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**REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF THE  
FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN MOZAMBIQUE**

By Filipa Neto Marques

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## **Glossary of Abbreviations**

<b>AMOSAPU</b>	Associacao Mocambicana de Saúde Pública
<b>C&amp;W</b>	Children and War Project
<b>CVM</b>	Mozambique Red Cross
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>MICAS</b>	Ministry for Coordination of Social Action
<b>NDSA</b>	National Directorate for Social Action
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>RE</b>	Associacao Reconstruindo a Esperanca
<b>SAF</b>	Save the Children Foundation
<b>SEAS</b>	Secretaria de Estado da Accao Social (Social Action Secretary of State)
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children Fund
<b>UNOMOZ</b>	United Nations Office in Mozambique

## **INTRODUCTION:**

A large-scale movement is in place to alert governments, organizations and individuals for the fact that in many conflicts across the world children as young as 7 or 8 years old carry guns and combat side by side with adult troops. These children are often given no other real option but to kill. Their innocence and youth are stolen from them, and often their future as well. If dying in a battle field or being tortured to death in the hands of their own armies is a cruel destiny for a child, surviving such events and carrying these memories of their acts can be just as brutal. These children become traumatized and often dysfunctional. Children are the future of nations.

In my paper I chose the case of Mozambique to analyze the different initiatives that have been created to foster the rehabilitation and reintegration of the former child soldiers who were forced to fight in a war that lasted 16 years and devastated the country and its society. The fact that this armed conflict ended 9 years ago allows us to look at the short, medium and medium-long run of the effects of these programs. Mozambique has been widely used as an example in international forums trying to find the best options to fight the effects of such appalling reality. The example of Mozambique goes towards the recent theories on the subject of rehabilitation of child soldiers, that state that foreign models cannot just be imported, emphasizing only the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. As Richman refers in her working paper, “ This approach is criticized because it does not take into account the range of adversities confronted or of emotional distress experienced, or of traditional ways of responding to adversity”. Programs should therefore incorporate local ways of coping with

suffering and intervene in a way that is well accepted by the community. A symbiotic relationship must be created between external organizations who try to work in this area and different components of the local communities. “ The contribution of traditional methods should be valued and seen as complementary rather than in opposition to other forms of support.” (Richman)

To complement the literature that I had found on the issue I went to Mozambique to talk with the Associação Reconstruindo a Esperança (RE -- former AMOSAPU) and with people from other organizations who also played a role in the rehabilitation of child soldiers in the country, such as UNICEF and the Mozambican Red Cross. I have also visited Ilha Josina Machel, where RE still has a program which addresses the children affected by the conflict. Here I spoke not only to the RE professionals but also to children who participated in the conflict, traditional and religious healers and with representatives of the local community.

In this paper I will often cite examples from Ilha Josina Machel, which I believe is a quite good illustration of how the war affected most of the Mozambican communities. Ilha Josina Machel covers an area of 190 Km, located at 130 Km from Maputo. It has a population of 14,020 people. Renamo, the opposition armed forces that were trying to overthrow the Mozambican Government, arrived in the area in 1986 and brought with them instability and violence. As Renamo set up two military bases nearby it started carrying on attacks in the small towns to steal food supplies. During these attacks Renamo killed or kidnapped local people who were used to transport the stolen goods to the military bases. Once in the base, children and teenagers were trained alongside the men to become soldiers. Since Frelimo, the

Government army, had no capacity to protect the area the local population formed a militia for self-defense. This militia also recruited children to fight, due to the lack of men. As the war escalated and landmines were placed all around the area, all the population was forced to flee Ilha Josina Machel, leaving behind their houses and their fields who were their only means of subsistence. 1988 was the worst year of the war in the area. Peace just returned after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, and even after that many children were retained in military bases until 1994. There is no one in Ilha Josina Machel who does not have a family member who was not forced to spend some time in a military base. Most people also lost someone in this war, and no one was spared from its side effects.

#### **CHILD SOLDIERS IN MOZAMBIQUE**

Shortly after independence was achieved in 1975, Mozambique became involved in a civil war that lasted for 16 years. To make the situation worse, since 1987 Mozambique suffered the damaging effects of the economic recovery program, in addition to the severe drought that affected vast zones of the country in the early nineties.

When the peace agreement of October 1992 finally ended the war, the country's material and social structures were shattered. Since 1980 the conflict had taken the form of a destabilization war, where the primary target was not military victory but rendering the country ungovernable. Multiparty elections were held and a small new army was created out of volunteers from both armies. The rest of both armed forces were demobilized, representing

about 92,000 soldiers. At the turn of the century, and one year after peace was reestablished, Mozambique remained one of the poorest countries in the world, with one third of the urban population and two thirds of its rural population living in absolute poverty. (Cliff and Noormahomed 1993:843)

Unlike many other contexts where the recruiting of child soldiers was done in a more or less voluntary way, in Mozambique most of the recruitment was forced. Voluntary recruitment is often justified by the fact that children live in poverty and often have no family that can provide for their basic needs. In Mozambique however most child recruiting was forced, often in a coercive and abusive way. As we will see ahead, Boothby in his study "Children of Mozambique: the Cost of Survival" (1991) reports how forced recruitment took place in many situations.

No one accurately knows how many children fought in this armed conflict. UNICEF (The State of the World's Children 1996) and the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (Final Report 1997) state that at least 10,000 children participated actively in this war. ONUMOZ, the UN force in Mozambique, stated that in May 1994 in the reunification areas 1.25% of the Renamo troops and 0.29% of the Frelimo troops were teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17. (Charnley, Helen and Silva, Teresinha 1996) Irrefutable data on a total number of child soldiers does not exist however. No one ever wanted to fully admit having recruited children to fight and the return to their homes was done in an unorganized way.

In Mozambique, the Law of Obligatory Military Service 4/78 established compulsory military

service above the age of 18. However, when the conditions of the government army started to deteriorate in a war with few perspectives of military victory, recruitment became more difficult. Many young men fled across the border to South Africa to avoid having to fight. In order to keep up numbers, at times the government military resorted to forced recruitment at public places such as schools, markets, bus stations and recruitment centers for migrant labor. As many youngsters did not have any identity documents, recruiters would rely merely on physical looks. (Boothby, Sulton and Upton 1991)

In many other cases, as it has been extensively documented, children were kidnapped by Renamo, the opposition armed forces that were trying to overthrow the Mozambican Government (Boothby, Sulton and Upton 1991 and Dodge P. Cole 1991). Abduction occurred to children as young as 6 to 14 years old. Sometimes they were taken separately, and in other cases with their families. At the military base boys and girls were separated. The boys were initially given heavy civilian tasks and slowly indoctrinated until some received formal military training and integrated the armed forces. The girls were forced to become wives and servants of commanders and officers, being often raped, beaten, and wounded. In some areas the girls also received military training. They learnt how to defend themselves in the base and how to participate in attacks, as reported by the youngsters I interviewed in Ilha Josina Machel. Kidnappings and forced recruitment were worse in the South of the country, where most of the men had migrated to neighboring countries in search for work. Renamo resorted to the drafting of children as young as 6 or 7. In the North, coercive recruitment would usually just start at 15 years old. (Boothby, Sulton and Upton 1991)

During the final years of conflict Renamo also recruited students who had dropped out of school promising them scholarships and good jobs within the movement. In several provinces women and school children joined forces of self-defense leaded by Naparama traditional leaders who proclaimed they could immunize people from the bullets of Renamo. (Boothby, Sulton and Upton 1991:22 and Charnley 1996).

Minors recruited were considered adults and treated as any adult recruit, even though the treatment varied widely. The training often included a period to break the resistance of the child, which could be made by forcing the child to kill a relative or a friend, giving him drugs and forcing him to see the brutal way in which deserters were dealt with. It was a process of dehumanization. Once faced with a command to kill, a child had no real choice. He would have to commit an atrocious act or else be killed on the spot. Some successfully managed to run away from the bases, but the fear of being caught outturned such option in many cases. After the first time a child killed a ceremony was held, generally involving eating or drinking parts of the body or the blood of the victims. This ceremony was said to protect the child from the enemy bullets from then on. Domingo, a 13-year old former child soldier described it saying "after the killing, body parts were cut up and cooked with other meat. The bandits got a healer who told me to eat the stew. Then he called for demons and asked them to make me safe from Frelimo's bullets. The demons agreed. But now I had to drink the blood of the next three people I killed before I would be safe from the bullets. If I didn't, I would be killed." (Boothby, Sultan and Upton 1991:22) Children also describe how often they were forced to walk over dead bodies after an attack, or how the only water they were offered to drink in the bases was served inside human skulls.



(Castanheira) The goal of all these actions was to dehumanize the actions the child committed, making him or her feel as part of the group.

After being initiated, children participate in armed attacks on civilian targets such as villages, towns, buses, hospitals and schools (Boothby, Sulton and Upton 1991). The attacks were made by large groups of 30 or 40 children, boys and girls, and some men. Only the boys and men carried guns and they had to protect the girls, whose role was to steal as many provisions as possible.

As António, one of the former child soldiers of Ilha Josina Machel explained, before each attack everyone gathered for praying. In this occasion, the commander would ask the spirits of his ancestors to help them to be successful in the attack, while all the soldiers should also ask the same silently. In the base there were also traditional healers, who could help children to strengthen their confidence by performing rituals that were said to protect them from bullets. Over a period of time it seems likely that the children started to sympathize with the Renamo armed group. According to Cole P. Dodge (1991:57), it seems that this is a case in which "a well known psychological adaptation takes place where in captives kept in close confinement develop a dependency relationship and eventually identify with the cause of their captors". Nevertheless, in most testimonies children say that the indoctrination that they were submitted to did not succeed in making them believe in the ideology behind the fighting. They pretended that they believed just because it was their only choice to be spared from tortured or being killed. After all, as António puts it, "killing always makes one suffer" and at the first chance children tried to run away.

To help the children breaking what they had learnt to be right or wrong, children were also drugged most of the time. As Sérgio describes it “ I was a big killer. I smoked *suruma* mixed with gunpowder and I felt good after that. It gave me more strength and courage. Still, when the effect of the drugs was over I would feel sad and pensive. The commanders assumed that when someone was sad and pensive it meant that he or she was trying to flee, so they would pick someone in the base to kill him or her right away.” (Castanheira) To avoid such ideas, the children were permanently drugged.

As in any military base the discipline was quite strict. Like the adults, children were punished each time they did anything wrong during the trainings or the attacks. Often the punishment was a collective punishment, even if just one soldier had failed to execute some order correctly. Disobedience could also lead to severe beatings with wooden sticks that were followed by forced exercises. Some commanders however were less strict with the children than they were with the adult soldiers, according to António (Ilha Josina Machel). Specially the child soldiers who distinguished themselves in fighting, benefited from special attentions from the base leaders.

Despite heavy criticism throughout the armed conflict, only few efforts took place to demobilize child soldiers. With the signing of the peace accord in 1992, the United Nations Office in Mozambique (UNOMOZ) and a Commission for Reintegration were charged with the coordination of the demobilization process nationwide. The process took anything from six weeks to four months and created quite some unrest and frustration among soldiers.

Financial assistance was given to soldiers, but an unknown number of child soldiers under 15 were deliberately excluded from this process. (Maslen 1997:3) Renamo, as the Government forces, never recognized officially the existence of children in their armed forces, preventing their official demobilization. Only by June 1994 did Renamo agree to grant full access to the military bases for the registration of children for family tracing and to authorize their transfer to civil areas.

After the signing of peace it took some time until the commanders allowed all the soldiers to leave the bases. Children left the bases accompanied by an adult or were led to transit camps organized by humanitarian organizations, such as the Mozambican Red Cross. Families came to the transit camps to try to find their missing family members, either children or adults who might have been kidnapped and kept in a military base. Others, who knew where their families lived, returned by their own means. There was not a single global program able to deal with the reunification of these children.

#### **IMPACT OF THE WAR ON FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS:**

The emotional scars of the children who survive this reality cause severe trauma that, if not addressed properly, can hinder the child's stability and ability to go on with his or her life. Once in safety children still often retain images or memories of the war's worst moments they experienced. These feeling can be so horrific that they cannot talk freely about them. Children believe that no one would understand their situation. This fear further excludes them

from reintegrating into society. Instead, they lock the fears inside, living in a combination of pain and guilt, sadness, depression and social isolation. (Barnitz 1997:12-15 / Berlund / Boothby, Sultan and Upton 1991:24-32 / IFRC 1999:9-13 / Tolfree 1996)

One other characteristic of war traumatized children is the inability to have future vision, to see themselves in the future, which makes the children strive to move forward. With few future perspectives, a severe economic crisis countrywide and lack of education or vocational training reintegration in the community is made particularly difficult. (Harris 1996 / Malsen 1997)

Another common trait of child soldiers is their inability to trust adults or other children. These children often learned in the military that they could not rely on anyone during the conflict. Once back to safety, these children tend to use violent methods to get what they want, just as they learned how to do in the military bases, beating younger boys to obey or steal for them, or stealing themselves from their families. They observed and learned this behavior from the older children and officers in the base, and they soon adopted it themselves to survive. The fear for their own security also lingers for long periods, so the child often will carry homemade weapons for protection or hides at night under the covers. Those who have lived for extended periods in military bases began even to identify themselves with Renamo or the militia, acting as if the war was not over. Authority figures outside the base are purely ignored or even challenged, and the parents and social workers have a very hard time understanding them, and feel threatened. (Boothby, Sultan and Upton 1991 / Berlund)

The impact of war on children does not resume itself to trauma, however. Being in a military base means being separate from one's family, in most circumstances. It means missing out on a normal growth and development process, during the time the child is far away from the community and its structures. In a military base the child or youngster is forced to grow up too fast. By being child soldiers and being separated from their families' children lose access to the social, moral and cultural values of their community, which can create an irreversible gap at an older age. (Brett and McCallin 1998)

Living in a military base also impacts on the physical health of the children. Alice, a teenager from Ilha Josina Machel illustrates it, "We often had no food for several days, when the attacks did not succeed. When there was not enough meat the children, and specially the girls, were given just animal's skin to eat". Silvestre, who was kidnapped as a young child says, "My worse suffering was being often left with no food. They said that I was still a baby and since I could not do any work I had no right to eat." (Castanheira) Most children, when they returned home, suffered from several diseases caused by the poor diet and the bad hygienic conditions that they were submitted to for a period of several years, in most cases. As a consequence of sexual abuse, most girls, and many boys who were given the girls as wives as if they were adults, suffered sexual transmittable diseases, including HIV/AIDS. (Bracken and Petty 1998) As we have seen above, to induce children to kill these were given drugs regularly. Once they return home children had become drug addicted, which in such a young age may permanently affect the brain.

## **REUNIFICATION, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION INITIATIVES:**

Special attention and treatment for minors in armed forces came into the foreground when in 1988 a group of about 40 children captured by the government armed forces was handed over to the National Office of Social Action, part of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. The National Commission on Children in Difficult Situations, a working group formed by several government bodies, was created to study how these children should be rehabilitated.

Initially these children were placed in centers where social workers and volunteers from the Mozambican Women Organization tried to help them deal with the psychosocial consequences of their war experiences. Soon, however, this idea to create specific centers for the so-called "instrumentalized" children called excessive attention from the media and hindered confidentiality. It was also felt that such institutions promoted the children's depersonalization because they lacked the social and cultural environment, which favors the children's socialization and reintegration in the community. (Honwana and Panizzo 1995) Rather than just focusing on the child's emotional wounds, those involved began to see that programs should aim to support the healing process and to reestablish a sense of normalcy. (ILO 1997 and Machel 1996). Based on such views, the government and other organizations opted to prioritize efforts to trace the children's families and to reunite them.

Starting from the Lhanguene Center for "instrumentalized" children, in 1988, SEAS formally launched the National Family and Tracing Program. This program was coordinated by NDSA

and implemented by various NGOs. The ICRC and the SCF-USA played the major role, and certain areas were assigned to Radda Barnar, SCF-UK, Christian Council of Mozambique and the Mozambican Red Cross. Part of this program was the Children and War Project. The activities consisted in the identification and registration of the child, tracing the child's family, reunification and follow up. During its implementation more than 16,798 children reported missing by their relatives were registered; more than 17,804 unaccompanied children were identified and documented; and more than 14,374 were reunified with their parents, relatives or placed in substitute families. (Honwana and Panizzo 1995)

The incorporation of the above mentioned NGOs in the mid to late 1980s provided most needed resources such as technical expertise, substantial external support for travelling, program operations, training, documentation, planning and personnel. A working relationship was established between MICAS and these organizations but the weak coordination capacity from the later and the territorial division made by organization made cooperation less than perfect. (Honwana and Panizzo 1995)

Within this program and once the peace was signed, in 1993 the ICRC, Save the Children-USA and UNICEF also carried out the evacuation of several child soldiers from the Renamo camps. Out of more than 2,000 children documented in an initial survey, 850 boys were reunited with their families in an operation that lasted 3 months. In some cases it was observed that once reunited these boys created disturbances, demanding to be treated as the rest of the demobilized soldiers. They occasionally refused to be reunited with their families

and ran away. (UNICEF) To cope with such problems, additional programs had to be developed to deal with the rehabilitation and reintegration of the former child soldiers.

Apart from the policies and programs of the NSAD, the Ministry of Education designed an educational program for war-affected children in 1987. Such program included setting up schools in camps for displaced populations, free distribution of school materials, and priority access for the orphans, displaced and unaccompanied children. In order to reach the children in the rural areas a massive training program for primary teachers who worked with children affected by war was set up. Reintegration in the schools seems to have been successful according to the Mozambique Red Cross. There was some initial aggressive behavior among the children, but the teachers eventually managed to help them cope with their new circumstances.

From the early nineties however, it became more difficult to reintegrate children in difficult circumstances in schools. As a result of the economic readjustment program, the training of teachers and the recovery of destroyed schools had to be discontinued.

To face such difficulties the Ministries of Education, Health and the Coordination of Social Action made a new partnership with the Mozambique Red Cross to open a training center to prepare workers and volunteers to help in the rehabilitation of children affected by war. The training was based in a project developed by the Mozambique Red Cross called "Healing Through Play" which focussed on helping the child coping with its emotions through play and expressive activities. In Nampula a project called RECRINA developed a similar approach.



AMOSAPU, a local organization created in 1994 in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, opted to create a more comprehensive program, which initially was designed to help just former child soldiers. AMOSAPU was constituted by a team of 20 Western trained psychologists, the only that existed in the country to serve a total population of 15 million people. (ANC Briefing News) The team chose to implement its programs in Maputo and in two regions around Maputo-- Josina Machel Island and Zimpeto – and in Manjakaze, situated in the province of Gaza. These were regions where a considerable number of children had been kidnapped during the war and had been forced to fight.

Before implementing its project the personnel of AMOSAPU dedicated its efforts to a few months of research focusing on other projects with similar objectives, on what children have been through, on the communities these children came from and how they were received back. The professionals of this organization also benefited from their experience in providing trauma counseling for these children in psychotherapeutic centers. By observing how the local communities coped with war trauma when there were no other programs available, AMOSAPU decided that the best solution would be to incorporate the Western training their professionals had received with the local culture, the traditional phases children go through, the beliefs in spirits and the capacity to deal with the past through local traditional and religious purification rites. In conjunction to these rites psychological counseling would be given to these children. As a result, this program went further than others did and was by far the one that has involved the community the most, as teachers and traditional and religious leaders were included in the program.

Initially AMOSAPU addressed only the former child soldiers through its programs, but soon the team of psychologists realized that separating these children just enlarges the gap between the former child soldiers and the community, generating fears and tensions. Therefore the group sessions led by AMOSAPU started integrating as well other children who had lived in military bases or who had been affected by war in other ways than having been made combatants.

The AMOSAPU program to rehabilitate the children affected by war has several components. Clearly the main goals of these psychologists was to help the children express their fears and to unlock the trauma from within themselves, but looking at the problems that children faced when they tried to fit back into their community it became clear that other problems had to be dealt with as well. Treating the psychological trauma became not a solution per se if the child and the family had no means to support themselves and had no future perspectives, so AMOSAPU became also involved in helping children affected by war develop income generating activities. At present there are large groups of adolescents and young adults who missed out on education or who had to interrupt schooling during the war. There are few educational opportunities for this group. The schooling network is still limited and there are few possibilities for educational and vocational training in rural areas. AMOSAPU set up business or crafts courses to teach skills that can be essential to start a new life. In most cases this program has said to be quite successful, even though it was not always easy due to the different expectations of the community and the children.

Over time divergences in prioritizing physical and psychological health led to a conflict of interests between the Ministry of Health and AMOSAPU, as the responsible for this organization, Dr. Bóia Junior, explained it to me. Consequently, the AMOSAPU team decided to form an independent organization to proceed with their programs. The new organization was renamed Associação Reconstruindo a Esperança (RE).

Focusing in part as well in the vocational training, but in a much smaller degree, the government also created the program "Support for Children with War Experience". This program targets the children who lived in military bases, including former child soldiers, and was implemented by the Ministry for the Coordination of Social Action in 17 districts and 7 provinces since 1995. Its activities started with visits to the reunited children to carry out assessments of what are their main needs. As a result, facilities for small income generating activities such as fishing have been provided in Gaza district. In other regions this program also tries to improve the access to education, school material and vocational training. It focuses as well in the access to medical assistance as through its assessments it was found that several children still had bullets or fragments in their bodies as the families had no money for the medical treatment.

Another two vocational training centers exist in the Southern area, where specific reference is made to the integration of former child soldiers. This centers are run by a program from the government and UNICEF called "Education for Peace", started in 1993. (GINIE)

## **LESSONS LEARNED:**

Analyzing the different initiatives carried on in Mozambique to rehabilitate child soldiers and to facilitate their reintegration in the community, allows us to see what worked and what could have been done differently. It allows to see what initiatives or factors were the most relevant in the reintegration of these children and how far did they arrive.

As we have seen by looking at the programs that have been implemented in Mozambique to promote the reintegration of child soldiers it has been a process of learning and sharpening strategies. When child soldiers became a concern, the first initiatives were to create centers to receive such children and give them psychological support in dealing with the past. Then, those involved realized the need to reintegrate these children in the community as a whole, and the fact that such reintegration needed to start by their families and local communities. This led to undertaking efforts to build tracing and reunification networks. Once most children were reunited with their families new assessments underlined the need for follow up programs. Such programs should not only help children unlock their trauma and make the link with families but needed as well to give the child a future perspective and skills to start an income generating activity and go on with his or her life.

If we consider the size of Mozambique and the number of children that were forced to fight this war, however, the existing programs were not enough in number and scope to address many of the individuals in this group. A major obstacle has been the fact that the children were dispersed in a quite large country, where the rural areas are hardly accessible due to the

lack of roads, means of transportation and the existence of landmines. Government relied mostly on the humanitarian organizations to help these children, and the humanitarian organizations focused their work in the capital or other main urban areas, where they were based. Other obstacles were the lack of infrastructures, trained personnel and lack of funds. As a result, most children ended up being reintegrated spontaneously by the communities.

In rural communities traditional religion constitutes an important source of strength in moments of crisis. Traditional practitioners such as healers, diviners and spirit-mediums by virtue of their proximity to the spirits, play a decisive role in the communities by providing the knowledge that permits to reestablish equilibrium in the lives of the individuals. The underlying idea is that spiritual beings guide and control the lives of human beings in society. Based on the believe that social pollution may arise by being in contact with death or blood shed, and since war is the most critical, unbalancing and devastating social crisis, traditional institutions become crucial for healing war trauma and related disorders. When an individual considered to be polluted comes back to his/her family and community, he or she cannot resume social interaction before the performance of certain types of cleansing and purification ritual. Traditional or religious healers perform the rituals.

Looking at the example of Ilha Josina Machel, here the population recurred either to traditional healers or to the Zion church. The traditional and the religious purification rituals vary slightly, as we will see bellow. As Salomão, the Bishop of the Zion church in Josina Machel, explains, even those who do not believe in this religion and who do not go to the church regularly recur to them for these rituals. The Zion prophets listen to what the child has

to say, what are the complaints and what he or she went through. The basic ritual for a child who returns from a military base consists in washing the child with water, ashes and salt to clean the child from any bad spirits, i.e., from the spirits of those he or she saw being killed. Those children who killed someone must go through a special ritual to erase any feelings of guilt. Around the altar the prophet places flour, seven candles, one liter of oil, half a kilo of salt, a special stone that produces a special odor when burnt and two pigeons. The prophet then kills the pigeons with his nails, opens it and takes out the intestines. The intestines and the feathers are buried and the blood is collected in a glass, mixed with water and placed in the altar. One pigeon is then burnt into ashes while the other one is roasted for the prophet to eat. The ashes and the blood are thrown over the child, and then washed off. According to Bóia Júnior's explanation, the blood symbolizes the death and the ashes destruction. In the cases when the child ate animal skins he or she is given a traditional medicine to purge his or her stomach and intestines. After these ceremonies the house of the children's family is all washed and the prophet prays so that the child can be united again with his or her family as well as with the whole community. The rituals performed by the Zion church are not paid, and according to Salomão, the bishop, they are practiced the same way all over the country. Once the ritual is performed the child will have no more problems related to his or her experience in the military base and the population accepts him or her back. All children who returned from a base to Josina Machel have been submitted to purification rituals. The bishop recognizes however that these youngsters also suffer from specific socio-economic factors, related to the fact that they have missed out on school and that they have no means to support themselves. Since rituals are not enough in this area, the bishop also volunteered himself to teach

alphabetization in the courses administered by RE and to help on the group activities where children learn how to play again and to cope with their past.

On the other hand there are the traditional healers. I was told that all the traditional healers follow the same rituals, which have been passed from generation to generation. The rituals applied to the child soldiers are the same rituals that were used for anyone who returned from the several wars that occurred over time in Mozambique, with some small adaptations according to the symptoms. As three traditional healers from Ilha Josina Machel explained to me, once they return home the children cannot enter the parents' house before a purification ritual is performed. To start the ritual the child must stand in front of the house where he or she must wash him or herself with a mixture of plants that is meant to clean the spirit of the dead people that he or she has seen and to keep bad luck away. Afterwards the child enters the house, where special plants are boiled in water so the child can inhale the vapors. If the child has nightmares and flash backs from what he or she has seen the inhalation must be done with a special stone that is burnt in a fire. The child is also "vaccinated" with several cuts of razor blade that are meant to make the child forget what he or she has seen or done during the war. Every Mozambican recurs to this "vaccination" system through out his or her life to protect himself or herself from different kinds of evil or difficulties. The clothes brought by the child must also be cleaned with specific plants, and once purified they might be used again. In order for the traditional healers to treat the different symptoms the children are asked to tell them what they feel and what they have been through. When a child is too young to be able to do it the traditional healer uses some bones that allow him or her to diagnose the problem. A special ritual called Kufemba might also be used. In this ritual the traditional healers recur to

the dead spirits. The idea behind is that the child must be cleaned from the spirit of the person that he or she killed. Through the traditional healer this spirit will tell the child what did he or she do wrong and what should be done to repair that action. Sometimes the spirits ask the child to go to the house of the family of the dead person and give a cow or money, or other times they ask that a person from the family of the child is given to the family of the victim to replace the dead person. Everyone in the community believes in this ritual and they obey to what they are told to do. After the ceremony the child is given several plants for further inhalations or to be drunk on the following days. The treatments are paid and usually after they are done the child is totally cured. These days, the traditional healers in Josina Machel are no longer consulted by former child soldiers because all the children who returned from the military bases have already consulted them or the Zion church as soon as they returned. These days these children proceed with their normal lives, the traditional healers say.

Traditional healing rites play a unique role. These rites may help overcome the psychological and even physical pain and move the young person to a new phase. Also, the rites and accompanying social relations are essential in restoring group identity. The feeling of belonging to the whole community is very important to motivate the child to become an active member of the society, choosing its own path and income generating activity. The rehabilitation of child soldiers leads to the strengthening of the whole community and helps the healing of everyone who is dealing with the effects of the war. Rituals take an irreplaceable role in some cultures, as it is the case of Mozambique, in overcoming the loss of family members. Symbolism can be quite powerful to involve the community as a whole in the common goal of overcoming the past and create a better future. These are the areas in



which western methods cannot do much by themselves. It is essential that humanitarian organizations operating in this field recognize such roles and work side by side with the traditional healers and the whole community. All the children that have been in a military base and that I spoke to in Ilha Josina Machel have told me that they felt that what had been the most crucial to make them overcome the memories and fears from the war was the traditional or the religious rituals. This represented the turning point towards the reintegration in the community they had left and allowed them to move on, trying to catch up the path that they were forced to interrupt. As António, a former child soldier who fought for 4 year, expresses it “In the beginning the neighbors feared me, but after the purification ritual both me and them were able to put the past behind”.

Most people in Ilha Josina Machel believe that these rituals were sufficient to make the children feel part of the community again, but sometimes additional help was also necessary. Such help can mean psychological support through Western methods as well as facilitating access to education and vocational training, as Green and Honwana (1999) underline in their book.

Despite the several critics often formulated by specialists in this area, western methods still have their validity in addressing the social-psychological needs of children affected by warfare, as long as they are adapted to the cultural reality of those who are being helped. When the traditional rituals are not enough to make the child overcome his or her traumatic experience, the child may find no one to talk to. Families may have a hard time trying to understand how to address their problems and often resent their violent or isolationist

behavior. Often parents feel guilty because they failed in protecting their children from such events, and prefer to ignore the past. Through story telling, role-play and projective drawing for instance, the trained social workers or psychologists help the child unlock those fears from inside and provide reassurance. These methods enable children to gain a measure of control over the troubling event. Putting words into the emotions the child is feeling, and helping him understand his reactions, helps overcoming the nightmares, sleeplessness, bedwetting, eating disorders and inability to concentrate. Psychological counseling also gives information to the child about what happened, instead of omitting the reality as it often happens within the communities and would lead to lack of trust in adults and the consequent fear and anger towards authority figures. (Dyregrov and Raundalen) The psychologists' methodology is also essential to recognize the signs of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), often overlooked by the families, and to prevent the permanent blocking of the effects. By expressing their thoughts and emotions, children can take control and reduce the frequency of disturbing intrusive images and thoughts, at the same time as it allows the child to have an active role in his/her recovery. At the same time the child is being helped directly the rest of the society should be addressed as well. Understanding what the child is going through is essential to help the community overcome its suspicions towards the former child soldiers that prevent them from feeling as part of the community. Simultaneously, helping the child to learn about normal reactions to trauma and loss can reduce misinterpretations of their own reactions and reduce the fear of turning violent or becoming suicidal. (Dyregrov and Raundalen)

As we had seen before AMOSAPU/RE also integrated the psychological support component in their programs. After identifying the children who suffered from their participation in the

war, with the help of the families and local workers, AMOSAPU/RE provided in average 35 psychological sessions for each child. These sessions could be individual sessions or group sessions. The group therapy consisted in playing games, drawing, dancing, clay modeling and story telling. Each group had between 8 to 12 children and met regularly during 3 months. Individual sessions complemented these group sessions. Group sessions were crucial as in most African societies the individual is less important than the group. Children felt often more at ease to speak about their fears in front of a group than to a single stranger. In Ilha Josina Machel, the local workers received training from the psychiatrist and the two psychologists of AMOSAPU/RE, and their work consisted in identifying the children that needed help, leading some of the group sessions and doing a follow up of the families and the children through regular visits. Regular meetings were organized between local workers and the psychiatrist and the psychologists to discuss the symptoms, the psychological development of the child, to define the intervention limits and to formulate hypothesis for a given case. Also, these meetings revealed to be an opportunity for the psychiatrist and the psychologists, who came from the capital, to learn some more about the cultural context of this community and to adapt their work accordingly. Regular schoolteachers also received special training to help them understand what these children were going through and how to act accordingly. In the first two years of its project in Josina Machel, between 1994 and 1996, AMOSAPU/RE consulted 546 children and 230 families. (AMOSAPU, 1996)

Observation of the reality in this war-torn country has also showed the vital necessity to link education and vocational opportunities for former child combatants with psychological support. In many other contexts where specialists work in the rehabilitation of the child

soldiers the focus on the socio-economic aspects is crucial to stop children from returning to the frontlines. In Mozambique the reasons are different. As we saw above, most of the former child soldiers in Mozambique did not volunteer themselves to fight in search of food or social cohesion. They were abducted and coerced to fight. However, if the socio-economic factors were not what led them to fight, fighting and living in a military base for several years has an inevitable impact in the socio-economic factors once they return to their communities. In military bases children were deprived from going to school. Even those who were not in the military bases, or who were successful in running away shortly after their arrival, were unable to go to school during the worst years of the conflict, during when nothing functioned in this areas. Families had to hide in the bush for months and months. Their lands were often abandoned. They had no means of survival and lost the little they had when their village was burnt down. In the end of the war these children returned home with no education, no work experience, no occupation. No matter how happy their families might have been to learn that they were alive after all, they had almost no economic capacity to lift themselves from the miserable situation they found themselves in. A child means one more mouth to feed and to eat everyone has to contribute with his or her labor. Educational and vocational training therefore are most often the determinants for a true reintegration sustained in the long-term. As Machel (1996) pointed out in her report, without a job and a way to sustain themselves economically, these youngsters tend to become frustrated and to resort to violence as the solution for all their problems.

With this concern in mind, in Ilha Josina Machel AMOSAPU/RE fosters self-help groups focused on several working activities. The organization provides some of the basic working

tools, like for example a boat and the fishing material while the children organize themselves in fishing groups. The fish collected is then sold and the money is managed by the organization and by representatives of these groups. Each participant receives a subsidy. A managing commission manages the rest of the profits. The money can be used to buy new material or it can be lent to the AMOSAPU/RE's beneficiaries in case of emergencies. Other groups dedicate themselves to activities such as agriculture, basket weaving, ceramics and live stocking. Most of the children that I spoke to identified AMOSAPU/RE mostly with these income-generating programs, seeing them as a great benefit to them. Presently the organization is losing part of its strength. There have been some problems of money management with the previous commission and the income generating programs have been neglected ever since, as it is not clear who constitutes the new management team. These days, only a few children keep working in these groups as no one has received their subsidies in a long time. The organization is struggling to find funding, in a phase where the war in Mozambique and the former child soldiers are no longer a major concern in the international or even national forums. Also, most of the former child soldiers have reached the age of going to the mines in South Africa, as it is tradition in the South of Mozambique. Only very few, except the girls, have stayed.

Looking at the global picture, and at what could have worked better in Mozambique when addressing the rehabilitation of child soldiers, despite the different approaches chosen by the aid and government organizations, two main problems seem to have been common: insufficiency or lack of precision in the assessment and follow up procedures. More emphasis should have been put in the preparatory phase in most cases. Just to give one example some

vocational programs were set up in technical or geographical areas where no jobs were subsequently available (ILO 1997).

Follow up is also essential in all cases, not only to correct possible deficiencies of the outlined project but also to make sure the long term rehabilitation and reintegration process is not paralyzed or even reversed. When the Western psychotherapeutic approach of emphasizing individual emotional expression is used and the child's memories are awakened, the child can be left in more severe pain and agitation than before if no further support is given. (Machel 1996) Follow up can be crucial in other contexts as well. In the case of the Children and War program, for instance, the follow up phase allowed to realize that a number of the substitute families' true wish was not to help a child but rather collect the subsidies or food support and have some free domestic labor. Even when reunited with their own family, reintegration was not always smooth, as the family may be unable to understand or cope with the new behavior of the children. Follow up allowed the implementation of the necessary corrections to these programs.

No one knows for sure how many former child soldiers populate Mozambique. No one knows for sure how many of these children can be considered fully reintegrated in the community or how many still need help. Nine years after the peace was signed, in a poor country where life is a struggle and where most people were affected by the war one way or the other, it becomes hard to tell if these children still have specific problems that must be addressed. Most people seem to believe that the local communities did quite a good job in reintegrating these children. Governmental and humanitarian organizations also had some impact, even if not nationwide.

Some external factors also helped the reintegration of the former child soldiers. One factor might have been the fact that the children were forcibly recruited by both sides. Having to reintegrate relatives who fought in both sides made it easier on families to see that they had had no choice, as they were randomly abducted and forced to commit such acts. Another factor has been the rains that have fallen more regularly since the peace agreement, after several years of severe draught. Rain is essential for the country's subsistence and prosperity, important factors in recovering from a war. The opening up of the roads and the continuation of peace are other two factors. In the South several former child soldiers are now able to follow their fathers footsteps to the mines in South Africa. All over the country former child soldiers have gotten married, started families and jobs.

Several wars have existed over time in Mozambique and the population has created its own mechanisms of dealing with the problems. As Dr. Bóia Junior sees it, the Government and the politicians have preferred to ignore the problem and to trust the capacity of the Mozambican families to absorb all this pain and difficulties. Both Frelimo and Renamo never admitted having used children to fight their war. These days, bringing back the issue nine years after end of the war would be bad publicity for a country who is trying to attract foreign investment. The rural population has been the one that has been the most neglected, both by the Government and the humanitarian organizations. The bad roads make the access too difficult. The inequality between the rural and urban areas is enormous. However, often it was the children from the urban centers who had a harder time to reintegrate themselves, as in urban areas jobs are more difficult to find and there is less cohesion and support from the community.

The population of Mozambique is tired of the war. All they wish for is peace, but the hypothesis of returning to war is not very far from most people's minds. Each of the two political forces, Frelimo and Renamo, try to manipulate the reality and to separate the country to fight their war. The politicians, in a country where different ethnic groups have no identity or power conflicts between themselves, try to explore ethnic differences. In reality the two parties do not even defend different ideologies or policies. There is a void of new ideas which address the problems of the population. Most people see that the only solution for the country would eventually be the creation of a third force, but no one has much hope for the time being since there seems to be no one with the capacity and will to do it.

Meanwhile Mozambique remains a country where peace is a fragile balance, as most of the countries in the region, it is undeniable that all the projects developed to deal with the post war effects achieved their results much sooner than had been envisaged. There is still a lot to be done in different areas of development, but the wounds left from the long years of war are becoming less visible every day.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Each war is a different war. Each former child soldier has his own past, ways of coping with things and belongs to several different community structures, such as family, village, church, clubs, religion, country, etc. Each of these communities have their rules and expectations that



influence and set up what is considered the normal growth process of every child and every adult. Rehabilitation programs, as any programs which deals with a society and its problems, cannot be exported as ready to apply models. Yet, there are many lessons that can be learnt and adapted to different contexts if one keeps an open mind and a natural curiosity to understand the social context he or she works in.

That is, in my belief, what AMOSAPU/RE tried to do. Obviously AMOSAPU/RE had the advantage of being a national organization, but most of its main professionals came from the capital, where social values are somehow different from the values of other communities in the countryside.

Through out all the development community arguments go back and forth trying to defend which methods are the most adequate for dealing with these issues and concerns. Several reports leave little doubt that traditional rituals are instrumental in building family cohesion and solidarity, and in dealing with the psychological and emotional side of these children's problems. However, the reality shows that generally these children return to an impoverished countryside struggling with the basic survival needs, with no education, vocational training or job opportunities which could allow them to envisage the prospects of a better future. Thus, as Green and Howana (1999) defend "while these rituals are important they need to become complemented by community development programs to sustain the gains achieved in the psychological and emotional sphere, and which cannot be dissociated from the rest". The example of wisdom of the local psychologists of AMOSAPU trained in the West, help in my

opinion to sooth such arguments and give some ideas to set up more efficient programs wherever such duality might exist.

Angola is another country where child soldiers have become a reality. Mozambique and Angola do not only share a similar colonial and post colonial history, but also spiritual beliefs. In Angola it has been reported that the communities also organize healing rituals, in a very similar form to the ones performed in Mozambique. (Green and Howana 1999) There has already been an attempt by the Christian Children's Fund, in cooperation with RE of Mozambique, to create a similar program to assist the former child soldiers in Angola. Unfortunately, however, once the war escalated again the children who had been target by this program were once more reincorporated into the army. Presently the war situation in this country prevents most humanitarian aid and development organizations to operate in the country, but once the situation calms down and these may return, applying some of the lessons learnt in Mozambique could provide a better response to help these children.

Presently RE is also providing some counseling to a Christian organization in Sierra Leon, with similar goals. In Zimbabwe, as in many other countries in the region, there are similar spiritual rituals and believes. People also believe that if one has killed someone he or she has to ask forgiven to his or her spirit and must compensate his or her family for such action. Last year a team formed by members of the Mozambican Government, teachers and representatives of RE also went to Congo Kinshasa to talk about their experience in rehabilitating child soldiers.

Child soldiers are a reality in many other parts of the globe, as in Iraq, Cambodia, Bosnia, Palestine or Peru, just to cite some examples (see annex). One must however keep in mind that not all societies will necessarily have such efficient and innate processes of coping with its ills. Spiritual beliefs are not always the focal point of a society. Also, societies that have not experienced war for many generations might not have kept alive rituals to cope with its effects. In those cases, different solutions might have to be found. Nevertheless, all religions have religious prayers to obtain guidance after such threatening situations. The goal of this paper is to remind that such aspects cannot be overlooked and that they should be integrated into the rehabilitation programs. Rehabilitation programs cannot be as a toolbox ready to be exported wherever is necessary. As Richman alerts us, “it is often overlooked that the actions of aid organizations can weaken the potential that people have for self help and initiative. This happens when local resources are neglected and traditional forms of help are replaced by specialist, institutionalized models for dealing with adversity.” The success history of AMOSAPU's is meant to illustrate how programs must be adapted to the local reality and not as an example to be exported just as it is into another context.

## ANNEX

According to Radda Barner, Stockholm (Swedish Save the Children), in 1997 the conflicts where child soldiers were being used in either government or opposition forces were located in:

- Colombia
- Ecuador
- Guatemala
- Peru
- Algeria
- Liberia
- Rwanda
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- South Africa
- Sudan
- Uganda
- Albania
- Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Croatia
- Russian Federation
- Chechnya
- Tajikistan
- Northern Ireland
- Afghanistan
- Burma
- Cambodia
- Angola
- Burundi
- Congo-Brazzaville
- Congo-Kinshasa
- Djibouti
- India
- Kashmir
- Indonesia
- Iran
- East Timor
- Iran
- Iraq
- Kurdistan
- Israel occupied territories
- Lebanon
- Papua New Guinea
- Philippines
- Sri Lanka
- Turkey
- Kurdistan

It is important to note that the geographical location of where child soldiers are used changes all the time, according to the conflicts that are on place at different times.

(Barnitz 1997)

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