiers with other armed movements, estimated to number around 3,000, were slated for reintegration under a general DDR programme. Concern was expressed that this might lead to some children not being covered by either programme (Human Rights Watch, 2004:3).

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC),** like many other countries engaged in many years of civil war, the use of child soldiers by different parties has been extensive. In 1997, President Kabila's government initiated a programme to demobilise 75,000 soldiers, including child soldiers. UNICEF was engaged to work with local authorities to develop programmes to reintegrate these former child soldiers back into civil society. In conjunction with provincial authorities and local NGOs, UNICEF implemented reintegration programmes in Goma (North Kivu), Bukavu (South Kivu) and Kisangani (Province Orientale) (UNICEF, 1997:1). These programmes consisted of three phases. The first phase lasted for three months and under it, children received psychological counselling and participated in community building activities. At this stage, family visits were encouraged and children with special needs were identified. In phase two, which was designed to last for six months, children were reintegrated into their families or put with other care givers and were given literacy and vocational training. Phase three comprised close monitoring of the reintegration process, the continuation of counselling, and the provision of additional capacity-building training (UNICEF, 1997:2).

Lessons learned from the DRC show that the schemes were not ultimately successful, because many former child soldiers who participated in war were re-recruited by armed forces. This happened because the programmes took place in conflict areas where military authorities were yet to give child protection guarantees. This was an important learning experience for UNICEF (and reintegration exercises in general). It showed that demobilisation in a state of crisis may not be successful, and that there cannot be a guarantee of success until demobilisation is made official. UNICEF realized that it needed to work more closely with political and military authorities in order to secure their support for demobilisation of child soldiers, and for an end to recruitment of children as soldiers. It was precisely this activity that has been at the forefront of UNICEF's child soldier programme in DRC since 1998 (UNICEF, 1997:2).

Also, unlike the experience gathered in other war-torn countries where reintegration programmes for child soldiers have taken place, the DRC experience shows that family/community reunification does not always materialise. Child soldiers were afraid to leave the armed groups, and the communities that would receive ex-child soldiers were normally afraid to do so as well (UNICEF, 1997:3). The immediate families of child soldiers were often disadvantaged and were ill-prepared to receive and reintegrate children. Moreover, the wider economic and social support structures needed to reintegrate former child soldiers back into civilian life were also largely non-existent (UNICEF, 1997:3).

Inter-clan conflicts in **Somalia,** particularly in the southern parts, have continued over the years, along with the widespread use of children as soldiers by all parties. The UN Independent Expert on Somalia (2002), for instance, noted large numbers of child soldiers with factional militias in Mogadishu and Baidoa, and reported that often, young boys carrying weapons were riding with larger groups of armed men on anti-aircraft or similar vehicles. The Independent Expert estimated that over 200,000, or five per cent of Somali children have carried a gun or been involved in militia activities at some point in their lives (UN, 2003). In 2002, UNESCO helped to demobilise and provide vocational training for 450 militia members between the ages of 15 and 35 in Mogadishu (UN, 2002). These reintegration activities involved the collaboration of The Rule of Law and Protection Working Group of the Somalia Aid Coordination Body (SACB). The group coordinated international support for disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of clan and faction-based militia. A pilot demobilisation and reintegration programme for 118 former combatants, girls and boys, was undertaken in 2001 and 2002 by UNICEF and the Elman Peace Centre, a non-governmental organisation that has offered vocational training for former militia members since 1992. A second phase of the programme continued in 2004 with funding support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for 420 more child soldiers, 20 per cent of them girls, in Mogadishu, Merca and Kismayo (UNICEF, 2002).

Sierra Leone probably holds the world's worst record for recruiting children as soldiers. Between 1992 and 1996, the period of the fiercest fighting between the Government forces and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an estimated 5,400 children were forced to fight on both sides. In 1997, 60% of a group of 1,000 fighters screened by the DDR Committee were children. In 2001, when the Sierra Leone conflict officially came to an end, the country immediately initiated programmes aimed at the rehabilitation and reintegration of all war-affected children, especially the child soldiers. The programme was adjudged to be successful. The success of the reintegration recorded in Sierra Leone was not unconnected with the proper coordination, support and cooperation from the communities and the welfare organisations (Oluwaniyi, 2003:153). The implementation process included

components such as counselling and the tracing of child soldiers' family members. The reunification of child soldiers with their families was carried out by tracing network partners once the location of communities and families were confirmed and sensitisation and mediation completed. At the end of the DDR programme in Sierra Leone, a total number of 4,892 children were reunified with families out of a total number of 5,037 demobilised children (UNICEF, 2002). A significant weakness of the Sierra Leone programme and many others was the exclusion of girls from demobilisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration processes, as girls were excluded from the demobilisation programme and left with their rebel captors (Becker, 2004). Such an oversight may not be unconnected with the usual underestimation of the involvement of girls in armed conflicts.

The Initial Liberian Experience with Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers

        The first Liberian experience of reintegration programme took place after the cessation of hostilities in 1997. The method adopted was described as a quick and dirty approach because of an improper planning strategy by UNICEF (Coordinator) and its regional network. The tracing of families was left to the Save the Children Fund (SCF-UK) and Don Bosco Home (Kelly, 1998: 48). This was unlike the Angola programme which featured a broad community-based network whose members accompanied child soldiers from demobilisation through to family reunification. Furthermore, the importance of cultural elements in addressing psychosocial problems was downplayed, whereas in the Angola, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique cases, ritual and traditional cleansing ceremonies for child soldiers were essential components of reintegration programmes. The initial Liberian reintegration programme might have further been limited by the lack of recognition for the need to economically empower the immediate families of former child soldiers. The Burundi programme, for its part, emphasised this aspect as it provided economic support for families of child soldiers, whether they were biological relatives or foster parents.

        Another vital feature of reintegration that was probably under-implemented in Liberia was skill acquisition and education. Countries like Somali, Rwanda, and DR Congo, however, provided for these aspects. Also, the Liberian reintegration programme failed to emphasise the position of girl combatants, unlike in DR Congo and Somalia cases, where girl soldiers were included in the reintegration plan, though the numbers of those reintegrated were relatively few. Finally, the 1997 reintegration programme in Liberia treated ex-combatants as an all-inclusive category, merging adult combatants with child soldiers. This would have accounted for the inability to focus on the special needs of children. Some other countries, however, took cognizance of this and treated former child soldiers as a special category within the reintegration plan. For instance, in Rwanda, children were separated from adults in the demobilisation process and were given special help which included trauma counselling, psychosocial care and access to education.

        The lessons learnt from the 1997 exercise provided a base of knowledge and experience for the 2003 programme, which was expected to be more comprehensive and better coordinated.

Liberian Experience of Reintegration Programme of Former Child Soldiers in 2003

        The second reintegration experience in Liberia, which was implemented after the end of the 2003 conflict, was more inclusive and better organised. The programme was premised on an institutional framework, based on the Accra Peace Agreement and Security Council Resolution 1509 of 2003. The strategic and operational framework of reintegration support for ex-combatants provided for the participation of various local and international non-governmental organisations and community based organisations, as well as relevant public sector ministries and the private sector as a way of ensuring maximum impact.

        The tracing of family of former child soldiers was carried out by a wider spectrum of organisations. This was a sharp departure from the first programme where family tracing was left with Save the Children's Fund UK (SCK-UK) and Don Bosco Home (DBH). The 2003 experience indicated that more organisations, both local and international, like Children Assistance Programme (CAP), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Zorzor District for Women and Children Care, Don Bosco Home, United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF), National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR) and some other religious organisations played an essential role in reunifying former child soldiers with their families. This reality can be compared with the

Angola case, which featured a broad community-based network that helped in reunifying former child soldiers with their families.

However, there is no evidence that the programme corrected the oversight that occurred in 1997 reintegration programme, where the families of the child soldiers were not economically empowered to take up the responsibility of caring for the children. This would have required that they borrow a leaf from the Burundi experience, whereby economic support was provided for parents or relations of former child soldiers. In line with what may be regarded as a conventional view about reintegration of child soldiers, the 2003 Liberian experience revealed that reintegrating children within a family and community setting was the most appropriate means of achieving reintegration for the former child soldiers. Unfortunately, it appeared that many of the former child soldiers have more or less become street children or urchins in the real sense of the words, and they should be regarded as having lost touch with their families and communities. For this set of children, the task of reintegrating them within a traditional family or community setting may move beyond the scope of what was provided for in the operational framework for reintegration.

Skills acquisition and educational support for former child soldiers was a dominant feature of the 2003 reintegration programme. This aspect was downplayed in the 1997 programme, perhaps because the programme was carried out in a rush. Non-governmental organisations in Liberia like Don Bosco Home, Children Assistance Programme and many others, with the help of international donor organisations, played a central role in training former child soldiers in different skills as well as placing the children in schools. This measure was equally adopted in Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and DRC. Formal education and skill acquisition are considered to be viable approaches toward the economic empowerment of former child soldiers in the Operational Framework of reintegration. Despite the level of success achieved with this measure, the Liberian experience yet revealed a significant under-achievement in terms of the decreasing numbers of former child soldiers in the streets of Monrovia. For example, the three years of educational support which were provided was not enough to see a child through elementary and secondary schools. For skill acquisition, the 2003 experience showed that many of those who completed trainings at vocational centres and were given start up tools, sold them and returned to the street. The implication of the above is that there was faulty isolation of certain needs.

This is not to say that there was no improvement from the 1997 experience, as the 2003 reintegration programme did focus more on the needs of the former child soldiers. The fact that the children were treated as a separate entity was an improvement on the previous programme. It was also an indication that lesson learnt from other countries like Rwanda was put into consideration in the reintegration plan. Nevertheless, it was evident that the former child soldiers were not involved in the design and implementation of reintegration programme. The field reality showed that former child soldiers were not well educated about the essence of reintegration. Their lack of knowledge and understanding of the programmes nitty-gritty may be associated with exclusion from the process that midwifes the programme.

The 2003 programme paid diligent attention to cultural measures in addressing psychological problems. This conformed with the practice in Angola, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone where ritual and traditional cleansing ceremonies for former child soldiers were components of reintegration programmes. The implementation of this aspect was another improvement on the initial experience. However, the ceremonies turned out to be nothing beyond symbolic, as they failed to provide the children with means of imbibing the morals, ethics, and values of their societies. A deeper and more authentic engagement with the cultures and traditions of Liberian society would have benefitted the programme, and could have been carried out through greater community involvement in the planning and implementation stages.

Finally, the place of girl soldiers was not well defined in the programme. The second experience, in this regard, failed to improve on the initial programme and, as well, learn from experiences in DR Congo and Somalia where girl soldiers were specifically focused on in the reintegration plan. There is no gainsaying the fact that the male child soldiers were more visible in the 2003 programme compared to their female counterparts.

Conclusion

This paper has made an effort to situate the Liberian programme within the context of the international

experience of reintegration of former child soldiers. It highlights the views of some scholarly work on reintegration measures which have, so far, become a general view of what reintegration should be. However, on account of the flaws that are yet visible in the Liberian experience, it will prove worthwhile that post-conflict societies examine carefully the practice, success and failure of reintegration programmes carried out in other countries, while remaining attentive to their particular socio-cultural environment, as well as the economic situation.

Despite the shortcomings, however, reintegration programmes for ex-combatants is a peacebuilding initiative that any society transforming from conflict to peace must imbibe if the society is to achieve durable peace. When it concerns children, the task is doubled as failure to initiate the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers back into normal life could spell doom for the future of the affected society. The most efficient approach, therefore, must also seek to prevent the recruitment of children as soldiers. In view of this, both governmental and non-governmental organisations, community based organisations, religious bodies, and international organisation concerned with the welfare of children should be more proactive in working against the recruitment of children as soldiers. They should also collaborate with one another for an affective reintegration programme for former child soldiers. These could be achieved through community level advocacy and sensitisation. Welfare and educational support for vulnerable children could also be a strategy in reducing the incidence of the recruitment of children as soldiers.

Fundamentally, mainstreaming Child Rights into the activities of both state and non-state actors can help in curbing the menace of child soldiering. Measures of international sanctions against state and non-state actors in conflict could also serve as deterrent to commanders involved in the recruitment exercise. Finally, reintegration is a dependent variable, which rests on conflict to strive. Without conflict, issues of child soldiers would not arise. Good governance, for every country, would serve as a panacea to preventing armed conflict.

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