

A Lost Generation

Young People And Conflict in Africa

This book is a product of a research project called 'voices of youth' carried out in Angola, Burundi, and Uganda. The purpose of the research and the book is to provide a channel through which the voices of youth could be heard, both within their own countries and further afield, and in doing so to contribute to improved policy and practice, both locally, nationally and internationally. This book departs from existing literature which is written about young people, rather than by them. The chapters in this volume highlights and challenges the increasing social injustices that births and breeds conflicts in Africa and especially the unethical use and abuse of children in war and post-war situations. The case studies from Burundi and Uganda focuses on the particular experiences of girls and young women who have experienced war – and its aftermath - in very particular ways which are rarely acknowledge or documented. The words of these young people are heartbreaking and are recorded verbatim in five selected case studies from Burundi and Uganda. It will touch the hearts of cynics and that of every peace loving person and it will challenge the very core of modern day civilization which for a long time turned a blind eye to the question of impunity for sexual violence and the extreme violation of children's rights associated with armed conflicts. This book did not only investigate the lives and stories of abducted children but also that of children and young people who have stayed at home or in camps and whose lives have still been blighted in myriad other ways by armed conflict and its consequences. The book attempts to answer these questions: How have young people in Africa experienced war? How have they contributed to it, and how have they resisted it? How has war impacted upon young people? How are they treated by the adults and why? Once war is over, how do their experiences shape their current lives and future prospects? This volume is therefore intended to be of use to anyone concerned with young people in war-affected situations, at advocacy, policy and practitioner levels.

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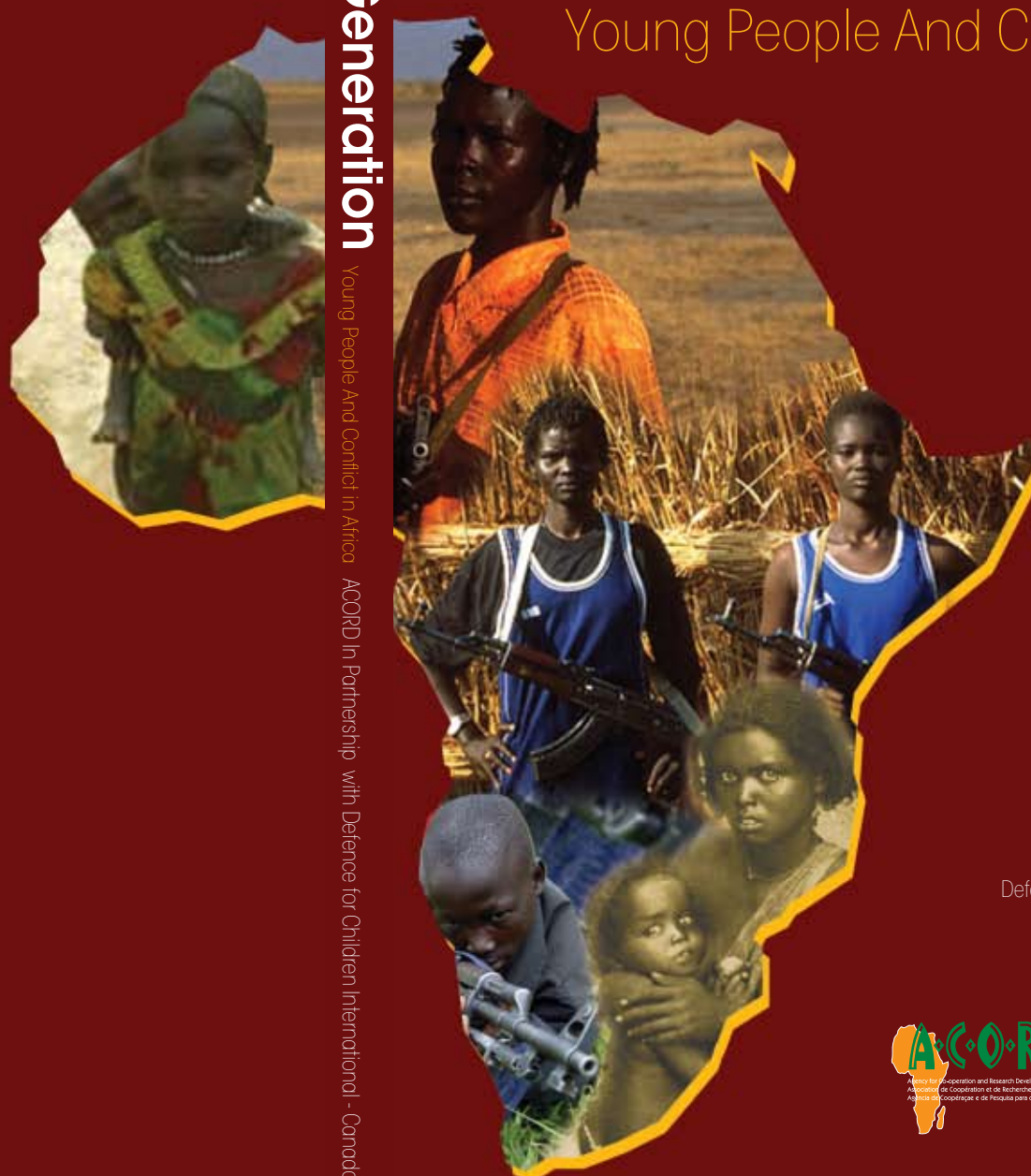
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ISBN -9966-753-00-2

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Young People And Conflict in Africa ACORD In Partnership with Defence for Children International - Canada

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ACORD

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Defence for Children International - Canada



Defence for Children International-Canada
Dedicated to the rights of children worldwide, and to fostering adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

'A Lost Generation'

Young People and Conflict in Africa.

Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development

In Partnership with

Defence for Children International - Canada

Nairobi
July 2007



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Revised Publication July 2007 by:

ACORD - Agency for Co-operation Research in Development

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ISBN – 9966-753-00-2

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Keywords:

Sexual violence, Child-mothers, Youth, Conflict, Burundi and Uganda Oral Testimonies

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ACORD is a Pan-African organisation present on the ground in 18 countries in Africa, working with communities on livelihoods and food sovereignty, HIV/AIDS, conflict and women's rights. We also do related campaign and advocacy work at the Pan African level. For more about ACORD please visit: www.acordinternational.org

UK Charity Registration No. 283302

Printed for ACORD by Ramco Printing Works, Nairobi, Kenya



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SELECTED ABBREVIATIONS

ACORD	Agency for Corporation and Research in Development
AU	African Union
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CNDD	National Council for the Defence of Democracy in Burundi
CNDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Burundi
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCI	Defence for Children International
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DW	Development Workshop
HIV/AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICC	International Criminal Court
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LC	Local Councillors
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
OT	Oral Testimony
RPF	Revolutionary People's Front
SEA	Social Exclusion Analysis
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces

Notes on Contributors

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of this research owes much to the hard work and dedication of young people from Angola, Burundi and Uganda under the leadership of Joao Gil Handanga, Marie Josée Kandaga, and Kevin Aciro respectively. These people worked tirelessly as they combined practical work with action research in the internally displaced person's camps in Uganda, and rural communities in Burundi and Angola. They collected data, analyzed and prepared case study reports amidst their own personal commitments, donor reporting responsibilities and tight reporting deadlines. The team leaders coordinated fieldwork and maintained contacts with the local administration and civil society groups to popularize the study and feedback on research findings. As a result, two high level local government representatives (one former Member of Parliament) and two women Members of Parliaments from Burundi and Uganda attended the March Seminar to add their views to discussions that shaped this book.

We are particularly grateful for considerable financial support provided by CIDA's Canada Fund for Africa through Defence for Children International (DCI) Canada, without which much of the fieldwork, research and the consultative seminar could not have taken place. Representatives of DCI contributed ideas during the first group analysis in August 2006 in Nairobi. DCI and a representative of CIDA were present in the March 2007 consultative seminar. We give special thanks to Linda Dale who conceived the idea and birthed this project. We are grateful to CIDA and DCI-Canada for their steadfast support and effectiveness in advancing funds in a timely manner throughout the research period. This publication is produced by ACORD Nairobi as an inter-agency project sponsored by DCI-Canada and funded by the Canada Fund for Africa at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Special thanks also go to Dr Asha El-Karib, ACORD Program Development Advisor in Charge of Methodology for training the project teams in Social Exclusion Analysis framework and to Judy El-Bushra for Oral Testimony training and the editing of the case studies from Burundi and Uganda. We also thank Shereen Essof for the final editing which she did within tight time frames. Very special thanks are due to the staff of ACORD Secretariat Nairobi for the great teamwork in organizing the research analysis meeting in August 2006 and the March 2007 consultative seminar. The Head of Programming at ACORD kept a keen interest in maintaining

high quality throughout the research process and provided institutional support to ensure the availability of resources to complete the research in time. Special gratitude goes to Janah Ncube, ACORD Gender Thematic Manager for continued technical and strategic support in the final analysis, and for practical support in the preparation for the March Seminar and co-hosting and co-facilitating sessions.

Notwithstanding the broad range of individual and institutional assistance provided to the research team, any errors of omission, commission and conclusions drawn in this study are entirely those of the authors and the researchers. The views expressed are those of the authors and researchers and do not necessarily represent the views of organizations and donor institutions associated with this work. The researchers have carefully transcribed the information derived from oral testimony interviews verbatim and the authors and contributors of the book are responsible for interpretation of the case studies in shaping the arguments presented in this book. The purpose of this book is to inform policy and practice at the local, national, regional, pan African and international levels in support of the work for social justice in Africa.

Sandra J. Ayoo
Research Coordinator and Manager of Inter-Country Project
Nairobi, April 2007

PREFACE

ACORD's work in Africa over the last three decades has focused its resources on the most challenged, remote, poverty prone and conflict ridden parts of the continent. This has enabled us to experience first hand the repercussions of the senseless divergences relating to power, religion and resources, which often culminate in war. These conflict and post conflict experiences have also given us an appreciation and strong desire to bring about sustainable resolution and peace while ensuring the participation of communities in these processes.

'A Lost Generation' Young People and Conflict In Africa is a by product of our analysis of ACORD's Conflict and Gender thematic programmes. It is a response to an identified gap; needing to link interventions which focus primarily on women and men, to that of the unique needs of youth and particularly girls who have proven the most vulnerable in times of conflict and post conflict.

This research has enabled me to appreciate the wealth of the Oral Testimony tool as it has given a voice to the youth and particularly girls in the conflict and post conflict contexts of Burundi, Northern Uganda and Angola. Through their experiences we see the reality of sadness, suffering and rejection which is their world. It also increases our sensitivity to the fact that they are only representative of the millions of girls in Chad, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Sierra Leone among other countries, who have experienced the horror and abuses of war and lived with and through the trauma to tell their story.

Much has been documented on conflict and abuse. However this resource provides a new understanding of the dynamics of conflict as seen through the eyes of young girls. Their vulnerability is heart wrenching and the type and extent of abuse and stigmatization experienced in the absence of comfort and support is a source of shame. Further it highlights the absence of law, order, recourse mechanisms for justice and the blatant impunity of the perpetrator. It brings to the fore the unique position of a child mother consequent to conflict and the dilemma of this victim who rejected by family and community. It also triggers queries as to the future of child mothers and a rejected generation of children borne out of abuse.

This book serves as a challenge to me as an individual, its readership, the entire development community and governments to partake at various levels in the reversal of this cycle of violence and sexual abuse which has become characteristic of war. There is an urgent need to strengthen law, order, peace and security structures. It is my hope that this publication affords the voice of youth its rightful place in representation and participation in developing responses tailored to address their unique needs and facilitate healing and restoration.

Ousainou Ngum
Executive Director, ACORD

SECTION ONE

'Restoring Peace Project' And The 'Voices of Youth' Research

Section one of this book gives voice to young people in Africa who are facing the challenge of war and its social, economic and political impacts – impacts that affected them in the recent past, are affecting them now, and will continue to affect them far into their futures. In particular, it presents the testimonies of young people from Uganda, and Burundi collected as part of the 'Restoring Peace Project', which upholds the rights of young people affected by armed and violent conflict and promotes their active participation in the social reconstruction of their societies. Their stories provide the source material on which section two of the book builds, by analysing and throwing the spotlight on the broader African conflicts and international response.

Chapter One: Introduction of the Book

The research that informs this book is an outcome of an inter-country project. This project is a component of a regional initiative called the 'Restoring Peace Project' - a collaboration between four development agencies running between April 2005 and June 2007. This initiative is based on the tenets of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts young people's inalienable right to the satisfaction of basic human needs, to protection, and to participation in matters affecting their lives. It also responds to the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) call for sustainable strategies to ensure peace and security in Africa, recognising that young people's commitment to the realisation of a new vision for Africa is critical to the success of these strategies.

The project supports war-affected young people in three countries (Angola, Burundi and Uganda) to improve their psycho-social and economic well-being and to participate alongside adults in peace-building processes. It encourages the three governments to respect and promote the rights of young people and advocates for the principle of 'first call' to be upheld and adequately resourced³. It focuses in particular on two main themes - gender-based violence and the promotion of youth citizenship - and seeks to address the regional dimensions of young people's disadvantage in the three countries, by bringing youth leaders and adults together regionally to conduct joint research and advocacy under the inter-country project. The 'Restoring Peace Project' took place in Angola, Burundi and Uganda, countries in which long civil wars have had a tremendous impact on children and young people. While each context is unique, in each country there are many young people struggling to survive and to lead productive lives.

'Restoring Peace Project' has three country components, each led by a national-level organisation and each addressing the local manifestations of one of the project's two themes. In Angola, the project works with youth in six of the most war-affected provinces: Huambo, Huila, Bie, Moxico, Kuando Kubango and Luanda. The mission of the Youth Ambassadors for Peace and Citizenship (JEPC) project in Angola is to actively engage young people in peacebuilding and the social reconstruction of their country by moving away from the adversarial approaches of the past, and promoting cooperative solutions through a collaborative structure involving civil society actors, government, youth associations, churches and political parties.

¹ Defence for Children International – Canada (DCI – Canada) is the Canadian section of the Geneva-based Defence for Children International. DCI Canada is dedicated to promoting and protecting the rights of children and youth worldwide, and to fostering adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

² DCI -Canada, ACORD International, World Vision Uganda, ACORD Burundi, and Development Workshop (DW) Angola with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) from the Canada Fund for Africa.

³ The notion of 'first call' arose out of the 1990 UN World Summit for Children and reflected the commitment world leaders made then to give a high priority to the rights of children.

Another of JEPIC's aims is to enhance adult leaders' appreciation and understanding of issues affecting youth, including their right to participate in decision-making that affects their lives. Working with girls aged 15 to 25, the project in Burundi is providing economic, psycho-social and legal support to survivors of sexual violence in the war-affected regions of Bujumbura and Kayanza. The Burundi project also works to reduce stigma and increase support for the young women by working with government and local community leaders to support the rights of these girls and to advocate for an end to impunity for rape and other forms of sexual violence. The Northern Uganda project, known as the Mother-Daughter Project (MDP), is working to develop the capacities of war-affected young mothers living in villages and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Gulu district. Through training, public education initiatives, psycho-social counseling, and income generating activities, the Uganda project is working to improve the social and economic well-being of child-mothers. The 'Restoring Peace Project' includes an inter-country component which provides opportunities for cross-learning and a more in-depth understanding among the three country projects.

Key elements in this research are the effects of conflict on youth, and the role of youth in peace-building. ACORD International, as manager of the inter-country project, collaborates with DCI in the joint management of the country projects, while DCI takes on overall responsibility for the project.

A lost generation: listening to the voices of young people affected by violent conflict in Africa

The 'Voices of Youth' research project carried out as part of 'Restoring Peace Project' aimed to provide a channel through which the Voices of Youth could be heard, both within their own countries and further afield. This is to contribute to improved policy and practice, both locally, nationally and internationally. There is little documentation available at present relating to the experiences of young people in situations of armed and violent conflict in Africa. Moreover, most of the existing documentation is written about young people, rather than by them. The purpose of the 'Voices of Youth' research project is to contribute towards filling this gap and to generate information for advocacy.

The need for advocacy arises from the recognition that young people are affected by conflict as victims and perpetrators. The issues affecting young people are well beyond local dynamics and are linked to policies and practices at national and international levels. The case studies in section one of this book reveals that the dynamics creating stigma and discrimination, exclusion, the human rights abuse at the local level for young boys and girls, both as actors and victims of the conflicts,

are consequences of systems and practices reinforced by political, economic, social or cultural factors. Sustainable responses for change can only be achieved if root causes are addressed in order to avoid an eternal recurrence of conflict and continual exploitation of children's vulnerabilities.

In the last two decades young boys and girls in Africa have been targeted by armed groups and forced to take up arms to kill against their own will and also be killed, tortured sexually, physically and mentally while the perpetrators have been allowed to walk and live freely without being made accountable for their crimes. The chapters in this volume highlight and challenge the increasing social injustices that birth and breed conflict in Africa and the unethical use and abuse of children in war and post-war situations. This volume is therefore intended to be of use to anyone concerned with young people in war-affected situations, at advocacy, policy and practitioner levels.

Framing the research

Through numerous international policy and legal frameworks addressing the subject of children and youth in armed conflict, dating back to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the international community has a clear mandate to carry out and support interventions in this area. However in practice interventions have tended to be limited to the work of specialised child protection and child rights agencies such as UNICEF and the Save the Children Federation. With the rise of the 'child soldier' phenomenon, and the high international media profile given to child soldiers, there has been increased international interest in this particular aspect of the issue. A number of organisations have been established including the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, and this has led to some improvements in the treatment of children in, for example, disarmament processes. Despite this, recent research has highlighted the neglect of girl ex-soldiers, who are estimated to constitute up to 40% of the child soldiers participating in armed movements (Save the Children 2005; Mazurana and Mckay 2004).

Atrocious as the experience of child soldiers may be, with its associations of extreme violence, abduction and sexual exploitation, such children are a numerical minority compared to the huge numbers of children and young people who have stayed at home and whose lives have still been blighted in myriad of other ways by armed conflict and its consequences. These children – and the adults they grow into – have stories that need to be told: How have young people in Africa experienced war? How have they contributed to it, and how have they resisted it? How has war impacted upon young people? Once war is over, how do their experiences shape their current lives and future prospects? The research explored two broad themes of relevance to these concerns: firstly, youth citizenship, or the crisis of youth in post-conflict social reconstruction, where services and employment are in

short supply, and where young people are in competition with the more established interests of adults. Second, the prevalence of gender-based violence during and after violent conflict, and the consequences this has for the survivors, their children, and their communities.

The research explores four main hypotheses, which are largely confirmed by the evidence. Firstly, that young people experience a wide variety of forms of discrimination at the hands of adults, including those with a duty of care. The second is that the power relationships which make this discrimination possible are rooted in culturally sanctioned ideologies in which youth are, at one and the same time, both infantilised and demonised. Thirdly, that discrimination against young people operates at all levels – within their own communities, amongst local and national institutions such as employers, schools, and the police, and amongst intervention agencies, both local and international. And finally, that there is a lamentable absence of post-war initiatives addressing the needs of young people, and more specifically that address the needs of young girls and child mothers.

There are two sections to this book.

What You Will Find In Section One

Section one presents the results of the research. The first chapter in this section is the introduction followed by a discussion of the research methodology. Chapter two describes the research process in its different stages and the approaches used. It focuses on two notable aspects of the methodology, namely the use of Social Exclusion Analysis as an overall framework of analysis, and Oral Testimony as a research method. In keeping with the aims of 'Restoring Peace Project', the research exercise was carried out by country teams which included young people from the communities concerned, both to enhance the accuracy of its analysis and to ensure young people's access to the relevant skills. The chapter attempts to draw lessons from the 'Voices of Youth' experience on the appropriateness of these methods to the contexts concerned. By way of illustration, the annexes following section two present some of the intermediate forms of analysis used by the different research teams. This includes material drawn from a third study, in Angola, which for practical reasons could not be presented as a case study.

The substantive chapters of part one consist of case studies from Burundi and Uganda. These are based mainly on testimony, supported by supplementary interviews (including key informant interviews and focus group discussions) and secondary material. Both these case studies focus on the particular experiences

of girls and young women who have experienced war – and its aftermath - in very particular ways which are rarely acknowledged or documented. Excerpts from oral testimony interviews are used extensively to illustrate the country analysis. Each case study chapter concludes with a section of unabridged (though slightly edited) testimonies.

In Burundi, the process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) currently under way pays little attention to the problem of girl soldiers. Many people in positions of responsibility for the process believe it to be negligible. The research material presented here demonstrates that it is not. In the case of northern Uganda, there already exists a mass of published testimony taken from abducted children, including both boys and girls. However, most of this material describes the actual abductions, the subsequent treatment of abducted children by the rebel forces of the Lord's Resistance Army, and the manner of the children's escape and return home.

The research presented here complements this literature: on the one hand, it describes the everyday trials of formerly abducted girls after they return to their communities, and on the other, those of girls who were not abducted, but who have suffered similar forms of discrimination.

What You Will Find in Section Two

The chapters in this section are developed with input from a one-day stakeholder consultative seminar in Nairobi in March 2007. The draft case studies from Burundi and Uganda were shared with a small team of eight activists, academics and practitioners in order to dissect and analyse the contents using the lenses of conflict, gender and sexual violence, human rights and legal frameworks, and youth participation. The team presented their views to participants of the seminar and benefited from the one-day lively discussions which greatly enhanced the final papers presented as chapters in this section. The seminar brought together over sixty high calibre participants representing over thirty regional organizations from Africa, mainly practitioners, social justice activists and policy makers. Their inputs greatly assisted us in organizing and presenting the material in this book.

Chapter five presents definitions of youth and children and associated definitional problems, analyses the impact of war on the children and youth, summarises the policies and legal mechanisms relating to young people in conflict, and identifies gaps and problems arising and recommends what needs to change. This chapter draws conclusions on how far the international community is failing, both to protect and to involve young people affected by conflict. Chapter six gives an overview and background to conflicts in Africa, underscores the changing nature of actors in

conflict particularly the participation of children, the lack of participation of young people in peace agreements and concludes with a question on why the interest on youth and conflict in Africa.

Chapter seven contextualises sexual violence in conflict situations and underscores the question of sexuality. It discusses the identity of perpetrators and sexuality in Africa. Chapter eight categorically names the crimes that have been committed against young people, evaluates the legal protection of young people in conflict, identifies gaps in the law, and concludes with an appeal for a broad based approach that entails legal and non-legal measures to address violations of young people's rights in situations of war.

Conclusion and lessons for advocacy

The concluding chapter of the book revisits and examines the four research hypotheses referred to above and assesses the extent to which they have been borne out by the research results. The chapter ends with overall conclusions on the participation and protection of young people in conflict, addressing young people's vulnerabilities and the consequences of conflict, and it offers lessons for practice and advocacy.

Chapter two: Research Methodology

For ACORD, the 'Voices of Youth' research project follows a succession of research projects undertaken since the mid-1990s which addressed issues of armed and violent conflict in Africa. These projects had in common a desire to develop a deep understanding of the social processes which enable a community or population group to withstand, or not, as the case may be, the impact of violent conflict. Within that concern was the desire to bring to the fore the 'view from the ground' and to harness the research process itself as a channel through which those 'on the ground' could express their understanding of their situation. ACORD considered this approach to be in itself a contribution to conflict transformation, since people from the marginalised areas where ACORD works are generally denied a voice. This denial is, arguably, a factor which contributes to the perpetuation of conflict.

ACORD's experience of research and programming in conflict situations over many years has led it to adopt Social Exclusion Analysis (SEA) as its main analytical framework for programme development purposes, and Oral Testimony (OT) as a key research method and foundation for the organisation's advocacy work. Both SEA and OT are described in more detail elsewhere (El-Bushra and Sahl 2005): what follows summarises the approach.

Social exclusion analysis

Social Exclusion Analysis (SEA) is a framework for research and programme design which was originally developed in ACORD's Namibia programme (Kandirikirira 2003) and which has guided a number of programming and research initiatives since then. A social exclusion analysis in a particular context examines the nature, causes and consequences of systemic discrimination, and the ways in which patterns of discrimination can build up over time into embedded systems of exclusion. It aims to build up a picture of the social, economic, cultural and political factors which provide powerful groups and individuals in a particular context with the 'power to act' to exclude others. The analysis explores the impact of discrimination on both the discriminators and the discriminated and on the wider society. Applying this framework encourages programmers to focus their attention not only on the consequences of discrimination, but also on its causes and the factors which perpetuate it.

The social exclusion framework takes as its starting point the idea that all forms of systemic discrimination have similar roots and function in similar ways, so that understanding the mechanisms of, say, racism will help us to understand other 'isms' such as sexism or ageism. Indeed, these may combine with each other and

⁴ For example, 'Complex political emergencies – from relief to development?' (1998-2001); 'Gender-sensitive programme design in conflict-affected situations' (2001-2002); Participatory Action Research to Strengthen the Capacity of Marginalized People to Resolve Conflict of Interest And Achieve their Rights Without Recourse to Violence (2003-2004)

with different social contexts to produce a wide range of forms of discrimination -- against pastoralists, single mothers, youth, or the mentally ill, as random examples, all operating according to similar principles. This means that there are large numbers of people in the world who suffer several different - mutually reinforcing -- forms of discrimination. In fact, hardly any group in the world is completely free from being targeted by one 'ideology of superiority' or another.

In the social exclusion framework, systems of exclusion are said to be composed of five elements:

- discriminatory attitudes and values
- historical and cultural circumstances which empower dominant groups
- when combined together, the above elements (values and sources of power) create the conditions which permit discriminatory actions against subordinate groups
- the targets of discrimination respond in various ways -- they may either resist, accept, deny or even actively participate in their own discrimination, and in the process they often help to perpetuate the system.
- over time, these actions build up into a systematic pattern of denial of rights and opportunities (an 'ideology of superiority')

'Values' are hard to pinpoint. However, they can often be seen reflected in people's everyday behaviour, or by things they say which reflect the assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices they hold. To use examples from the present research, young people are often said to be irresponsible or unreliable; unmarried girls who become pregnant are considered to bring shame on their families, no matter what the circumstances of their pregnancy might have been; ex-combatants may be feared by their family and neighbours in case they become violent and kill again.

Everyone makes value judgements about people from groups other than their own. We should not consider such value judgements as being negative in themselves: they may perform constructive social functions by contributing to our sense of identity. However, they can easily turn into prejudices, and prejudices become dangerous when they are translated into action that discriminates against others, depriving them of their rights, opportunities, or self-respect. For example, believing young people to be irresponsible is one thing (a prejudice), but turning them down for a job on those grounds is a discriminatory action which denies the applicant an income, a position in society, and the self-esteem attached to being employed.

People who discriminate are able to do so because they have the 'power to act'. People acquire the 'power to act' by virtue of having wealth, decision-making authority, physical strength, established consensus (for example, if there is common

acceptance that parents have the right to chastise their children), or, in extreme cases, superior physical force or weaponry. In our case studies, young people are discriminated against by adults who have statutory authority (such as the police), economic power (e.g. employers, husbands), or the power that attaches to age (for example parents or other guardians).

The 'power to act' includes the power to avoid action, i.e. to inflict injustice by turning a blind eye, and by failing to challenge the oppressive behaviour of others. Inaction may indeed be as devastatingly discriminatory as overt actions. For example, the research suggests that the international community is guilty of inaction when it fails to defend the rights of formerly abducted girls in Burundi to qualify for demobilisation privileges. Discrimination becomes an 'ideology of superiority' when it is embedded in society in such a way that people can imagine no alternative to it, or see it as natural and unchangeable, or even perhaps divinely ordained, so that even those who are objects of discrimination may accept it as right or unavoidable.

Applying the social exclusion framework is useful for social researchers because it helps to identify the ways in which rights are denied to those who are the objects of discrimination. Moreover, it also helps to identify which duty bearers or institutions hold responsibility for applying and defending these rights. It can therefore lead not only to increased understanding, but also to a range of practical outcomes.

Oral testimony research

Oral testimony (OT) was adopted as the main research method in this project for two main reasons. In the first place, it was considered a fitting strategy for a project (the 'Restoring Peace Project') which aims to strengthen the capacities of young people to participate actively in national life, by involving them in all aspects of project design and implementation. The research project aimed for the active participation of young people, both as interviewees and as researchers. OT as a method is designed to give voice to respondents, and this was particularly important for the participants in the 'Restoring Peace Project', many of whom felt that their voice had been ignored and suppressed. Secondly, there can be no better source of information about the problems facing young people in conflict situations than young people themselves. Testimonial research, when carried out well, offers full and vivid descriptions of people's lived realities. This contributes to the legitimacy of research findings, as well as enhancing the potential for developing advocacy on issues of importance to the respondents.

Oral testimonies are essentially conversations. The Panos Institute defines oral testimony as '... the result of free-ranging, open ended interviews around a

series of issues, drawing on direct personal memory and experience' (2001:1). Such interviews may broadly address a particular discussion topic (such as the respondent's experiences of climate change, their opinions about current events, or their expectations for the future). However, beyond this they are open-ended and unstructured, and might touch on an unpredictable range of issues, just like an everyday conversation.

Although oral testimony is in essence a simple tool, mirroring the sorts of conversations people might have in ordinary circumstances, the communications skills they require need deliberate thought and a lot of practice, if they are to be put to use as effective research skills. This is especially the case where fieldworkers are accustomed to doing other, more quantitative types of research. A particular difficulty is the open-ended nature of the OT interview; the task of the researcher in this type of interview is not to quiz people for information, but to undertake a joint exploration, with the respondent, of a particular topic.

OT allows those whose voices are not normally heard to express their experiences, sentiments, opinions and perceptions. The reality they describe is their reality, and not the reality as assessed by development agencies, governments or policy-makers. It is expressed in ways that are 'real' and 'true' to the respondents, although they may appear to others to be inconsistent and sometimes factually inaccurate. It has particular strength when a method is needed that:

- gives narrators the courage to address sensitive political and social topics that are hard to address through other methods
- offers confidentiality and security in a protected space where respondents can talk about sensitive or emotive matters, or matters that could have legal or other consequences which respondents wish to avoid
- provides a voice to those who are too often ignored or spoken for
- empowers, rather than extracts information from those who are normally excluded
- permits wide-ranging scoping of an issue that not much is known about already

Oral testimony has drawbacks as a research method, and is not appropriate for every research project. In particular, it is not likely to be useful when the purpose of the research is to establish exhaustively verifiable facts. One of the main difficulties of interpreting oral testimony material is that it raises questions about the purpose of research and about the nature of truth. If the purpose of a research exercise is to uncover, for the benefit of the researchers, the facts of a particular situation, OT may not be the best method, and the researchers may be better advised to use more conventional methods such as social surveying. What OT can do, however, is to bring to light the perceptions of people who are most directly affected by a

particular issue, and this is what makes it valuable in a case such as this. Even if the respondents' views seem to the researchers to be biased, confused, or factually inaccurate, they nevertheless reflect the truth as understood by the respondents. Researchers who have been trained to see their work as having objectivity may find it difficult to accept an oral testimony approach, in which the subjectivity of the material is one of its most valued features.

How the 'Voices of Youth' research project was conducted

The research was carried out in three stages: planning, fieldwork, analysis, and writing up.

Planning: To ensure that a common approach was maintained by the three country projects, a series of workshops was held which brought the three teams together to plan and analyse the work and to facilitate networking between them. The workshops were hosted by each of the teams, and the co-ordinating team in Nairobi, in rotation, enabling them to experience each others' working environments. The first workshop was held in Bujumbura in March 2006 and provided training in SEA. The second, held in Gulu in June 2006, focused on oral testimony. Researchers had the opportunity to carry out practice interviews with displaced child mothers within Gulu municipality, clarify their research questions, and make plans for the conduct of the fieldwork.

Fieldwork: interviews were carried out between July and October 2006. The main method used was oral testimony (open-ended) interviews with selected categories of young people. In each OT interview, two or three 'guiding questions' were identified to form the framework for the interviews; these were tailored to focus on gender-based violence and the promotion of youth citizenship that had been identified for the research in the three projects. For example, in Gulu there were two main guiding questions for the child mothers, namely: 'Tell us about your life during this period of war, and the problems you encountered' and 'How would you describe your relationship with your family, peers, in-laws, husband, etc?' Apart from these guiding questions, the interviewers had no ready-prepared questions, and the rest of the interview proceeded much as an ordinary conversation does. In the course of the conversation much information came to the fore - about, for example, the sort of violence the interviewees had undergone and its consequences - before the interviewers eventually turned the talk around to the respondents' hopes for their future.

As well as interviewing young people, the country projects also selected other categories of 'key informants' for semi-structured interviews or for focus group discussions. These categories included representatives of local authorities, parents,

teachers, employers, police, magistrates, project staff, and community elders.

All interviews were recorded on audio tape, and later transcribed. Most interviewers took the precaution of making written notes as well. Transcriptions of interviews were annotated with the interviewers' comments about the conduct of the interviews, noting down, for example, what was the emotional state of the respondent, hesitations, interruptions, and so on. These notes proved helpful in the later interpretation of the material. They also proved useful in the occasional cases where the tape recorders failed to function. Once transcribed, interviews were translated from Luo into English (in the case of Uganda), and Kirundi into French (in the case of Burundi)⁵. Finally, the research teams went through each interview a second time, checking both the transcription and the translation.

An explanation of the approach to transliteration and translation is appropriate at this point. Any recording – audio or in writing – of the interview is bound to alter it in some way, taking it out of the precise context in which the respondent originally spoke. When the testimony is then translated, it is even further removed from the original words. In the ACORD OT methodology, when reproducing the testimony for publication it is important to preserve as many as possible of the features of the original interview, as spoken by the respondents and as heard by the interviewers. Even the translation itself is, in a way, a feature of the interview. For this reason, in the testimonies reproduced here we have not attempted to alter the wording as submitted by the researchers, even though on occasion the translation may sound discordant to Anglophone ears. The testimonies are, as far as possible, the stories told directly by the girls themselves.

Analysis: information drawn from these interviews was analysed at two levels. In the first instance, the interviewers discussed their initial impressions together in the project locations, and, on the basis of this, each team came up with a provisional list of emerging themes. The teams' first, subjective, reactions to the material were considered to be an important part of the analytical process, since it enabled them to identify issues that were particularly striking, surprising, or shocking.

The second stage took place at the project's third workshop, held in Nairobi in August 2006, after the fieldwork had been completed. This stage was devoted to the detailed analysis of the research findings. In the Nairobi workshop, the three teams (Uganda, Burundi and Angola) worked sometimes separately and sometimes together to carry out a more in-depth analysis, which was made up of the following stages:

1. Detailed analysis: each interview was reviewed in detail, dissecting the text, separating out relevant phrases or paragraphs, and classifying them under the

⁵Excerpts from the French versions of the testimonies, and three full testimonies, were translated into English for the purposes of this volume.

different themes identified

2. Synthesis: the teams then brought together the phrases and paragraphs relating to each theme, and synthesised these, leading to a fuller and more exhaustive analysis than had been possible in the first stage
3. Elaboration of analytical frameworks: out of the general synthesis, the research team elaborated tools for summarising the information arising out of the study. These were later synthesised into the summaries presented in chapter one of part two of this volume.
4. Comparison with other material from elsewhere: the information collected was compared with secondary sources such as government statistical information, and with similar material obtained from previous research and from other organisations.

A fourth workshop (to finalise details of the three case studies) was planned for Luanda in November 2006, but had to be abandoned because of practical difficulties. These difficulties contributed to the Angola team being unable to complete their documentation for this volume. The case studies report from Angola will be presented in a multi-stakeholder consultative seminar in June 2007 in Luanda and the final report will be presented in a separate volume. The oral testimony research in Angola focused on the constraints to young people's civic and political participation. The research investigated young people's right to employment, participation in decision making, association and freedom of speech. Young people were interviewed and they described how they are discriminated against by adults.

Writing up: report-writing was carried out in the first instance by the team leaders for Burundi and Uganda. Their reports were progressively refined through exchanges with each other and with the inter-country programme, and were eventually edited into the present volume.

Some methodological lessons

The 'Voices of Youth' research project incorporated several features which differentiated it from ACORD's previous research using the SEA framework and oral testimony methods in conflict situations.

In the first place, the SEA framework was applied in a more deliberate and consistent way than in previous projects, and this has contributed to a sharpening of the conclusions to be drawn from the research. As in previous studies, SEA served as a planning tool, guiding preparatory analysis and helping to identify key research questions and respondent categories. In addition, it was also applied at the analysis stage to shape the interpretation of the data it generated. When researchers met

at the analysis workshop in Nairobi, they returned to the SEA framework as a basis on which to refine their initial analysis and consider how respondents were being discriminated against, including what forms the discrimination took, who was discriminating, what gave them the power to act, and what the consequences were for the discriminated as well as for their communities. This analysis is summarised in chapter one of part two. SEA has served as a tool not only to focus on, but also to analyse the nature of discrimination against young people.

Secondly, in relation to the use of oral testimony as a research method, the quality of OT interviews improved as a result of increased attention being paid to interview skills training. In the Gulu OT workshop, researchers identified the components of a good OT interview and practised, first on each other and later on participants in World Vision's Mother-Daughter Project. They identified positive ways of communicating with respondents at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of an interview. The experience of being interviewed, as well as of interviewing, was salutary, and enabled team members to put themselves into the shoes of respondents. Having understood what OT interviews involve practically, researchers were then better able to draw up plans for the field study, deciding what topics to explore in the interviews, how to select respondents, and how many interviews to plan for. The importance of investing time in practice was demonstrated by the consistently high quality of the interviews which resulted, some of which are reproduced here in full.

A third way in which this project developed the methodology further was the time and attention given to the analysis of the interview material. As described above, analysis was carried out twice over, first in country, eliciting general impressions and broad themes, and secondly in great detail at the Nairobi workshop. Here the research teams dissected the texts of the testimonies word by word, grouping extracts together in thematic clusters in order to develop an exhaustive list of issues. They then presented their findings to each other, using a variety of frameworks in which to order the material, some of which are presented in annex two in this volume. This work later formed the basis for the case studies.

Fourthly, an issue which both this project and previous projects attempted to address was the 'chicken and egg' question common to all qualitative research projects – should the researchers start with a conceptual framework and fit the data they have collected into it? Or should they sift through the data and see what themes emerge, running the risk that the resulting analysis will bear little relation to the framework? In this project, both happened, in an organic fashion. The Nairobi analysis allowed the themes to cohere naturally, without attempting to force them into a framework. However, as the analysis progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the material fitted adroitly into the social exclusion framework. As

the levels of abstraction increased, so the links with SEA became increasingly clear.

Finally, perhaps the biggest change that was introduced in this project was the fact that the testimonies were intended from the beginning to be used for advocacy purposes as well as to develop new knowledge – indeed these two aspects of the work have been seen as complementary and indissoluble. A previous research report raised the question of whether it would ever be possible for research to be genuinely appropriated by those who supplied their knowledge to the researchers:

'...for all the strength that oral testimony and other 'participatory' methods have demonstrated, this project has been in essence an extractive process....How could the process have been appropriated by the communities and individuals which generated the information? In focusing analysis on our research questions, and in preparing reports which discarded extraneous material and quoted selectively, have we distorted the voices of the respondents? The methodology of OT as a developmental tool is still in need of elaboration.' (El-Bushra and Sahl 2005:142)

The dilemma has not been resolved. In this research, the interview process was initiated and managed by the project, the interview material was treated and dissected by the researchers, and it was then incorporated into a book destined for an audience in the communities, and policy makers at national and international levels. Some progress has been made in 'giving voice to the voiceless', in several ways. Firstly, in all three countries, the research teams were made up of both young people and adults, and the young people included representatives of the youth citizenship activists and the violated girls who were the subject of the research. This innovation was viewed as a success from the point of view of research effectiveness: all the team leaders remarked that the young researchers who had taken part had facilitated the process, both by enhancing the confidence of the interviewees, and by rendering the analysis more reliable. However, in addition to that, it also made some contribution to the transfer of research skills to young people.

Secondly, the complete texts of five selected testimonies (albeit with minor edits for clarity's sake) are presented as a major component of this book. In this way we hope that readers will gain a sense of being in the presence of a 'real live' person rather than a set of dismembered quotations. Thirdly, the descriptions of their lives given to us by the young people who contributed to the project have directly informed the arguments for change presented in chapter one. They have demonstrated to the 'Restoring Peace Project' partners that both the local and the international communities bear a responsibility to do more to assist young people affected by conflict and that the largest part of the solutions that are being found to their problems are emerging from young people's own initiative, resilience and creativity. Conveying this message – their message – is the main purpose of this book.

Chapter three: Case Study One: Girls Affected By Violence And Conflict In Burundi

1 Introduction⁶

1.1 Country profile

Burundi is a small, landlocked, mountainous country bordering the north-east corner of Lake Tanganyika. As a Belgian colony, it was administered together with its northern neighbour, Rwanda, as one country - Rwanda-Urundi - from 1923 until 1962, when the two countries were established as separated entities and granted independence.

Burundi's economy is dominated by agriculture, on which 94% of the population depends. The principal export crop is coffee, though other sources of foreign currency include tea, sugar and hides. The international coffee market is notoriously fickle, and Burundi's export earnings are vulnerable to market fluctuations. Burundi suffers from serious population pressure (a population density of 271 per square mile, the second highest in Africa) leading to environmental degradation (soil erosion as a result of overgrazing, the expansion of agriculture into marginal lands, and deforestation) which in turn limits agricultural production. Despite this, for most rural communities, subsistence agriculture is the main source of both food and income; given Burundi's underdeveloped manufacturing base, rural people without access to land have few choices, other than agricultural wage labour or petty commerce. In addition, an international trade embargo was imposed on Burundi from 1996 to 1999, reducing the country's access to markets and international financial services, and trade is only now beginning to recover. With a GDP per person of US\$700, and 68% living below the poverty line (an estimated 71.5% in rural areas and 36.5% in urban areas) Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, with the rural majority suffering the deepest poverty. In 2005 it ranked 169th out of 177 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index.

Burundi's 7 million population is poorly served by education and health services. Only 52% of the population over 15 is literate (45 % of women, and 58 % of men). Infant mortality rates are 63 per 1,000 live births. An estimated 250,000 people are currently living with HIV and AIDS; the rate of HIV infection is 6% in the general population, and approximately 16% among pregnant women in the capital, Bujumbura. There is a wide difference between urban and rural seropositivity rates, although rural rates are increasing while urban rates appear to be stabilising.

1.2 Background to the war and the peace process

⁶Information for this section is drawn from a variety of references, listed as annex 1

The crisis of 1993-2003

In 1993, Melchior Ndadaye took over as President of Burundi following the country's first democratic elections. Within months of Ndadaye being sworn in, however, he was assassinated. The years which followed saw several waves of violence, including a series of revenge-inspired massacres of one ethnic community by the other, as well as a regular war waged between the government and rebel movements such as the National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD), which demanded the restoration of constitutional law and the reform of the security forces.

Poverty, a colonial legacy of division, and the interests of other states in the region and beyond, all played a part as factors contributing to the war. These often found their expression in ethnic differences. Since Independence in 1962, Burundi experienced cycles of political/ethnic violence, especially in 1965, 1972, 1988 and 1993. The round which started in 1993 proved to be the most destructive in human lives, and lasted 12 years. These wars were characterised by massacres between the two main ethnic groups (Hutus and Tutsis), while Burundi's third ethnic group, the Batwaa, have been so deeply marginalised that they have rarely played an active part in political life. However, ethnic differences have usually been at least partially offset by other forms of difference, for example between regions of the country, between descendants of aristocratic and commoner clans, and between rural and urban populations.

The peace process

In 1998, external mediators (initially Tanzanian and later South African government representatives) initiated a lengthy process of peace negotiations. A power-sharing government was set up in 2001, following the signing, in Arusha, Tanzania, in August 2000, of a peace agreement between the main parties involved in the war. In October 2003, a further agreement was signed in Pretoria, South Africa, between the government and the CNDD-FDD (the main branch of the original CNDD). The Arusha Accords, as these agreements came to be known, between them set out both a comprehensive cease-fire and a detailed plan for reconstituting democracy in Burundi.

After a formal transition period overseen by United Nations peace-keeping forces, elections in 2005 saw an unequivocal electoral victory by CNDD-FDD (which had become a political party early in 2005), and the installation as President of one of CNDD-FDD's leading figures, Pierre Nkurunziza. In September 2006, the second main rebel group, the National Liberation Front (FNL) in turn signed an agreement with the CNDD-FDD government and joined in the reintegration process. The newly elected government, supported by the United Nations and the international community, is now engaged in a programme to demobilise militias, reform the army and police, reintegrate ex-combatants, return refugees and displaced persons,

and rebuild the country's economy, judicial institutions and social services.

Current challenges

Burundi faces considerable challenges in this post-war reconstruction and peace-building phase. An estimated 250,000 people were killed during the war, and hundreds of thousands of Burundians sought refuge in neighbouring countries (mainly Tanzania), and although many have now returned, there are an estimated 250,000 still being accommodated in camps in Tanzania, with others spontaneously settled, making a total Burundian population in Tanzania of around 380,000. An estimated 400,000 people have been displaced within Burundi itself, and altogether around a quarter of the whole population was obliged to move home, either inside or outside of the country.

The return and reinstallation of refugees and internally displaced people has in turn generated further problems. Not only do the returnees require assistance before they can re-establish their own means of subsistence, but also many have come back to find their property has been occupied by others. This has given rise to localised tensions and fresh conflicts. Government, multilateral agencies and local civil society organisations alike are struggling with the challenge of ensuring the displaced regain their property where appropriate, and are promoting reconciliation and the renewal of trust between neighbours.

Procedures for the demobilisation and reintegration of combatants were agreed in the Arusha Accords. With the assistance of the World Bank, a National Commission for Demobilisation and Reintegration (CNDRR) was put in place in 2004 to effect the demobilisation of a planned 55,000 combatants; the total demobilised up to the end of 2006 was 18,754, of whom 494 were women.

The Arusha Accords attempted to recalibrate ethnic and regional balances through agreed quotas of representation in the government and in parliament, as well as by restructuring the army, a move intended to enhance its ethnic balance and ensure the integration into the army of members of the previous rebel movements. Government is putting in place measures to overcome the factors which militated against the aspirations of the majority population. In this context it has declared free primary education for all children, free health care for all children under five years of age, and free hospital care for delivering mothers.

Throughout the Arusha peace process, women played significant roles in negotiations, and women's rights and representation have been incorporated into the new constitution. Thirty per cent of parliamentary seats are reserved for women (they currently account for 30.5 in the lower house and 34.7% in the upper house), and new laws are in the process of being drafted to ensure equal rights for men and

women in property, land and inheritance and in protection from sexual and gender-based violence. However, it will require time and a concerted effort of lobbying to ensure that these provisions are implemented in practice. Women's organisations - ranging from economic organisations such as co-operatives and micro-finance groups, to organisations engaged in local reconciliation work, to organisations of women parliamentarians - are engaged in all aspects of reconstruction. However, a major challenge they face is the concentration of resources and organisations in the capital, and the practical (logistical and financial) difficulties of developing organisations which link urban and rural populations.

1.3 Challenges facing young people

In a country where 46% of the population is under the age of 14, poverty weighs heavily on the young. Health indicators for young people are poor; for example, in 2001 it was estimated that 18% of children die before their fifth birthday. Eighty per cent of births are estimated to take place at home. Vaccination campaigns were abandoned for several years during the war. A combination of displacement, drought, low agricultural production, insecurity and the breakdown of services renders children and youth vulnerable to preventable diseases including malaria, upper respiratory tract infections, and dysentery. Both health and education indicators are likely to improve after the 2006 decision by government to offer free primary education and basic health care for children, but it will take time for these improvements to take effect against the background of a previously depressed context. In 2002, for example, it was estimated that only 50% of primary-school aged boys, and 43% of girls, were registered in schools; many children failed to register because their parents were too poor to provide them with school fees, decent clothes, and materials, or did not see the need to send them to school.

In 2002 it was estimated that more than 600,000 children had been orphaned, many as a result of the war, but an estimated 230,000 following the death from AIDS of one or other parent. War has raised levels of violence experienced by children, as many have been forced to witness violent attacks and rapes carried out on their families and sometimes on themselves. Perpetrators have included both armed groups and neighbours: many believe, for example, that the incidence of incest is on the increase, though this is impossible to verify. What is certain is that many men believe that having sex with virgin girls can protect against diseases, including HIV, and this is believed to be responsible for the high levels of rape experienced by girls, including children and even occasionally babies (see section 1.4 below).

An estimated 14-16,000 young people were conscripted, some allegedly as young as 10 years old, into both government and rebel armies. Child combatants have been killed, executed, imprisoned and tortured. Child combatants include those

who were abducted as well as those who joined voluntarily (sometimes with the encouragement of their parents and teachers) and those who were enticed into enlisting with promises of substantial salaries. It is believed that UNICEF made provision for a total of 4,000 child combatants to be demobilised; by June 2005, 2,985 children were said to have been through the process. Numbers of children passing through the formal demobilisation system have been in part determined by agreements between UN supervisory agencies and the various armed movements, and limited by the numbers declared by the latter.

Youth have paid an extremely high price for the war, especially since large numbers were recruited into the armed groups. And it was youth who were most driven into delinquency, either as a result of being orphaned or by being displaced or otherwise forced to discontinue their studies. However, girls experienced the consequences of war in a different way to boys⁷. While men were killed and young boys enrolled in armed groups, girls were also enrolled, but the girls and women were victims of sexual abuse and other forms of personal violence, and girls were targeted in larger numbers than adult women⁸. Yet women and girls who suffered this fate were met by general incomprehension and were stigmatised and denied the right to speak of their sufferings, while the perpetrators continued, with impunity.

1.4 Background to the research

As part of the project 'Support to the economic and social reintegration of war-affected young girls who have suffered violence', ACORD works with a group of 400 girls in Bujumbura municipality and in Kayanza province. The project started in April 2005 and works with girls affected by the war in the following categories: abducted girls, girl ex-soldiers, ex-wives of combatants, girls who have been rejected from early marriages, and child mothers who were abused during the war. The project comprises four components:

- The psycho-social component provides counselling for traumatised girls and helps them recover self-esteem and hope for the future. At the same time it works with the community, and particularly parents, with a view to ensuring the girls' social reintegration as well as combating stigmatisation
- The economic component trains the girls in various occupations and supports them in setting up micro-projects. It supports them in the management of the projects to enable them to become economically independent
- The legal component trains the girls in their rights and procedures for taking cases to court, provides legal assistance to rape survivors, and advocates for legal measures against rape
- The advocacy component organises demonstrations and uses media to raise awareness about the issue of sexual abuse of girls as well as the human rights

⁷ In focus group discussions in Kayanza Province, communities identified more than 600 girls in each commune who had been affected by violence in war in one way or another – had been raped, abducted, orphaned, had become child mothers, etc.

⁸ Sexual violence against boys is also a reality, though in much smaller numbers than for girls: it is known, for example, that street boys are vulnerable to rape. However, as with other forms of homosexuality, the subject is still extremely sensitive and almost no reliable information is available.

of the youth

The number of girls ACORD has been able to assist is small in comparison with the large number of victims needing assistance. In addition to the generalised violence which was common during the war, and experienced by the whole population, for many girls and women there was the additional perpetration of sexual violence, which in the case of girls took a number of different forms. Furthermore, girls suffered from stigmatisation and discrimination with almost universal indifference from those around them, as a result of the prevailing view that they themselves bore responsibility for the indignities they had been forced to suffer.

In the light of the many provisions in international law protecting women, children and girls and promoting their participation in peace-building (see chapter 1) ACORD decided to gather evidence of the privations undergone by girls during and after conflict, and to lobby for special measures to be put in place in all conflict-affected countries for their protection and for the rehabilitation of those who had survived violence. While protection is of course necessary for all people in situations of conflict, evidence suggests that because of the prejudices and sexual beliefs surrounding young girls, they are more of a target than adult women⁹. This can be attributed to beliefs that having sexual relations with children offers a cure for AIDS and enables men to regain their youth. Many believe that men experience more pleasure with younger than older women and that sex with young girls, since they are unlikely to have become HIV positive, is less risky. And, young girls are more vulnerable in many ways.

It is in this context that the present study on violence against girls was carried out. Its aim was to raise awareness about the violence perpetrated against girls in periods of war. The results of the study underscored the need to promote protection measures for girls (as distinct from adult women), as well as the need to develop support strategies and projects for girls who have suffered sexual violence which take into account the specific conditions in which they now find themselves.

Seventeen girls were interviewed for the study. Three of these were ex-combatants whom the research team had made contact with through a UNICEF ex-child soldiers project. Fourteen were participants in the ACORD programme described above, and fell into several (overlapping) categories: girls living in displaced camps, girls who had been kidnapped during the war, those who had returned home from exile in a neighbouring country, and those who had been raped. The three ex-child soldiers claimed not to have been raped, because it was forbidden for cadres in the militias to have sexual relations with the child soldiers. Only one of these had children, and she had become pregnant after the war. Apart from these three, all the other 14 had children. One had married at the age of 17 and had later been abandoned by

⁹For example, 60% of rape victims seen at MSF Holland's sexual violence clinic in Bujumbura are under 18 years of age.

her husband, three others had had children as a result of voluntary relationships (though while still minors) and 10 declared that they had been raped. Respondents were drawn from the four provinces which have been most affected by conflict in Burundi, namely: Bubanza, Ruyigi, Kayanza and Bujumbura Municipality.

2 Research findings

2.1 What forms of violence were suffered by the respondents?

War provides a cover for all sorts of atrocities. People were plunged into despair and fatalism, which diminished their capacity for resistance and for organising, and pushed to one side all the usual social values and norms. There were several forms of violence that were visited on the population at large during the war, and girls suffered from these along with everyone else. For example, people lost family members, many children were orphaned, there were growing numbers of child-headed households, people were attacked by armed militia groups, displaced either within the country or to other countries, family property was destroyed, and so on.

However, in addition to these, there were several other forms of violence which were peculiarly the fate of girls. Some of these had existed in Burundi since before the war, but had increased in volume during the crisis. The particular forms of violence for which girls were singled out can be grouped into four categories:

2.1.1 Forced enrolment into armed groups

Although the majority of combatants in the armed movements were men, girls and women were also quite numerous. Boys and girls were literally enrolled by force, as well as by playing on their naivety and their weak capacity for judgement. Forced recruitment took place mainly at night, using lies and manipulation, rebels selected certain persons (mainly youth) to abduct and take away with them. Another context during which abductions took place was when rebels ambushed buses and cars on the roads. Sometimes rebels who were responsible for recruitment came and terrorised families into sending their children to join the rebellion. There were even abductions from schools or on the way to school. As far as manipulation and lies were concerned, children were told that life in the rebellion was good, that they would live better there than with their own families, and that they would be paid a salary like the soldiers in the government army.

The violence suffered by these children, once they had been enrolled, was without limit, and they had many physical and psychological scars to show for it, as respondents testified. Amongst other privations, we can cite: excessively harsh training for their age, enforced by flogging; forced labour; torture; running for long distances; death threats; unjust sanctions for the smallest fault; stationing at

the front; being forced to fight and kill; being used as a 'human shield'¹⁰.

2.1.2 Abduction by combatants

Girls and women living in the areas which armed groups passed through were sometimes victims of abduction during the night. Once abducted, they would be forced to help the militias transport their booty as well as their arms. Some abductees were later freed again, while others accompanied the combatants to wherever they were holed up, and were obliged to stay there, in some cases for good and in others for some weeks or months. These girls and women were given several roles to play but they were also often victims of sexual violence. Once back home, they lived in shame: most do not admit to having been abducted because they fear being stigmatised, so they carry around with them the secret knowledge of all the privations they have suffered.

2.1.3 Sexual violence

The most widespread form of violence against girls and women, which was amplified during the crisis, is sexual violence. In fact this was a constant, because it was more or less integral to each of the other forms of violence, which often led to sexual abuse. Whether it was in the course of attacks, in displaced camps, or in cases of abduction, sexual abuse was a common occurrence. But also, the overcrowding and lack of privacy in the camps, the fact of being orphaned, extreme poverty – these were factors that exposed girls to abuse of all kinds, because certain men knew how to benefit from this situation of vulnerability and lead them into sexually abusive relationships. Some girls were raped by strangers whom they had met by chance, while others were abused by friends or relatives. Others were simply obliged to turn to prostitution, or to be kept by more prosperous men, in order to survive. During the war, both government soldiers and combatants of the other armed movements circulated throughout all the provinces of Burundi, and this means that an indelible mark of violence - and sexual violence against women and girls in particular - has been left throughout the country.

2.1.4 Stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination is a form of violence which eats away at the life of victims of violence all through their lives. All manner of degrading names and stereotypes are used to describe these girls and their children. If girls who were victims of violence are now living in extreme difficulties, this is mainly a result of the attitudes shown towards them by their parents, brothers and sisters, the administration – in sum, the whole community. These attitudes are part and parcel of Burundian culture, history and society – they represent the way Burundian society sees and acts towards victims of violence.

A girl who has been raped, who joined armed movements by choice or by force,

¹⁰The connotation of 'human shield' in this case is that the children were put in the front line, and were told that as they were short in stature, bullets would not touch them and would pass over their heads. But in reality they were put in front to protect the adult soldiers, who would then not be the first to be hit if they were attacked. There are no figures for deaths of child soldiers, but bodies were on occasion displayed on national television.

who is a child mother or has been divorced, is subject to stereotyping and prejudice. Basically such girls are described as prostitutes, women who propagate HIV/AIDS, thieves, bringers of bad luck. A girl ex-soldier is mistrusted because she is believed to be dangerous, over-aggressive, a killer, capable of committing any sort of crime. Neighbours of girls who have been raped believe they should be banished from society: it is hard for them to find a marriage partner, owing to the influence of the community on their potential suitors. Girls who have suffered violence in war have no legitimate place amongst their peers, with their families, in their communities, and in the eyes of the administration. Their lives are fragile, and in consequence they are both socially and economically vulnerable. It is the girls who are condemned by society, while the perpetrators are left to get on with their lives unaffected.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'I was often taken into the forest by the rebels, carrying their booty. Often, they kept me during the night and took me back early in the morning, at dawn. They raped me. They did that three times.'

'The others discriminate against me and say that I am bad because I was in the rebellion, and that I shouldn't speak to them. Me, I never speak to them because I can see by the way they look at me that they don't like me. The neighbours stop their children from speaking to me and from playing with me. But, since I'm not the only one to have been there (we were six girl soldiers from our hill ¹¹) some people are understanding.'

'Lots of girls suffered violence during the war. Apart from rebels, people from the neighbourhood did harm to girls and women. Most often, it was sexual violence and stripping them of possessions. If a girl or a woman tried to denounce the man who raped her, the latter could kill her because it was a war situation.'

2.2 What did girls do in the armed movements?

During the war, some girls were abducted by force, others enrolled voluntarily, and there were also cases of girls who were tricked into enrolling, having been told that they would go to the front and fight for their country, or that they would earn a salary. These latter believed that they would become members of the fighting forces. Girl fighters were trained militarily and went to the front to fight, just like the boys. The girl ex-soldiers we interviewed also told us that it was strictly forbidden for male soldiers to have sexual relations with girl combatants, while girls who had been abducted did suffer this abuse. However, some doubt has been cast on this assertion by other informants, who told us that sexual abuse of girl

¹¹ The 'hill' is the basic unit of Burundian local administration, equivalent to a village.

soldiers did indeed take place in some cases. Generally speaking, the girls were reluctant to talk about their experience in the armed movements.

Often, children were encouraged to join up voluntarily by family members or friends, who talked to them about the rebellion and inspired them with the ideology. In such a case, when the child was eventually drawn to join the rebels, the person would take them to where the rebels were, since the child would not otherwise know how to find them. In other cases, children enlisted out of despair, having perhaps witnessed the killing of family members and wanting to take revenge, perhaps having had to flee fighting with their family so often that the child gave up on the life they were trying to lead.

The roles of girl fighters in the armed movements were similar to those of boys. All the young fighters were collectively called 'kadogo'¹². But others were not fighters as such; instead of going to the front they stayed in the camps of the armed movements as 'wives'¹³ of combatants. In some cases this continued throughout the war, while in others it went on for a limited period while they were being held as hostages. Those who did not receive military training were assigned different tasks to the fighters. Usually, they helped in carrying munitions and food, and in preparing food. The very young ones played the role of spies and informers; the public believed them to be above suspicion, being children, and girl children at that. No-one could imagine that they might be connected in this way with the rebellion. Young girls who enrolled also played the role of human shield. Girls too had a role in provisioning (they stole harvests from neighbouring hills) and also took care of transporting the dead and wounded during attacks.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'We set out, and in the beginning I helped the combatants transport their luggage with the other girls. After that they forbade us to go back home and our role was to watch out for the soldiers at the place they gathered at. They told us that as we were girls we wouldn't be suspected.'

'In relation to work which was too hard for us, it's true that we did this: carrying munitions, rockets, food provisions, the dead and wounded, stealing food, transporting and cooking it. They said that we kadogo should stand in front during the battles, as the bullets couldn't touch us, that they would hit those behind instead.'

2.3 How were girls treated during the demobilisation process?

The procedure for demobilisation was that ex-combatants passed through assembly

¹² A Swahili word for child soldiers

¹³ Though a fiction of propriety might have been maintained, the girls were generally forced into this situation

zones, and were then either demobilised or integrated into the regular army. During the demobilisation process, girls and boys who had reached majority stayed in the assembly camps while waiting to be demobilised, while minors were registered to be demobilised in the UNICEF child soldiers' reintegration programme. Very few girls were reintegrated under this project, since out of more than 3000 child soldiers who were reintegrated in the whole of the country, only 48 were girls. This is a surprisingly low figure, given studies from elsewhere suggesting that globally, an average of 40% of child soldiers are girls (Save the Children 2005). In the adult categories, figures from CNDDR (the National Commission for Demobilisation, Reinsertion and Reintegration) show that up till September, 2006 only 494 women had been demobilised, compared to 17,192 men. The question which might be asked is whether this is a result of there being very few women and girls in the armed movements, or whether women and girls have been overlooked by the demobilisation system. Further research is needed to establish what proportion of the armed movements were girls and women.

As has been indicated in the preceding chapter, the main international instrument governing the demobilisation of child soldiers is the Cape Town Principles, drawn up in 1997, which defines 'combatant' as a person who has been part of an armed movement in any capacity. Girls who are abducted into militias and who serve as camp followers are explicitly included in this definition. In the Burundian case therefore, such girls should, in principle, have been eligible for the benefits of demobilisation. However, in practice the Cape Town definition has not been well understood or implemented in Burundi. Rebel commanders, who were tasked in the peace agreements with identifying minors for demobilisation, were generally not aware that camp followers were to be included. In addition, they often hid girls away, conscious of the shame that was attached to their behaviour towards the girls. This is borne out by the fact that, of the 48 girls who were formally demobilised, not one had a child, i.e. one can presume that for the most part they had been in the militias as fighters.

In addition, what sometimes happened was that, when the rebel forces placed military posts in the midst of populations (in displaced camps, for example), boys would be forced to assist the soldiers by carrying arms, cooking and so on, and were therefore in constant contact with the soldiers. This of course constituted abuse. The abuse faced by girls, on the other hand, was of a different nature, generally sexual, and one of the results of this was that girls were often not physically present when the time came for the rebel posts to pack up.

Our respondents confirmed that very few girls in the armed movements, even among girl fighters, went through the formal demobilisation system. Some had not been informed about the demobilisation process, and so went directly to their

homes after the end of the war. Once home, some received information and then went to sign up as child soldiers. But by that stage it was often difficult for them to persuade officials to take them seriously, unless a neighbour or some other credible person could plead their case. Those who had been abducted, or who had not had the status of fighters, were not offered any choice but to return home. Some had contracted common law marriages with other combatants, but these tended to separate after the war was over, the man going to the assembly centres and the woman or girl going home. Some of the girls managed to get back together with their spouses, but many never heard from them again.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

‘We got to the assembly camps. Me, I was in Karindo assembly zone, here in Ruyigi Province. I was asked my age, and I replied that I was 16. I was put on the list of under-18s. These had to go home, while those who had reached the age of majority stayed in the assembly zones so as to be eventually demobilised or integrated into the regular army. After that, we were taken to Ruyigi where a very warm welcome awaited us. And then we were each taken back to the hills that we came from.’

‘When it was known that negotiations had started, one of my friends told me that we had to go home. When we arrived at the house, the neighbours went and called the (army) soldiers, telling them that some child assailants had come, surely with the intention of continuing to inform on them. So the soldiers took us to their base. We told them we had fled from the rebellion. They kept us there to watch us, to make sure we wouldn’t return to the rebels and tell them what we had seen. They kept us there for a month and a half, then they let us go home. We went home, and after that the other children started to go home too.’

2.4 How did the families respond?

Girls who had been in the armed movements and who had gone home with no illegitimate children were treated with compassion and support by members of their families. The few problems they mentioned were linked to the fact that some had lost one or all of their family members in the mean time, and were not well treated by the families who took them in, who sometimes tried to get their hands on the girls’ demobilisation packages. Rose, for example (see selected testimonies in section 3 below), had to fend off her mother’s new husband, who tried to channel her allowance exclusively to his own family.

As sexual violence was a corollary to all other forms of violence suffered by the girls, many of the victims had given birth to, or were expecting, illegitimate children. In Burundian society, a girl is expected to be a virgin until her marriage, and becoming

pregnant is considered to dishonour the whole family. In fact, when such a thing happens, the girl is considered to be a bad omen for the family, which is stigmatised in turn by the wider society. When such a misfortune happens to a girl, the parents' instinct may be to react otherwise, but because of the cultural influence, the first reflex of the family is to chase the girl away if she is pregnant. From the interviews it was clear that most girls who were pregnant or who had had children without being formally married were chased away by their families, either permanently or for some months. Marie, for example, was chased away repeatedly by her brother and sister. Sometimes parents eventually agree to take their daughters back, either as a result of advice from friends or because they take pity on their child, who would otherwise be doomed to an unsettled life.

From the moment the girl is known to be pregnant, she suffers ceaseless mistreatment. For example, she is deprived of care and food, given harsh physical punishments and wild and incessant insults, refused access to resources such as land to plant food crops on, and deprived of money for basic needs, and she and her child are constantly discriminated against and stigmatised. Even though girls are treated badly by all members of the family without exception, the girls we interviewed considered the worst maltreatment to come from their brothers. This intolerant behaviour is linked to questions of inheritance. In fact, when a girl gives birth to a boy, the maltreatment of the girl and her child is worse, because this child has the right to inherit from his maternal grandfather and therefore encroaches on the possessions which would otherwise come down to his mother's brothers, given that in Burundi only male descendants have the right to inherit. Not only that, but also the girl mother's chances of marrying are slim, and her brothers resent the fact that she will for ever be a burden on the family. The discouragement the girl receives from her family only aggravates her problems, psychologically and from a social and economic point of view.

All the same, there are some exceptional cases, especially where there has been a rape, when families who are aware of what has happened to their daughters behave in an understanding way, and try instead to comfort and support them in order to minimise their unhappiness. But in general terms, the girl is held to be responsible for what has happened to her, whatever the circumstances. This coercive discrimination has traditionally been practised to repress girls and act as a deterrent.

Some illustrations from the testimonies:

'At home, they mistreated me, they refused me food and insulted me all the time.'

'My father, who himself had seen what had happened, never said anything to upset

me when my new pregnancy became visible. He consoled me, saying that I could not have done otherwise.'

'When this child was born, my brother came from Kayanza to chase me away from the family home. It was the local administrators who supported me to be taken back in by my family. The same brother came back to chase me away again, this time for good. My family, especially my brothers, rejected me because they see me as encroaching on the family land. And no-one around me cares one jot.'

2.5 How did the community respond?

The behaviour and reactions of the community vary according to whether the young girl in difficulty was in contact with armed movements as a combatant, was abducted, or was just a child mother. For all these categories of girls, stigma and discrimination by those around them are very pronounced, for different reasons. In the case of girls who were abducted by combatants or who have been demobilised, the community harbours suspicions that they have acquired bad behaviour in the armed movements. Several testimonies describe how people accuse them of being violent, killers, thieves, people who carry the HIV virus, and so on. Rose, for example, describes the long and intense efforts she made to persuade those around her that she intended them no harm.

Although the community in general discriminates against these girls, it reacts positively in certain situations. In the case of girls who participated in armed movements and who were officially demobilised, such as Rose, administrators often try to help them reintegrate. But for other child mothers, in addition to the bad treatment they get within their own families, those around them do nothing but condemn and exclude them. These attitudes are hard to shake because people believe this is the way that things have always been. And that is also why those who have the power to change the situation (for example parents, administrators, neighbours, lawyers) remain passive in the face of this discrimination and stigmatisation.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'People considered me to be something less than a woman, for they said a girl who produced a child while unmarried was to be banished from society; no-one could give her water to drink, and even if her child got ill no-one could even lend her 100 francs to buy some pills. They would say 'Go away, you slut!' No-one could help you in this case.'

'When we came back from the war, the local dignitaries took the initiative to explain to people that we were not dangerous because we had been through re-education. But in spite of these explanations, people were still sceptical.'

'Then, the others came to where I was in the room and they raped me. There were three of them. I kept quiet about it. You see in those days, when such things happened to a girl, she would keep it a secret right at the bottom of her heart, so that no-one would know what really happened. If you shared your sorrows with someone who you considered a friend, she would start laughing and making fun of you so that when you passed by everyone would point a finger at you, saying 'She was taken by the rebels' or 'She was raped by so-and-so'. That's why I said nothing to anyone. It stays inside me like a personal secret.'

2.6 Consequences for the respondents

For the girls who suffer it, the consequences of sexual violence are many. First of all, these girls are discriminated against by everyone, starting with their own families. Living in extreme poverty, they struggle to fulfil the most basic functions such as obtaining food and medical care for themselves and their children. Deprived of resources, they have little choice but to wander and beg in order to survive.

Many of those who are in school when they are raped leave school immediately and never return.

Child mothers are often abandoned by the child's father, since for the father, acknowledging the child may have a variety of undesired consequences. If the father is unmarried, he may be forced into marrying the girl, while for a married man the consequence may be trouble within his marriage. If the girl seeks a solution through the courts and he has already acknowledged the child, he will be obliged to pay maintenance, and if the case is one involving rape he is likely to face severe sanctions. For these reasons, a father may officially deny that the child is his, but later on seek to get the child back, sometimes by abducting the child and hiding it somewhere far from its family. The 'Support to girls affected by war' project is supporting a number of girls whose children have been taken from them in this way. As the interview with Spes (below) graphically illustrates, there may be enormous emotional consequences for the child's mother.

Young girls who have been raped are vulnerable to a variety of health problems including HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and deficiency-related illnesses.

Girl ex-soldiers who have been through the official demobilisation process are

entitled to demobilisation packages. The child demobilisation process managed by UNICEF provides ex-child soldiers with a combination of monthly income and start-up grants for micro-projects, generally totalling around US \$420 for each child. Start-up grants cover capital purchases (a plot of land, a cow, goat, sewing machine for example) enabling the recipient to set up a micro-business. While this package clearly facilitates their relatively smooth reinsertion into the community, the difficulty the children face is that neighbours who are not aware of these provisions believe their income derives from the ill-gotten gains of looting and other crimes carried out during the war. There are also family conflicts which arise when parents want to take control of their daughters' demobilisation money.

Another, more serious, consequence is a psycho-social one: girl ex-soldiers, as well as others who have suffered violence, are subject to serious traumas. At the same time everyone around them is hostile to them, unable to hold out a supportive hand or help them regain their equilibrium. As a result of the exclusion they face, they lose self-respect and this leads inescapably to their self-isolation, keeping themselves to themselves and voluntarily limiting social contacts with others.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'Girls who didn't get pregnant didn't escape from sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and others. I know a girl who suffers from AIDS, which she got after having been abducted by combatants.'

'The problem for us girls is that if someone deceives you and you get pregnant, he will abandon you immediately. It's not just that he won't help you, but he will try to steal your child. Or else your parents will chase you away and you will have nowhere to go, since the father of the child doesn't acknowledge you.'

'So I stopped studying then. It was in 1997 and I was in 9th year at school. My sister left me in a family and asked them to take care of me.'

2.7 How did the respondents deal with their problems?

The ways young girls affected by war and victims of violence adapt deserves particular attention. In fact, certain of their strategies can aggravate their problems, while others reduce them. The survival strategies developed by respondents faced with social rejection as described above include resignation, seeking refuge, delinquency, seeking employment, and seeking relationships with people who can offer them a home.

Loss of self-respect leads girls to resignation in the face of being called degrading

names and hearing incessant insults. Taking refuge in religion allows some young girls to find hope and joie de vivre. Others give themselves over to delinquency, notably in the form of prostitution and alcoholism, which in turn exposes them to other forms of violence, and their lives thus become a cycle of violence and victimisation. Some, as a solution to their situation, go and look for work in towns or far from their homes, or seek petty employment opportunities.

One possible solution is to look for older people who can offer security - at least economically. This might be a relative or neighbour who is tolerant of the girl's situation and understands her problems, possibly an older woman who herself needs support. But some find refuge in the first person who seeks them out in marriage, for they have little room for manoeuvre in terms of choice of marriage partner.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'I brought these two children up by myself, with no-one to help me. I was full of sorrow and I thought I was going to go mad. So I went and prayed and was reconverted, and God is helping me now. I see better, but I still have lots of problems in the displaced people's camp.'

'So I continued looking for something to eat left and right, doing petty commerce like most of the people here in Bujumbura who are unemployed, to survive with my children.'

'Now, I live with another woman who said she would provide for me. My mother explained to me that the woman's husband doesn't love her - he is an animal - and as a result she advised me that in future I should look to this woman as a surrogate mother.'

2.8 What is the fate of the respondents' children?

The girls are very young to be having children, and they lack both the skills and the resources to bring them up. The majority of the children are not acknowledged by their fathers, which will later on pose an identity problem because they are not even legally registered. Some of the fathers dare not acknowledge their children officially because they are already married, or else they are single but do not want to be forced into marriage with girls they have made pregnant.

The mothers' families reject these children, and so does the community around them. The stigma and discrimination faced by their mothers goes no way towards letting them off, and people attach all sorts of prejudices and degrading names

to them. In people's perceptions, they will cause problems later when they come to inherit, especially if they are boys. Families put continuous pressure on girls to take the children back to their fathers, even though they may not know who the fathers are. The child mothers say they love their children, but consider them to be a burden, for example when they (the child mothers) come to marry or look for work or go back to school.

Some of these children are already of school age, but have little prospect of attending school because of their mothers' poverty. The children of child mothers suffer the same fate as the latter: they are rejected by their fathers and by society. They live in poverty as do their mothers and they face an uncertain future. The same lack of resources which affects child mothers means that their children suffer from lack of care, and this may even lead to their deaths from negligence.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'I left my family home because my brothers chased me away. But after a while my mother asked me to go back home. My child was sick, but they refused to give me any money to treat him, they said that it wasn't worth the trouble to care for a child who had no known father. He got ill three times and I had to do agricultural work to earn a bit of money to treat him. The last time he got ill, I couldn't provide treatment for him, and he died. Now my brothers and all my family love me and treat me well because I no longer have a child.'

'Problems are arising now that my child is getting older. Father says I should take the child back to his father, although I don't know which soldier I had him with, or where he is at the moment.'

'He doesn't go to school, or else he is absent for a week here and there, either because he doesn't have pens and paper, or because he doesn't have clothes.'

'Well, I love this child whose father I don't know, and I love him just like the other children. I love him because it was me who gave birth to him, and to me he's just the same as the others. And as well as that, I thank God for what he has done for me, because I think all my children are gifts which He has given me, because not everyone is able to have children.'

2.9 What hopes do the respondents have for the future?

At the end of the interviews, the girls set out their hopes for their reintegration. Most of them wished to be accepted by society and no longer to be discriminated against by their families, friends and communities. They wanted to have husbands,

establish a household and have a normal life.

A child mother is often chased away from the family home and deprived of resources, and this is why they want to own property, including land, and conduct activities that will permit them to meet their needs and those of their children. At present girls do not have the right to inherit from their parents, and can expect no more from them than the minimum necessary for their survival.

As the majority of the girls have children, they would like their children to go to school and not to be mistreated by their families and neighbours. They also want to join associations and benefit from training to gain skills. In the case of those who have benefited from the ACORD project, they asked that other girls not yet identified should also be enabled to take up occupations, as they themselves have been.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'I would like there to be a bit more justice. I would like people to stop excluding me on the grounds that I was in the rebellion.'

'I would like people to know that we have been given a lot of information that will help us to rejoin society. Now, we are like everybody else. We should all help each other and create a climate of mutual understanding. As for me, I need a patch of land to live off and so that I can buy myself some soap and other basic necessities.'

'To ensure that girls affected by war and victims of violence are rehabilitated, ACORD must collaborate with the local administrators to ensure that people receive more intensified information, so that they respect the rights of young girls who are victims of violence, because they are not responsible for the consequences of the violence they have suffered.'

'I wouldn't ask for much, since I didn't go very far in my studies, but if I could be a trader and earn my living, and meet my needs and those of my child without having to beg, or just have a little job...And for my child, I hope that he will succeed where I have failed.'

2.10 Summary: sexual violence against girls and its consequences

The war has had devastating impacts on young girls as well as on their families and on the community in general. In addition to the factors that have affected Burundian society in general – impoverishment, unemployment, urbanisation, displacement, settlement in overcrowded displaced camps, amongst others – the

impact on many young girls has been disastrous. Often coping with the loss of, or rejection by, their parents, they have been obliged to survive on their own, using whatever strategies they can - leaving school early, entering into early or undesired marriages, and seeking a precarious living in towns and camps. Young girls have been particularly vulnerable to forced enlistment in armed militias, where they have, at best, been subjected to gruelling training and life-threatening risk, and at worst to months and years of servitude as spies, porters, and forced 'wives' of other combatants. The girls who were not members of armed groups have had to face a heightened level of violence in society at large, and a much greater risk than normal of sexual violence, not only from soldiers but from the community at large.

As if rubbing salt into their wounds, girls face not only these risks but the near certainty, if they happen, of being met with indifference or rejection from those who should be protecting them, their family, neighbours and the state. Although some isolated incidents of exemplary support and empathy were noted by respondents, the general picture is one of rejection and struggle, engendered, it seems, by an ideology which entirely fails to value girls or to recognise their vulnerability to being violated and manipulated by others. In effect, the victims of violence are being blamed for the crimes that have been visited on them, instead of the perpetrators of the crimes being brought to account. Faced with so many disasters in their lives - violence, rejection, unwanted pregnancy, poverty, loss of hope and self-esteem - respondents demonstrate extraordinary resilience, compassion and humanity, and respond with energy when offered opportunities to deal with their problems.

But the impact of violence against girls does not end with the girls themselves. Families have been broken apart by the consequences of violence against girls, and in particular by the consequences of their pregnancies - the shame of children born out of wedlock, conflicts over inheritance, the continuing economic burden of children without a father. Communities are seeing their values and their tolerance being tested to the limit, struggling to know how best to respond to the pressures of this new situation. Prostitution, family breakdown, street children, sexually transmitted illnesses are all rapidly increasing, alongside incidences of psycho-social trauma, early marriages, preventable diseases among mothers and children, and a generation of girls and their children unable to attend school.

3 Selected testimonies

GAKOBWA Marie¹⁴

Marie was born in 1985 in Kayanza Province, Muruta Commune. She is the third of five children. Her father and mother died in 1997 and 2001 respectively, when she

¹⁴All respondents' names have been changed

was in her early teens, and she is now looking after her brothers and sisters as well as her own child. Her father was a petty trader and her mother was a farmer. She does subsistence farming and sometimes sells fruit. She was chased away from her family's property by her sister and brother. She is learning tailoring as part of the ACORD project.

I lived through the war. It started in 1996, when in 3rd primary. I was living in Muganza Hill. That year, the rebels started political education, and that led to people being displaced. They started killing people. They killed my uncles in front of our house, they abducted my mother, and I had to flee the fighting with the baby of the family on my back. They took her (i.e. her mother) into the forest and tied her up, but she was released the next day.

That day my father came back from Kayanza, where he had been burying my uncles who had been killed by the combatants. The same day, in the evening, the government army arrived on our hill to fight the rebels. The fighting got worse and we left our hill to seek refuge on a neighbouring hill. And the fighting spread there too. My father decided we should seek refuge in Kayanza. He died six months later.

We went back to live in Muganza. We hadn't experienced peace because the rebels attacked frequently and this was accompanied by stealing and murders. We went back to Rwegura, in this place, and I have been staying here ever since. Even here, the rebels continued to deprive us of all our possessions and to beat us up.

My mother fell sick, and died while my elder sister was a refugee in Tanzania. I looked after my younger brothers and sisters and they grew up. To keep them alive, I went out every day to look for work so that we could have something to eat. If I failed, we would spend whole nights and days without eating. When my elder sister came back from exile, she sold all the family possessions and sent me away. I came back again, and was chased away again by my brother. I no longer live in the family house: I live in a house I rent, although I have no income. Now, some of my younger brothers and sisters get by on their own, but there are some that I'm still taking care of. In order to live, I have to sell avocados or vegetables. If I make any money, we eat, if not, we don't.

I have one child. One night, soldiers came to our house and they beat us, me and the small children. They said they wanted to know where we kept the gun my father used to use for stealing, and after that they took me outside and raped me. After, I discovered that I was pregnant. That's how I came to have this child. No-one has come to claim him up till now. Even if the father was a neighbour, having participated in the rape, he wouldn't dare to own up publicly to fathering this

child.

After the child was born, my brother came from Kayanza to chase me away from the family home. The local administrators supported me so that I was taken back by my family. The same brother came back to chase me out again, and this time it was for good. Members of my family, and especially my brothers, reject me because they are afraid they will have less of the family land because of me. And no-one round here cares.

I was often taken into the forest by the rebels, to carry their loot. Sometimes they kept me there overnight and brought me back very early in the morning, at dawn. They raped me, they did that three times. There were lots of girls who suffered violence during the war. Apart from the rebels, neighbours did bad things to girls and women. Most often, it was rape and stripping them of their possessions. If any girl tried to denounce her rapist, the latter might kill her, because it was a war situation. There were girls and women who were abducted by rebels and who were killed by them, others were wounded. For example in our group there was a girl, Cecile, who experienced terrible violence. One night, she was taken to the forest. The rebels had killed her mother, her father and her sisters. Cecile was wounded with a machete around her neck.

Girls who had been taken by the rebels were first of all rejected by their families, especially if they had children as a result of these rapes. The girls who weren't pregnant didn't escape from sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and other illnesses. I know a girl who got AIDS after being abducted by rebels. When the girls came back from the forest, from being with the combatants, the administrators and the parents and the people all around would suspect them of having become friends of the combatants.

It is very difficult for me to be accepted again by society, probably impossible. Often I was taken in the night while people were sleeping – even when we passed by the night patrols¹⁵ and we cried out, no-one believed I was being taken away by the rebels. Lots of people didn't accept that I had been raped. A lot thought I was responsible for my situation. It is hard for people to be understanding, but God willing I will recover my dignity. This will mainly be through the tailoring that I am now learning. This is very important for me, just as it is for the other girls who are learning an occupation. I would ask that other girls who have not yet been identified as being among the poorest should be taught an occupation.

As far as we war-affected girl rape survivors are concerned, even those who have been accepted back, we believe ACORD and the administrators should do more to enlighten people so that they respect the rights of girls who have been raped,

¹⁵ Night patrols were organised by the local community and carried out by local men.

because they are not responsible for the consequences of the violence that they have suffered.

KIGEME Rose

Rose was born in 1988 in Ruyigi Province, Kinyinya Commune. She is the oldest of 5 children and has one brother and three sisters. Her mother is a farmer and her father was killed during the war. She went to primary school for only one year, and is unmarried.

Rose volunteered to enlist in one of the armed movements when she was 12. She had just witnessed her father's murder at the hands of the government army, and the only thing she wanted to do at that time was to fight to revenge her father's death. In the beginning she was glad to be a fighter, but she became traumatised by the beatings and wounds she received as part of the training (standard practice, designed to harden the recruits up), as well as by homesickness. She took refuge in tobacco and other drugs. On her return from the rebellion, she managed to find her mother again, but her mother had remarried and Rose was unable to get along with the man her mother had married, so she went to live with her paternal uncle. With the demobilisation package she received from UNICEF, she bought 9 goats and 8 crates of beer and started a small business with them. She manages to earn enough income to meet her basic needs.

Me, I really had a lot of problems. After I'd realised that there was no point in staying at home while others were fighting for the country, for peace, I decided to join them. That was how I came to enlist in that army – I was 12 years old. When they first saw me, the people in charge tried to stop me from coming in, because I was still very young, but as I insisted, they accepted me in the end. So I started the military training. It was really tough, because the main training method was beating, so hard that I nearly died. It took me days to get my strength back. While I was convalescing they sent me to the front. The first day, it was at Mura. After Mura we went on to Bubanza, Ruyigi, Cankuzo, etc. We fought in several places, even in Bujumbura.

As for our treatment in the militia, rape was strictly forbidden and was heavily reprimanded. Anyone found guilty of rape was killed on the spot. Those who were suspected of having sexual relations were beaten heavily. We were asked to carry out work that was beyond our capacities, true – carrying arms, rockets, food, the dead and wounded, we had to steal food and cook. They called us kadogo – we were told to stand in front during the battles because the bullets wouldn't touch us but would hit the ones behind us. No-one gave any consideration to the fact that we were girls, nor that we were kadogos. We went to the front just like the

boys, and we fought like them because we had been given the necessary training. Considering the dangerous fights I was in, I would be dead now if it wasn't for divine intervention. The worst things we did were those connected to the war – you can't possibly imagine what I feel when I think about it.

The last stage was Cibitoke, but we didn't spend much time there because the war was coming to the end by then, so after that we went to the assembly centres. I was in Karindo assembly zone, right here in Ruyigi Province. I was asked my age, and as I replied that I was 16 they put me on the list of under-18s. The ones on this list were supposed to go home, while those who had reached the age of majority stayed in the assembly zones and were eventually demobilised or integrated into the regular army.

After that, they took us to Ruyigi, where a very warm welcome awaited us. They took each one of us back to the hill we came from. Each one had to tell the administrators who accompanied us which hill they came from. As I had been very young when I left, I could hardly remember exactly where I had been born, but I did eventually remember. Unfortunately my family was no longer there. I learned that my father was dead and that my mother had re-married, and that she had taken my four brothers with her. I too, I decided to go and live with my mother's new husband, but he made life very difficult for me. The thing we quarrelled about was my demobilisation allowance. He wanted the whole thing to go to his own family and that I should not provide any support to my paternal family. We tried to reach a sensible solution to this conflict, namely that I should share my income between the two families equally. But even then he wasn't satisfied, and he kept on giving me a rough time of it. One day I went to visit my mother's family and stayed there quite a long time, and he made it clear that he didn't want me back. I understood that he was intending to chase me away. I told my uncle about what had been happening and he straight away decided to put me up with him. Now I live in peace in my uncle's house. I am making good use of the money I was given to finance the projects I thought up – I'm selling beer. My uncle has been showing me how. He even suggested I should raise cows and goats, and up till now everything has been going well. My uncle doesn't ask anything of me and has never tried to spirit anything away from me in any way.

The other problem I had is discrimination. When I arrived, people in the neighbourhood said no-one should go near me, because I might hit them or otherwise do them harm. I've tried to calm them down but the results haven't been fantastic. For example, when I go to draw water, the others wait for me to finish before taking their turn. But I try to show them that I will wait my turn like everybody else. Now, they are beginning to understand that I'm not as dangerous as they thought and that I too am human. The other girls are afraid to talk to me. I

try to take the initiative to talk to them and dispel their fear. That girl there, I spoke to her, and she could see I was not in any way aggressive. She admitted that before, they were afraid I would hit them. I tell them that all that has finished along with the war, and that I can't hit someone for no reason. She and I carried on talking and became friends. There are still some who are afraid of me, but all the same I can see that there is a bit of an improvement.

On the other hand, I still suffer discrimination. That's due to jealousy: they think I'm rich and that I received a lot of things when I was demobilised. Others say that I could even kill them. They even say that I have AIDS, although it's not true because I did the test and it showed that I was negative. Actually I did get ill, because someone put a spell on me – it was my mother's husband – and I nearly died. People started saying that I was confirmed positive and that I would be carried off by AIDS. There are even some who resent me because they think I was one of those who stole their cows and other possessions during the war.

When we came back from the war, the administrators took it upon themselves to explain to people that even if we had been in the war, we were not dangerous because we had been to re-education sessions, but people were still sceptical. For example, when a young man wanted to get engaged to me, the others tried to dissuade him and told him that once we were married I would beat him up and kill him. They advised him to find another girl who hadn't been in the armed movements.

I think all that adds up to social exclusion, because all of us are human beings. The rebellion is over. I don't even remember it. Now, I am reintegrated into society and I lead my life like any other citizen. We should not discriminate against people on the basis of their membership of the rebellion or otherwise, because we are all the same. When I think about the violence and discrimination I suffered, it really upsets me. I try to calm myself down and I hope that with time they will realise that they are making a mistake.

I would like there to be a bit more justice. I wish that people would stop excluding me for having been in the fighting movements. That they should know that we had sufficient reorientation teaching to enable us to be accepted in society. Now, we are like the others. They should not treat us like that: instead, we should all help each other and create a climate of understanding.

KARONDO Spes

Spes was born in 1981 in Kayanza Province, Muruta Commune. The war broke out when she was 12 years old and she had to flee with her mother and go and live in

a site for internally displaced people. There are two children in her family, herself and her elder brother. Both her parents were farmers, but her father is dead and she now lives only with her mother in the displaced people's camp. She completed primary school and has just finished an on-the-job training course in culinary art, and hopes to set up her own restaurant.

Spes had a child with a soldier, but the latter took the child away without her knowledge. Spes was extremely distressed over losing access to her son, as was clear during the interview, which was brought to an end when she broke down.

When war broke out I was in 6th primary. We had to go and live in a displaced person's camp. Where we stayed, there were lots of soldiers. At night, when we went outside, to the toilets for example, the soldiers would be waiting to rape us. That was how I fell pregnant. No-one understood me, and no-one helped me. My family chased me away, saying 'take this pregnancy to the person who made it'. When I delivered, I had nothing, not even a piece of soap, not even a cloth,¹⁶ or a towel or clothes for the baby. The baby grew up and then one day his father came and took him away from me. Now I can't even go to see him because his father told me not to come near his house. That's why I have so many problems. My hope is that you can help us form associations, and that way we can live better.

The problem for us girls is that if someone deceives you and you fall pregnant, he immediately abandons you. He won't help you but he can still come and take your child away, or else your parents chase you away and you have nowhere to go because the father won't recognise you.

Another problem: when I delivered, the child's father refused to register him, and I didn't do it. But that didn't stop his father from coming and stealing him, despite not having recognised him. My hope is that someone can help me take him to court, because he stole my child and even when I go to see him they hide him from me. This child is now 12, and he never comes to see me. He is being brought up by his grandmother. This child is the cause of much unhappiness for me. I want to bring a complaint because when he took the child from me he didn't give me anything, although I suffered bringing him into the world in conditions of extreme poverty. I interrupted my studies, because I became pregnant when I was 15 and people thought I would be unable to deliver at such a young age. But God helped me and I delivered with no problems. In the maternity ward I just wore a dress and didn't have a cloth to wear.

When I had the child, my uncles told me to take him to his father, because later on he would come and claim some of our property. My mother chased me away while my brothers harassed me. I didn't know where to go, I spent the night outside. But

¹⁶Spes is referring to the rectangular piece of cloth wrapped round the body forming part of Burundian dress, meaning that she had no clothes to wear. To have a cloth is a minimum requirement for a Burundian woman, especially during delivery.

what really upset me is that in spite of everything I've endured, the child's father took him from me without giving me any sort of compensation. I don't understand how this man, who has caused me so many problems, could have taken my child. I had no soap even, I got ill and had no money to get treatment. I'm dying of unhappiness. The authorities have to help me to get my child back. I'd better stop here.

4 Conclusions

The war in Burundi has generated widespread violence over a long period, and has had massive and varied impacts on Burundi's people, society and economy. However, groups within the population have been affected in different ways, and for this reason the reconstruction and peace-building phase needs to be based on principles of social justice, ensuring that responses are designed that are appropriate for each category. Unfortunately, intervention agencies tend to base their actions on a global analysis, rather than examining the specificity and the needs of each category. This tends to act to the detriment of women and youth, reinforcing inequalities between men and women over time and pushing the needs of youth into second place. During this reintegration phase, in which the priorities are to support the victims of the war and to revitalise the economy, corrective measures should be adopted, in view of the numerical importance and the vulnerability of these two categories.

Plans for the reintegration phase are often drawn up during cease-fire negotiations, where women are mainly absent, and so their needs may not be taken into account when demobilisation and reintegration plans are being drawn up. As a result, most of them fail to go through the formal reintegration system. This is especially true of those who are not fighters as such but who joined the fighters in other capacities. Girls who have suffered violence, who are often illiterate and without resources, are marginalised and rejected even by those whose duty it is to protect them, with all the ingredients combined for their exclusion. Most violence against girls is combined with sexual abuse, with the result that stigma and discrimination become their shared fate throughout their lives.

International humanitarian and human rights law includes instruments which specifically enshrine the rights of children and women, both globally and in their African regional interpretations. UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1612 require the specific needs of women and children respectively to be taken into account in conflict and post-conflict periods. Together, these instruments provide, in principle and in specific ways, for the protection of girls against sexual exploitation, and for their integration into post-conflict reconstruction programmes. Yet, in Burundi, as elsewhere, we are far from seeing these good intentions turned into

practical action. It seems important to bring hope to these abused young women, who are deep in an abyss of isolation and despair. An echo of this despair can be seen in the interview with Spes: however, our respondents are unusually fortunate, since the material and moral support provided by the ACORD and UNICEF projects has given them a degree of optimism, as interviews with Marie and Rose illustrate. The 'Restoring Peace Project' in Burundi assisted the child mothers and selected young girls to find ways to re-integrate, re-socialize and to reconstruct their lives. Many others have not been so supported.

To remove girls from their isolation and desperation needs combined efforts from interveners. But before that, much groundwork needs to be done to inform them about this issue and to bring it constantly into the centre of debates. In advocating to protect girls from violence in conflict periods and to support their reintegration in post-conflict programmes, this present collection of testimonies is nowhere near enough, but can be seen as a step along the way. In allowing the girls to express the misfortune and suffering they have endured at so young an age, the testimonies enable those with the power to act, to think again, and to start questioning the weakness of their commitment to gender equality in post-conflict reintegration and reconstruction programmes. It is urgent that their interventions result in equity and ensure equal benefits to all those categories that have no voice and no-one to defend their interests.

Chapter four: Case Study Two: Child Mothers In The Northern Uganda Conflict

1 Introduction¹⁷

1.1 Country profile

Uganda is a landlocked East African country of 25 million people bordering the northern shores of Lake Victoria. Dubbed the 'pearl of Africa', its many lakes and rivers, fertile soils and regular rainfall generate agricultural wealth based on diversified crop production - coffee, tea, cotton, and tobacco are the main cash crops. As in Burundi, Uganda's principal export crop is coffee.

Agriculture occupies 82% of the population; the economy also benefits from sizeable deposits of copper and cobalt, and growing industrial processing and hydropower sectors. However there are brakes on economic growth: overspecialization in agricultural production as a result of a colonial legacy of unequal development; environmental problems including deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, and water hyacinth infestation in Lake Victoria. Gross Domestic Product per person was estimated at \$1,800 in 2006, and 35% of the population lives below the poverty line. The 2005 Human Development Report ranked Uganda at 144 out of 177, near the bottom of the 'medium human development' category.

Infant mortality stands at 66 deaths per 1,000 births, and life expectancy at birth is 53. The general rate of HIV infection is 4.1%, though this conceals significant differences between the war-affected north of the country and the rest. Almost 70% of the population over the age of 15 is literate, but there is a wide male-female literacy gap (male 80%, female 60%)

1.2 Background to the war and the peace process

Political violence has been endemic in Uganda since its independence from the colonial power (Britain) in 1962. The colonialists saw the Baganda of central Uganda as the most advanced Ugandan culture, inheritors of the colonial mantle, and deliberately set them against other groups. After Independence there was increasing fragmentation - along ethnic lines, but also reflecting political tensions between the centre of the country and the peripheral regions in the north, east and west. The uprising against the Baganda in 1967 and the exiling of the Baganda king resulted from a backlash against the Baganda, more favoured by Britain, and was the first step into an extremely vicious civil war. The rise of President Idi Amin in 1971, the expulsion of Ugandan Asians in 1972, the atrocities of the Lowero Triangle in the early 1980s and the rise of the National Resistance Army which took

¹⁷ Information for this section is drawn from a variety of references, listed as annex 1

over the country in 1986, are well-known.

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) established a system of government based on tiers of elected local committees, creating stability, a reduction in military activity, and a positive climate both for enterprise and for international assistance. However, despite this the country has not been free of war. Resentment against central government, sometimes in the form of armed rebellion, is appearing in a number of peripheral regions of Uganda such as the north, the north-west and the east. There are still cultural and political schisms between the Bantu populations in the centre and south-west of the country, and the Nilotic and Central Sudanic peoples in the north. Uganda has been involved militarily in both the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In the north, resistance to the regime by a succession of rebel groups (the Lord's Resistance Movement or LRA¹⁸ being the most recent) has continued in various forms since 1986. Human rights abuses of the population have been recorded on both the rebel and the government sides. Over 90% of the Acholi population¹⁹ now lives in 'protected villages' or displaced camps, where self-sufficient agriculture is no longer possible because of lack of space. The war has resulted in gross impoverishment through the loss of livestock and land. 65.8% of the population of the northern region falls below the poverty line and accounts for over one third of the country's poor, compared with 20.3% in the Central region, 28.1% in the Western region and 36.5% in the Eastern region. The traumatic experiences to which the population of the north has been exposed (including intimidation, torture, harassment, killings, captivity, inhumane displaced living conditions, sexual abuse of different kinds, duress in captivity or in hiding) have brought intense suffering to individuals and have in turn rendered Acholi society vulnerable to breakdown.

Despite various military campaigns against them, the LRA continued to ravage the population with impunity, committing various abuses including murder, mutilations, abductions, and theft. In 1999, after it had apparently lost the international support which had sustained it up till then, LRA violence decreased in volume and severity, and people in the north began to prepare for peace. Acholi clans, with government backing, restored the institution of the clan chiefs and elders (rodi), and in 2000 the government introduced the Amnesty Act. Both of these initiatives aimed to encourage rank and file LRA fighters in the bush – many of whom had been abducted as children and forced into a life of violence - to return without fear of reprisals. However, in 2000, LRA attacks began again with increased severity, and in 2002, the governments of Uganda and Sudan launched a joint military operation against the LRA, 'Operation Iron Fist'.

This approach, together with the increasing numbers of combatants emerging from

¹⁸ It is believed that the LRA's aim is to install the Ten Commandments as the basis of Acholi society.

¹⁹ The Acholi ethnic group occupies the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader

the bush and giving themselves up, weakened the LRA to the extent that in 2004 it succumbed to pressure to negotiate. In December 2003, Uganda had referred the LRA to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and investigations began in July 2004. Although government declared a ceasefire in November 2004, and peace negotiations were undertaken by an independent mediator, Betty Bigombe, the ICC issued arrest warrants against five LRA leaders in October 2005. These are still outstanding.

A ceasefire between the Government of Uganda and the LRA came into force in August 2006, and the LRA has since begun to assemble in two camps on the border between Sudan and Uganda. The LRA has agreed to release all women and children present in the group. At the time of writing, negotiations to finalise the peace agreement are still continuing in Juba, the southern Sudanese capital.

The dynamics of the war and the actors involved have varied over the years, and have remained impervious to the various initiatives (both peaceful and military) that have been attempted to resolve the conflict. The numerous peace initiatives brokered since the war began have always failed, due to mistrust from both parties. The consequences of failed peace talks always rebound on civilians, who are perceived as betrayers of the peace process by both sides. This is especially prominent on the government side, since government claims that the Acholi are collaborators, supporting the war and unwilling to cooperate with the army in bringing it to an end. This is reflected in general Ugandan attitudes towards the Acholi, namely that they are warriors by nature and therefore constantly at war. Military options have also failed, partly because of the humanitarian emergencies that they tend to give rise to.²⁰

Although neither the peace negotiations nor the ICC indictments have brought an end to the conflict in northern Uganda, there have been significant recent efforts by the United Nations and NGOs to establish programs in northern Uganda directed at disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. However, the main area of focus has been reintegration, owing to the pressing need to address the needs of large numbers of returnees. Reintegration programs include a package of cash and/or in-kind compensation, counselling, training and income-generating projects.

1.3 Challenges facing young people

Young people in Uganda face particularly acute problems, given that, over the country as a whole, more than 50% of the population is under 18 years of age and youth services are therefore overstretched. In the north their situation is even more severe, since the north as a region is relatively under-served by health and education services, and there has been little investment in roads, markets and other

²⁰ For example, one consequence of Operation Iron Fist was an increase in 'night commuting', or the practice of people moving into towns at night for security.

infrastructure as a result of the chronic insecurity that has affected the region since 1986 and earlier.

Young people in the north face severe limitations on their chances of education and employment, and are vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation from adults, including parents, teachers and employers. The depredations of the LRA have generated violence and insecurity which young people particularly have suffered from. To obtain food, supplies, wives and soldiers, rebels looted villages and abducted young people, sometimes as young as 8, to serve as porters, combatants and spies, and, in the case of girls, as 'wives' for soldiers and commanders. At least 20,000 children and youth are believed to have been abducted in total, and perhaps one or two thousand still remain with the LRA as of December 2006. Thousands of boys and girls (as well as adults) have returned from the bush deeply scarred by their experiences, having been forced to kill in combat.

Many who were abducted as children have spent years in the bush and are returning as adults, having lost their chances of education. When abducted children return, those who had interrupted their studies find reintegration into school very difficult. Although primary education is free, many schools in the north have closed down due to insecurity. Older children find it difficult to be in class with much younger children. An estimated 30% of girl and young women returnees have become mothers. Many are excluded from school because of poverty and because of the stigma they face as a result of having transgressed social codes by living a life of violence and by bearing illegitimate children.

The LRA is not the only body against whom accusations of child abuse have been leveled. Children have been recruited into local defence units and the government army, the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). There are also many reported cases of sexual exploitation and sexual violence against girls by government military personnel in internally displaced camp settings. The government is currently committed to an action plan and to strengthen the implementation of existing legal and policy frameworks on the recruitment and use of children in its armed forces.

In general, the number of young and single mothers has increased year after year, and at present stands at more than 3,500 (UNICEF 2005), leaving stakeholders with a substantial challenge in ensuring their reintegration into the community. The difficulties faced by young mothers who return from captivity have received little attention. In addition to the problems of material poverty they face in providing for themselves and their children, they return home seeking psychological and social rehabilitation, and find little support available to enable them to do this. Although extended family and clan systems continue to operate in displaced people's camps,

extended families and clans living in these conditions are hardly able to muster items necessary for the cleansing rituals which would help these children to be accepted back, given both the gravity of the offences they were forced to commit, and the overwhelming number of young mothers returning from captivity.

Most formerly abducted girls hope eventually to get married, but many fail to find a husband at all, or else are obliged to marry for protection rather than out of choice. When they do marry, mistrust often creeps into their relationships. The sexual violence they have suffered affects their relationships, even though marriage is believed to offer protection for women and children. Many issues arise in marriages, including for example the consequences of spousal separation, bridewealth and dowry, the identity of children, and the accompanying clan and extended family support relations. Acholi traditional institutions in the past rarely had to deal with mass rape, mutilation and other forms of violence which have characterised the current war, and so there are few precedents offering solutions to these catastrophes. In this era of pervasive violence, Acholi leaders need to refocus their approach and afford priority to the most vulnerable segment of the population, namely young mothers. For this to happen, the elders need knowledge about the plight of girls on their return from the bush. Men are also vulnerable to abduction, but the elders need to understand that the consequences for them on their return are less severe, given the poor economic and social conditions experienced by women in the displaced camps.

1.4 Background to the research

It is in this context that the present study on violence against girls was carried out. Its aim was to raise awareness about the violence perpetrated against young mothers in this period of war. The results of the study will be used to advocate for protection measures for girl mothers, as well as the need to develop support strategies and projects for those mothers who have suffered sexual violence, taking into account the specific conditions in which they now find themselves. The book is also intended to be used as an advocacy tool to put into place measures to stop impunity and to change social attitudes.

DCI's partner in Uganda for the "Restoring Peace Project" is the Mother-Daughter Project, an inter-agency project coordinated by World Vision Uganda. The Mother-Daughter Project (MDP) is currently working directly with 950 young mothers in 12 IDP camps and in the 4 divisions of the municipality of Gulu, the main town of northern Uganda. The project's goal is to ensure that the rights of young people, especially girl mothers, are respected and fulfilled through their active participation in social reconstruction, by developing and strengthening their capacity. This, it is believed, will help them create lives that they value, where they respect themselves

and can expect respect from their communities. The MDP assists them with income-generating activities, organises counselling and peer support, provides training in literacy, leadership, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, carries out research on and documents the girls' experiences, and undertakes public advocacy work. It helps girls organise in groups, in order to provide each other with mutual support and to carry out income-generating projects and provides for the groups to be animated by 'matrons', older women from the community whose role in the project is to provide child mothers with supportive advice.

The girl mothers supported by the project are taking care of their children single-handedly, despite their lack of means for survival. Most are young and unprepared for childcare, have little knowledge of reproductive health issues, and suffer from depression. Their children, especially those of formerly abducted mothers, have no identity and are usually treated abusively by other people. Looking at the current struggle the young mothers are making to feed their children, pay school fees, find rent money, etc, it is clear that roles of women and men in the war ravaged north are changing, with the women taking over most of the roles which were in the past predominantly male.²¹

The study is based on interviews with 29 young mothers, as well as a number of key adults – mothers of the child mothers, elderly women (to help assess changing attitudes) police officers, the chief magistrate, and the heads of five NGOs. Two group discussions were held with elders. Interviews focused on the sexual and gender-based violence experienced by the young mothers, and the challenges they faced, their coping strategies, their relationships, and the roles of other stakeholders, as well as the potential role of child mothers in the peace-building process. Interviews were conducted in selected IDP camps in Gulu District, as well as parts of Gulu Municipality.

2 Research findings

Three categories of child mothers were identified in the research: those who had been abducted and came home through reception centres, those who had been abducted and did not pass through reception centres on their return, and those who were not abducted but had children while still children themselves. These three categories experienced very different levels of support from those around them. Essentially, while all three groups suffered rejection and exclusion from society, those who had been abducted were doubly rejected because, as well as having had children out of recognised wedlock, they were also associated in people's minds with the violent lifestyle of the rebels, and therefore represented a deep-seated threat. This finding is significant, in view of the high levels of publicly expressed support and sympathy for the plight of girls abducted by the LRA, about which much has

²¹ Information drawn from interviews carried out by MDP in the IDP camps.

been written (for example, Human Rights Watch 1997, de Temmerman 2001). The testimonies of the MDP child mothers who took part in this study suggest strongly that this support, while it certainly exists in some quarters, is profoundly lacking in the lives of the majority of girls in this situation. This applies both to the families and neighbours of the girls, and to a range of other duty bearers, including the police, the courts, and NGOs operating projects which support returnees.

2.1 Rehabilitation centres

Rehabilitation centres are the first point of re-entry for many child and youth ex-combatants. At the rehabilitation centres, young mothers are registered with their children, and are given an amnesty card and letter of introduction from the centre. When they leave and are reunited with their families they are given rehabilitation packages.

Mothers who pass through rehabilitation centres have the advantage of being provided with a minimum of support. The disadvantage they face is that this support is itself a source of discrimination since it announces to the world that they have been in the rebel movements. At the same time, once the rehabilitation package is used up, the girls face the dilemma of how to survive economically, and how to provide both themselves and their children with food and shelter. For many, the answer lies in marriage, or at least in settling down with a man who can offer such protection.

Some young mothers who come home and rejoin parents – often themselves living in poverty - end up seeking remarriage with their former spouses, who had provided for them during captivity. Some interviewees said they would not consider reuniting with their former LRA husbands. The majority of this group said they had been given as wives to the commanders by force and not by choice, that they had been mistreated by their husbands in the bush, and that they would never think of reuniting with them. Others said they had been obliged to do so just because of the hardship of looking after their children. As Margaret²² explained,

'After I left the rehabilitation centre I stayed with my brother, but things were not easy. I had to feed my children and pay rent with the little money that GUSCO²³ gave me. So when my husband came back after six months I just made up my mind to go and live with him. My mother consented because my father died while I was still in captivity. My husband is still taking good care of me and without his support I would not be looking good like this. Nevertheless, he destroyed me, he destroyed my future and my school career. I would have been a different person today.'

Margaret considered that there was a big difference between her and those child

²² Not her real name

²³ The Gulu Save the Children Organisation, one of several NGOs which offer rehabilitation services to formerly abducted children.

mothers who returned from captivity without their husbands or whose husbands were killed, and who have no-one to support them. In Acholi culture men are known to be the protectors and breadwinners of the family. Margaret went on:

‘At least I have some one to support me, but the other girls have to struggle to make ends meet ...When relief food takes a long time coming, their children move like mad people to other people’s doors, begging for food to eat, it’s so painful. And my children are happy to be with their father and their father too is close to them.’

Not all former captives pass through rehabilitation centres, however; others return directly into their communities with no support. The young mothers who did not go through rehabilitation centres suffer both psychologically and socially. Respondents told us that when they seek assistance from NGOs, they are normally expected to produce their amnesty card, showing which rehabilitation centre they registered at. However, some cannot identify with any rehabilitation centre and no documentation can be found about them. There is no justification for requiring this documentation, however, since there are other ways of establishing whether or not a girl is an LRA returnee. For example, local councillors (LCs) also document their return into the community. As one respondent put it, ‘I do not know whether the Kony that abducted us was different from the Kony they talk about now. Perhaps our type of rape was not rape?’

A deeper problem confronts child mothers who go directly home, however, namely the problem of their children’s identity. Often, the children of the child mothers grow up without being able to trace their families, and without knowing their fathers, who may have been captured, or died, or remained in the bush. Children who escaped with their mothers lead a life of misery and frustration; they suffer stigma and are always called names by their peers, in schools or in the communities. One young mother described the pain of having children without a father:

‘You have to do every thing on your own, there is no-one to support you, no-one to help you bring the children up morally, and no-one to point to show the children “that is your father, that is your grandfather”. Worst still, they belong to no clan. I almost committed suicide because I could not see the end to this suffering.’

Girls who later marry often try to avoid telling their husbands about their experience as abductees, because they fear that this would lead to the breakdown of the marriage. One respondent described how her children questioned her on the whereabouts of their father, because the man whom they regarded as their father did not care for them and constantly harassed them when drunk, saying that he wanted nothing to do with her or them, because they were rebels. She explained:

'Today when they insist on knowing where their father is I burst into tears, because I have no-one to give them as a father'.

Many child mothers still need to go to school or acquire some skills and training that would enable them to generate some income for themselves and their children. Yet this is like a dream for them. Only a few lucky ones who return through some rehabilitation centres have managed this.

A number of the young mothers also said that they would consider marrying when their children are able to go to school. Yet a large proportion of them lack the means to send their children to school.

2.2 Stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination are widely experienced by all three categories of child mothers interviewed in this research. Although it falls short of physical violence, it has serious psychological – and indeed material – effects. All manner of degrading names and stereotypes are used to describe these girls and their children. The fact that girls who were victims of violence are now facing extreme difficulties is mainly a result of the culture and attitudes shown towards them by the communities in which they live. These attitudes have appeared in Acholi society relatively recently, since before the war it was rare to encounter rape victims because of enforcement of law and order and strict traditional codes. However, before the war too, girls who gave birth out of wedlock or who had been divorced were subjected to various forms of prejudice, and considered to be bringers of bad luck and shame to the family, girls who lacked the moral teaching that their mothers were expected to provide.²⁴

Girls returning home from captivity are often marginalised and isolated from their communities because they are believed to be dangerous, aggressive, killers, chicken thieves, unruly, dirty and still capable of killing. It is rare for formerly abducted girls to find a marriage partner, owing to the influence of the community on their potential suitors. Girls who have suffered violence in war, especially those who were formerly abducted, are not considered to have a legitimate place amongst their peers, with their families, in their communities, and in the eyes of the administration. To make matters worse, those returning pregnant or with babies face the additional pressure of protecting and providing for their babies, with little or no support from a community that resents their presence.

Discrimination within the child mothers' families

When the formerly abducted child mothers are reunited with their families, relationships are usually good at first, especially if the girls have been through the

²⁴ Interview with Mego Ato, Bungatira camp, Gulu District 23rd July 2006

rehabilitation centres, because of the material support they receive from the centres. However, as the materials given to the girls gets used up, the relationship tends to take strain and diminish. Poverty has resulted in a lot of bitterness in families and communities, and this may give rise to them fighting over the assistance given to the formerly abducted girls. In some cases, the girls are simply sent away by their parents.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'At home I'm forced to do most of the domestic chores while others go to school.'

'My dad told me directly that he cannot feed me with my bastard child.'

'I have a difficult life in my family because my aunty doesn't want me to study, she wants me to get married.'

'My aunt took away my money, and as a result I had no means to treat my baby, and the baby died.'

'When it comes to sharing things, I'm excluded.'

Even where the girls are accepted back into the family, relationships are often tense. Psychologically they are not prepared for motherhood, yet their families expect them to do things in a normal way. Moreover, the girls' formative years have been spent in exceptional circumstances, rather than within their families as would be normal, and this creates a gap between older and younger family members. In some cases the girls look on their parents as people who should have protected them during abduction, and this generates bitterness, especially when the family members lack respect for the girls' feelings. The formerly abducted girls themselves sometimes contribute to the poor family relations, using people's mistrust of them as a basis for threats. For example a mother of a formerly abducted girl described how sometimes, when she tries to correct her daughter, the girl responds: 'Do you know how many people I have killed?'

Discrimination from the community in general

Relations between the community and the formerly abducted child mothers are generally poor. The girls are regularly insulted and derided, they are accused of being thieves and killers, and their children are prevented from associating with other children. This is because people have suffered at the hands of the LRA, and believe the girls to be tainted by their association with it. There is also resentment at the fact that those who were not abducted suffered greatly too, and yet their

suffering is not being acknowledged or compensated for. Moreover, very little preparations were made for the children's return in many cases.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'My peers don't freely associate with me, I think they take it that as I have been in the bush I may hurt them.'

'We are rejected by people because they say we are killers, thieves, that we robbed them and ate their goats.'

'I fear to stay with them (peers) or even approach them. I usually spend my time with my colleagues, the ones I came back from the bush with.'

'The group members are stoned when they dance, because people say that we are robbers, murderers and have stained hands.'

'The community uses bad language on us, which makes me not even to work or stay with other ladies because they insult me.'

Child mothers who were abducted by and spent time with the LRA in the bush did not do so of their own volition. However, having undergone this experience, they are seen as offending Acholi values in a number of fundamental ways. Most importantly, because abducted children were forced to kill in some cases, and because all have, in one way or another, been associated with adult LRA members who killed, one of the main reproaches levelled against the returning children is that they too are killers. Associated with this allegation is the belief that they have acquired *cen*, meaning that they are haunted by the avenging spirits of those they have killed. *Cen* can be transferred from one generation to another, and any misfortune which occurs to any member of the girls' families can be attributed to the *cen* which they have brought into the family. This leads to extreme mistrust of the formerly abducted children. People fear that, having acquired a taste for blood, they could easily kill those they come into contact with.

Community elders have a potential role to play in assisting the abducted children back into the community. Recognised clan heads and local chiefs preside over clan discussion, rituals, marriages, funerals, and initiation ceremonies. Elders believe that when someone returns from fighting in the bush, he or she needs to be cleansed before they are accepted, and to carry out this cleansing they officiate, both within families and in the community, in a ceremony in which the person to be cleansed steps on eggshells. There is no particular ritual for cleansing a young mother who

conceived and/or had children from the bush. Some believe that rituals such as stepping on eggshells can be effective in such cases, but others are not sure, and continue to believe that a person who, for example, marries a girl who had been with the LRA in the bush, would run the risk of acquiring cen from them.

Secondly, in the ideal Acholi tradition, the right way for young Acholi girls and boys to develop relationships is through a courtship process which is carefully controlled by their parents. One of the impacts of the war which parents regret most profoundly is the widespread abandonment of these courtship practices (El-Bushra and Sahl 2005, chapter on Uganda). In the past, girls who became pregnant before marriage were heavily penalised, and were considered to have brought shame to their families. Although the behaviour has changed as a result of circumstances, the ideals have not, and the formerly abducted child mothers, even if their pregnancies were the result of rape, are still considered to be devalued and a shame to the family. This is a major reason why girls hesitate to come forward to claim their rights, since they are aware of the disrespect in which they are held.

Thirdly, in normal circumstances girls are not expected to bring up children on their own but to depend on their husbands. When they do so, the normal pattern of resource management is threatened. Girls with children and no husband need land in order to feed themselves and their children, yet girls traditionally have no right of inheritance and cannot claim land from their fathers. Hence the child mothers are under pressure from their families to marry and find a husband to take care of them and their children, and even in extreme cases to leave altogether and find whatever source of income they can. Yet finding a husband and maintaining a good marital relationship is itself fraught with problems for the child mothers.

Discrimination from in-laws

Most of the marriages contracted by formerly abducted child mothers break down because of the attitudes of the in-laws. All the child mothers interviewed had poor relationships with their in-laws. In-laws consider the formerly abducted girls as 'second-hand', and therefore not fit wives for their son or brother. In-laws often mistreat and insult the girls so badly that they become unhappy in the marriage and eventually leave. Many young mothers reported that they are chased away by their in-laws, especially their mothers-in-law, whenever the latter discover that the girls have returned from the bush, or when they or their children begin having health problems. This includes infertility of the couple (assumed to be a result of cen), even if the wife has already had children from her previous relationships in the bush; the possibility that the husband might be the source of the infertility is not considered.

In Acholi culture the boy is the heir and considered to be the 'backbone' of the family, expected to take care of his mother and younger siblings when he grows up. Boys are closely attached to their natal families, even after they have grown up and married, and the family especially mothers, play a crucial role in choosing good wives for them. Even though extended family relations have tended to become eroded by life in the displaced camps, boys still do not normally get separated from their mothers, and most tensions that exist within the family are between women and their mothers-in-law. Since the formerly abducted young mothers are considered 'unclean' and having *cen*, they normally have difficulty gaining their in-laws' acceptance. Any misfortune that occurs in the man's family will be put down as being the result of *cen*, and blamed on the young mother. Moreover, misfortunes like sickness are seen as draining the boy's resources, thus justifying the concern of in-laws who have to depend on this same income for their support.

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'Those child mothers who are not formerly abducted have a brighter future, because even when you separate from each other the child knows the father and even their home, which is very important in Acholi culture.'

'My in-laws are provoking, insulting, and abusive, and they instigate my husband to drop me and bring another woman.'

'She (my mother-in-law) goes around telling people that she cannot waste time looking after my son, because in future the boy will start looking for the whereabouts of his father if the father is alive.'

'My mother-in-law said if I don't leave her son, she will poison me.'

'My mother in-law is so bad. She hates me so much that she cannot even eat the food that I have cooked.'

'My mother-in-law chased me away, saying I cannot be a wife to her son, because I am mad, a killer, and I will kill her son. Secondly, I have children whose clan is unknown.'

The relationship between child mothers and their husbands is generally not bad. However, like Doreen and Monica, whose testimonies appear below, the girls often feel obliged to accept undesirable conditions in a marriage, since to be married at all provides some form of security. Doreen's testimony, for example, shows how accusations flow easily if the girl does wrong. Moreover, problems often arise in

these marriages around the issue of children born in captivity. Husbands generally do not want to take responsibility for these children, whose clan of origin is not known and who are perceived as a burden. Community and peer pressure, as well as pressure from the man's family, add further strains to the marriage. The problem is made worse by the increasing poverty in IDP camps, as well as the deterioration of the extended family support system. Sometimes the wife is chased away, while in other circumstances the man runs away and abandons the woman, or stops giving her any assistance.

Discrimination by officialdom

Many child mothers fail to get justice either from the community or from legal structures such as the police and the courts. For example, it is commonplace for child mothers reporting their cases to be advised to settle their cases out of court. Cases which the child mothers are likely to bring to court include defilement²⁵ cases and cases involving property, especially disputes over property between the child mothers and their husbands and in-laws. Parents of child mothers often withdraw allegations of defilement and negotiate privately, after the perpetrators have offered them money, thereby denying their daughters the chance of seeking legal redress. Bribing court officials is not unheard of, especially if the accused is well-to-do. The situation of poverty which northern Uganda finds itself in encourages corruption, since people are open to bribes and since those who wish to pursue cases through the courts often lack the financial resources needed to do so. This is generally the case with the child mothers; the main expense is the cost of a medical examination to prove that the girl is no longer a virgin.

In many cases, the primary person denying the child mothers their rights is a parent, husband or in-law. However, duty bearers such as local council members, Amnesty Commission officials, and development workers are in a position where they can and should uphold the girls' rights even to their family members, for example by interceding with them not to send the girl away or by insisting that she be given access to her property. Often they fail to do this. Moreover, people who are in a position to provide the child mothers with services, such as the local authorities, the Amnesty Commission or the NGOs who provide support services to ex-combatants, themselves look down on the child mothers, speak to them insultingly, turn them away or sometimes even treat them violently, on the slightest pretext or none. However, it is also true that some local government officers, police officers, and NGO staff members are very much aware of the discrimination meted out against child mothers, and try hard to support the girls and ensure they are treated properly.

²⁵ The term used for statutory rape in Uganda

Some illustrations from the testimonies

'The person from the Amnesty Commission Office said that we are stupid and mad, what brought you here? He abused our mothers and threatened to beat us up...he further called the police and army to arrest us and take us to the barracks.'

'We even tried to get money to fund the projects we had designed from NUSAF (the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund) but our project was not approved - only the rich got it.'

'The Amnesty Officer told me: "You are mad with the blood of people you killed"'

'Culture has a hand. This is because they expect women to be tolerant and they expect women to accept any situation that comes their way. They feel going to the local council or to the police is something for men to do.'

'The voices of women are not heard and they are never taken seriously.'

Although the rights of child mothers may be enshrined in law in specific or general ways, there is no specific Ugandan law which explicitly protects their rights. Therefore knowing the intricacies of the law is essential for someone seeking to navigate their way round the many relevant provisions. Most child mothers are not aware of what their rights are and they do not have sufficient legal knowledge or support to claim them.

For all these reasons, child mothers are often denied basic rights to food, to education, to property, and to a family life. However, what is most galling to many of them is the absence of justice, they suffer exclusion and deprivation for a crime that was committed not by themselves but by those who abused them in the first place. Moreover, senior commanders who abducted, raped and tortured young girls are now free to move around in town and in the camps. This is viewed as a grave injustice by some young women who have returned. Respondents told us in their interviews that some senior commanders still have underage 'wives' in Gulu town, constituting the legal offence of defilement or statutory rape. It is true that the amnesty applies to and forgives all of those who returned, however, this behaviour after they have returned is not covered under the amnesty and is in fact a violation of the law.

2.3 Consequences for the children of child mothers

The children of child mothers are not recognised, simply because the community believes that they have no tribe or clan, and therefore no origin and no identity.

In the bush, the girls were given to a man by the LRA leadership and were not in a position to ask him about his origin. On their return, the child mothers try to trace the families of their husbands but encounter much difficulty in doing so.

The consequences for the children born of such liaisons are extremely serious. The community sees them as rebels, to be mistrusted and chastised. This is partly because they often behave in ways that are “strange” to people who stayed at home and have no experience of war or life in the bush. However, it is also a result of the various prejudices (outlined above), against the young mothers, which are then extended to their children. Children of child mothers, especially those who were abducted and lived in the bush, are socially isolated by their families and peers. No-one wants to take responsibility for them, and they are looked upon as a burden. In many cases they are deprived of love, attention, food, schooling and medical care, and their future prospects are dim. As Doreen says: ‘I really feel I need someone to help my child. For me, at least I have the group to turn to.’ There is no structure or system put in place by the government to look into the issue of children born in captivity.

2.4. How the child mothers respond to their situation

The consequences of the experiences of child mothers are very damaging. They carry physical scars, but they also carry psychological scars both from the violence that was committed against them and from the injustice of the treatment meted out to them on their return. These psychological scars affect their relationships with partners and potential partners, since the experience of rape and forced sexual relationships over a long period make it difficult for the girls to sustain loving relationships with other men. This also affects their relationships with other girls of the same age, since the experience of being sexually active and having children sets them apart from other girls their age, and they find they have little in common with them. The community views them as having already become women in the social sense, even though they are physically still children. Moreover, child mothers tend to suffer from low self-esteem, and this results in social exclusion and isolation.

Girls carry the heavy burden of looking after children prematurely. For most child mothers, meeting their immediate needs for food, shelter and health care is a struggle, even for those fortunate enough to be living with their parents or husbands. However, some are completely on their own and with no other means of supporting themselves, many are forced to turn to sex work, making them psychologically, socially and economically even more vulnerable and even more stigmatised and isolated.

Despite these constraints, many child mothers show considerable resilience. For

example, some formerly abducted young mothers have started getting together spontaneously to form groups for the purpose of carrying out income-generating projects as a way of surviving. In addition to income-generating activities, the girls have also been active in drama and songs; a sign of resilience and creativity amidst the high poverty levels in the camps.

One such group, Empowering Hands, was formed by young mothers in 2003 and has worked in a number of camps to ensure that returnee girl mothers are accepted and supported by the community. This has been undertaken through counselling for the child mothers and community discussion forums to break through the stigma.

3 Selected Testimonies

Doreen²⁶

Doreen grew up in Gulu district at a parish called Unyama in the village of Awich. She grew up with both parents but lost her father when she was 11 years of age. Her father had two wives, her mother being the 1st wife. She studied in Kitgum district from primary one to senior three before she was abducted. She is married to a farmer who is also struggling for survival, this makes her current situation very challenging as she has to take care of her child. She is quite happy because she has just completed her salon training in December 2006.

I was abducted from my home area – Unyama - at around 5.00 a.m. in the morning. We were four from the same home, but altogether there were 40 newly abducted. We walked for almost 30 miles without rest. We reached a certain village that I cannot name today and it was there that they put a lot of us, men and women, into a very small hut. When they realised that the house was too squeezed, they decided to separate the women from the men.

As soon as we were separated from the men, the rebels started coming to our room and touching all the women. If they found that you were still a girl they would tell you to get up and follow them. Once outside, they asked whether the girls were married yet. If you said yes they then asked if you were ready to accept whatever they were going to do to you. In that situation no-one could say no, because we were scared and full of fear. That day they raped almost all of the girls including myself. They slept with us the whole night. The next day some of the girls were not in a position to walk, but for fear of their lives we had to.

We started the journey the next day, but we were too hungry, because we were not

²⁶ Not her real name.

given food the previous day. They said we were captives and that is what is done to newly abducted people. We moved for some good miles that I cannot estimate but I guess it was over 40 miles. When night came it was even worse for the girls now.

We were divided into three different groups. So when you change position a different man rapes you. Different men raped all the girls. I must confess over five men raped me in a period of only one week. Some times you are raped by two men in one night. Just imagine such an inhuman situation. One month after all the raping my period was no more. I thought it was because of the bad feeding and the environment. But the second month came and the same thing. It was then that I realised I must be pregnant. I became so depressed because I could not tell who impregnated me because different men raped me. I felt like dying, killing myself, but there was no way, because we were heavily guarded.

After the one month they started training us to go and raid food in the camps. One day they sent us to go and raid food in one of the camps in Kitgum District whose name I don't remember. In the process, one rebel was shot dead, and better still there was a heavy downpour of rain. Then a friend of mine told me she was also pregnant. 'Are we still going to follow these people?' she asked, meaning the rebels. She immediately responded NO. It was then that the plans to escape started coming in. We decided to keep some distance from the main group. There was an exchange of fire between the UPDF and the LRA. We moved some distance and met two boys who asked our identity. We told them we had just escaped from the LRA. The boys then took us to a nearby (displaced) camp. The community later took us to the local councillor of the area.

Before abduction my life was very good. I used to do things together in a group with my peers. I had a great plan of becoming a nurse because I admire their work of saving life. This life is now shattered, because I cannot go back to formal education, because I have a child and I have to work for him. Life after abduction has not been easy. First of all I came back when I was pregnant. My parents welcomed me and indeed they were so happy to receive me. But the community would always point a finger at me: 'You see that girl there? She is from the bush.' After I gave birth my child was really segregated in the community by other parents. Most of these children who stigmatise are influenced by their parents. Other parents refer to my child as 'Kony'.²⁷ Sometimes they even say my children are having the mentality of the rebels.

What is so bad with the community is that you should not do certain things that even any other person who has not gone to the bush can do. For example like getting annoyed, quarrelling and many others. They start saying: 'Ineno en wic mi lum ni we, wic pa loneko', meaning 'she has that mentality of the bush, that

²⁷ Referring insultingly to Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA.

of killers'. The community uses languages that are not welcoming to our children. Children play, and sometimes they are rough like any other child whether born in captivity or not. But they always refer to my child as having cen. When sometimes I keep quiet, just reflecting on my life, some people start saying that it seems those things from the bush are coming back in my mind. There is a difference between those who were in captivity and those members of the community. The community segregates us even on issues that are obvious.

It is not easy to get into a relationship when you are from the bush. If the boy is not aware of your background you can get on well, but if the boy is aware, it's very difficult for him to accept you as a wife. Most of the men just play with girls like us. I have a man and we are still living together. He is not bad, though he does not provide for my child. He has allowed my son to live with us, which is very rare. I am very grateful to my current husband because he does not point a finger at my son and he has never referred to him as Kony. For those who came back with their spouses or who are living together with their so-called husbands, life is a bit easy for them because they can work together doing things like digging²⁸ to feed the children.

Girls get a lot of difficulties and stigmatisation compared to boys. This is because girls come back when they are either pregnant or with a child. How to keep the child you have to leave it all to God, because it is very hard, and that is the most difficult situation that child mothers from captivity are facing. Those who came back with their spouses or living together with their so-called husbands, life is a bit easy for them because they can work together doing things like digging²⁹ to feed the children.

Those child mothers who have been living in the camps, or those who dropped out of school, manage to keep their relationships going for a long time. This is because you know where the other comes from. This is not like some of us who were just allocated a man who is sometimes as older than your father. Those child mothers who are not formerly abducted have a brighter future, because even when you separate from each other the child knows the father and even their home, which is very important in Acholi culture. The child can easily point at their homes, the aunties, uncles, grandmother and so on. The man can easily give help to the child. But for some of us who came back from the bush pregnant and others with children, life is so hard because you come back and there is no-one to give assistance.

My mother in-law is so bad. She hates me so much that she cannot even eat the food that I have cooked. She tells my husband: 'Living with formerly abducted people is not easy - I told you before, now you try it yourself. There are many nice, good girls in the camp, and I cannot guess why you had to marry a woman who was in the

²⁸ I.e. performing agricultural labour.

²⁹ I.e. performing agricultural labour.

bush.’ It gives me a lot of fear because she hates me too much. She goes around telling people that she cannot waste her time taking care of my son because in future the boy will start looking for the whereabouts of his father. It makes me feel bad because I know the boy has no clan because I was raped by different men.

I did not pass through any rehabilitation centre but I must say the group³⁰ makes us happy. Many of us can afford to laugh. Group work is so good. It is the only place that we get encouragement. I really feel I need someone to help my child, because for me at least I have the group to turn to.

Monica

Monica grew up in a place called Bobi, located on the border of Gulu, Lira and Apac districts of northern Uganda. She is the sixth born in a family of 7 children. Her father had only one wife (her mother). She started primary one up to primary three in a school called St. Thomas in Minakulu sub-county, Apac district. When she was in P.3 she was abducted, that was on the 30th/11/1991. She stayed in the bush for 13 years where she was forced into a marriage with a commander. She recently gained skills training in tailoring and she sews to get an income. She also has a fish selling business that is operated by her brother. Monica gets adult literacy training at Action International Organization.

I was abducted with my three brothers, on the 30th November 1991 at around 3.00 a.m. in the morning. I tried to resist but I was beaten seriously with a panga (machete). They asked for money and after one of my brothers gave them money they decided to release my three brothers but not me. I stayed in Sudan for six years before I could come back to Uganda.

I was only 10 years old when I was abducted. They could not give me to a man immediately because I was too young. However in 1992 when I turned 11 I was given to a man who was 40 years old, I was not his only wife, he had five other women. This man is the father of my five children. I gave birth to four children while still in captivity and conceived the fifth child. Life became very hard for me, it was almost unbearable. When my husband saw my suffering he decided to release me and I stayed in the GUSCO rehabilitation centre for 3 months because I was pregnant.

I was reunited with my family and started staying with my brother. However, my brother could not support me so I had to start renting my own house with the little money I was given from GUSCO. Life was not easy. The owner of the house I was renting started complaining that my children behaved like soldiers and I had to look for another place because my children would chase away the rest of the

³⁰ I.e. the Mother-Daughter Project group

tenants. But what really made me leave was the kind of treatment the neighbours were giving my children and me. I bought new shoes for my child and they were cut, my new slippers I bought were cut, and to make it worse the new bag that I bought was cut into pieces right from inside my house. I reported the case to my brother but there was nothing much he could really do and he also advised me to leave.

I decided to collect all my things ready to go and rent elsewhere. Then I decided why should I continue to suffer, I would just go and live with my husband since he had already returned. I told my parents that I was living with my former husband from the bush because life was very hard and I could not manage it on my own. My parents accepted me reuniting with my husband. I really did not want to reunite with him but conditions forced me to do so.

He officially took bridewealth to my family this year. We are still living happily because he takes care of my children and me as well. The community talks a lot about me and my children. They like pointing fingers at me, saying we are now rich with the blood of people. They also sometimes make comments like 'Kony has made some people's daughters rich!' My children are stubborn and it's true they behave like military, hence they face a lot of stigmatisation from the community. Many parents do not want their children to associate with mine, saying they will teach their children those manners of Kony. While we were still in the bush, my elder boy asked his father a very serious question: 'Daddy, you keep on living under a tree - don't you have a home?' It was on that day that my husband started planning to release me so that I could come back home with his children, and I was even pregnant by that time.

I am so grateful and happy, for there is a big difference between me and other child mothers. This is because at least I am staying with my husband. The rest of the child mothers who have lost their husbands or whose husbands are still in captivity, have to struggle to make ends meet. There is no one to lean on when in need. If the rehabilitation centres were not supporting them, some child mothers would have run mad by now. When the food relief takes a long time to come, children move like mad people to other people's doors, begging for food to eat. It's so painful.

My being in the Mother-Daughter project has been a very good coping mechanism. It has helped me a lot and brought a lot of changes into my life. We share a lot of experiences and our matrons give us guidance on how to live with others and how to be tolerant with things that come our way. I really appreciate being in the group and the assistance rendered to us by the Mother-Daughter Project.

4 Conclusion

The case studies point to three issues of particular concern. The first is the provision of sexual and reproductive health services for young people affected by violent conflict. Given the violence and abuse that many have suffered and continue to suffer, it is critical that appropriate services are made available, and that young people are able to access these without further stigma. These services would include advice and counselling (including relationship counselling) as well as treatment for sexually transmitted illnesses, safe motherhood services, and child health services. Such a strategy would require increasing the number of structures offering reproductive health services and information to young people, as well as strengthening the capacities of health personnel to deal appropriately with abused girls and women.

The second issue is that of the children borne of sexual violence and abuse. The capacity of abused girls to accept, and maintain, to the full extent of their capacity, children born of violence against them, is one of the most striking features of the testimonies. Yet the love and commitment of the child mothers is not in itself sufficient to protect their children from the damage to their physical and emotional well-being which comes from their rejection by the rest of the community. The sheer numbers of children growing up in such circumstances provides a threat to the future recovery of the communities concerned, unless efforts are made to integrate them more effectively through education, training, counselling and support.

The third issue is about demobilization and social reintegration of women and girl ex-combatants, whose particular needs are often ignored in plans for post-conflict reconstruction. Girls who do not go through formal reintegration systems suffer from a clear disadvantage on their return home, especially those who were not fighters as such but who joined the fighters in other capacities. Yet the testimonies in this study make it clear that international policy commitments such as the Cape Town Principles are being overlooked, both in the planning of demobilization strategies and in their implementation. Given the continuing stigma, marginalisation and discrimination that these girls will face throughout their lives, it is important that service providers live up to their responsibilities and ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place. This means ensuring that the criteria for demobilization assistance drawn up in specific instances do cover women and girl ex-soldiers, regardless of the roles they played in the armed movements. It would also include developing specialized training and support programmes which take into account their specific needs for psycho-social integration and economic support, particularly institutional support for the children of child mothers. Traditionally the parents of a girl provided support for children born out of wedlock but this value is eroded today because of poverty and economic deprivation that has come as a result of

long term displacement and loss of livelihoods.

SECTION TWO

Pan African Perspectives: Lessons For Practice and Advocacy

Section two of this book explores advocacy-related themes based on the five selected testimonies from the Uganda and Burundi case studies. It is an attempt to analyse what the young people are saying and comparing their testimonies with broader policy and practice at local, national and international levels. The chapters draw on information from other sources to broaden the conceptual framework to a pan African level. This is in fulfilment of the need to use the testimonies in this book for advocacy purposes as well as to develop new knowledge to contribute to improved policy and practice in Africa and indeed internationally. This section is intended to bring out different voices and emphasis on pertinent issues arising from the case studies.

Chapter five: Young People And Armed Conflict In Africa – Policy and Practice

Introduction

In the discourse of conflict analysis relating to Africa, it is sometimes said that war is a war between generations, and that intergenerational conflict is one of the drivers of war. In this analysis, young people – and this usually refers to young men – are seen as perpetrators, rather than victims, of violence. Is this really the case, and how do young people themselves see their role in armed conflict and its impact on their lives? The literature on youth and violent conflict rarely examines the way young people are affected by conflict – the pressures on them to join up, the constraints imposed on their lives by the lack of opportunities or hope for the future, and the consequences of these impacts for the community in general and for future generations. Nor does it address the contributions which young people can and do make to peace-building and social reconstruction. In this chapter, we examine the impact of war on the young people who have contributed to the 'Restoring Peace Project', and assess whether the – relatively recent – attempts of the international community to support young people in conflict situations have made a positive difference to their lives.

'Youth' and 'Children' – some definitional problems

The United Nations General Assembly defines youth as being individuals aged between 15 and 24 years of age, and children as being under 15. However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation of African Unity 1990) both define a child as being under the age of 18. This contradiction reveals an ambiguity in the international community's approach to young adults - and especially those between the ages of 15 and 18, and reflects the wide range of variations in the way different social systems and national legislations deal with adolescence. The context of armed conflict in which high proportions of the world's 1 billion youth and children live exacerbates this ambiguity, since war often forces young people into adult roles as carers, fighters, breadwinners, sexual partners, and so on, at an age when, in other societies, they might be protected from such exposure.

Defining 'youth' as falling into the 15-24 age range is problematic for other reasons, too. Although this definition mirrors normal parlance in the West, in many non-Western cultures the social status of 'youth' may continue for much longer – or much shorter – periods than this. In many countries a person remains a 'youth' in a social sense until he or she marries and takes on family responsibilities. For a man, this may require the accumulation of sufficient wealth to found and maintain a

³¹ Defence for Children International – Canada (DCI – Canada) is the Canadian section of the Geneva-based Defence for Children International. DCI Canada is dedicated to promoting and protecting the rights of children and youth worldwide, and to fostering adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³² DCI – Canada, ACORD International, World Vision Uganda, ACORD Burundi, and Development Workshop (DW) Angola with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) from the Canada Fund for Africa.

family. It is not uncommon for men to remain unmarried into their 40s or beyond, during which time they will be regarded by their entourage as being a 'youth'. In contrast, women in many societies are expected to marry in their teens. Poverty and conflict often impose early sexual activity on them, whether they are married or not. Thus by the age of 24 many young women are already mothers of several children, and so by common definitions no longer 'youth'.

Furthermore, although the term 'youth' is gender-neutral, applying to both male and female young people, in actual usage it often refers implicitly to male youth, and, as a result, projects and legal provisions are often geared to the needs of male youth to the exclusion of females. This is a particular problem with the identification of child soldiers. As we will see below, provision for the support and demobilisation of child soldiers tends to assume that the children in question are boys. However, some studies estimate that up to 40% of child soldiers may be girls (Save the Children Fund UK 2005), indeed, the Burundi case study in the previous section of this volume presents a testimony from a girl who enlisted voluntarily at the age of 12. As has been attested elsewhere, the policy and humanitarian communities find it difficult to accept the notion of women as combatants, given the strong association of vulnerability and peaceableness with women, and aggression and territoriality with men (Carpenter 2006; El-Bushra 2007). The humanitarian community also demonstrates a confusion, which we return to below, over the definition of 'combatant'.

Taking these definitional issues into consideration, in this book we are broadly concerned with 'young people', meaning both youth and children. Where it is necessary to make a distinction between youth and children, we consider children to be those under the age of 18, and youth to be over 18. It should be noted that many of the 'child mother' respondents in this study were 'youth' at the time of the research, but had been made pregnant while still under 18. While we maintain the United Nations definition of youth as ending at age 24, we also recognise and accept that the social status of 'youth' may continue after that age.

The impact of war on youth and children

In Burundi and Uganda where the 'Restoring Peace Project' was implemented, experience showed that war has intensified structural discrimination against youth, and that it has done so in a variety of ways. Both countries are now in a post-conflict phase (although war in Uganda is not completely over), and yet young people are still facing the consequences, not only of the war itself but also of underlying inequalities and injustices towards them that still persist, often in exaggerated forms. These inequalities and injustices take a wide range of forms, most notably including gross sexual exploitation and exclusion from economic resources, and our

respondents describe these forms with appalling consistency in the two countries.

Essentially, adults (whether they are parents, employers, church leaders, neighbours, governments, or UN peace-keeping agencies) exert over young people and children the power vested in them by virtue of their superior social standing and command of resources. As minors – either in the legal or the social sense – young people are allowed little opportunity to make their own decisions or exercise an independent voice. Yet adults continue to impose heavy responsibilities on them, and indeed frequently exploit their physical vitality and sexuality in the grossest ways. To the extent that young people, in consequence, fail to conform to norms of behaviour set for them by older generations, they are then denigrated, stigmatised and further isolated, in a classic pattern of victimisation.

Uganda

Of the three countries where the 'Restoring Peace Project' took place, Uganda is at one and the same time furthest along in the process of peace consolidation and stabilisation, but also the most directly touched by violence at the present time, owing to the continuation of the rebellion in the north of the country by the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan army's response. Unlike other districts of Uganda, the northern districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader (which together form the homeland of the Acholi ethnic group) have seen little investment in infrastructure and services, leaving the north underserved by health and education facilities, roads, markets, justice and security services. Acholi young people lack opportunities for education or employment, while also suffering from the psycho-social effects of decades of violence. The result is impoverishment, lack of hope, and frustrated aspirations (Ochola 2001; Dolan 2002).

The conflict in the north – and the current peace process – is often described in age-related terms. People's longing for peace has encouraged them to re-establish the Acholi institution of chiefship, and with it, to reinstall the complementary roles of clan elders. Reinstalling the ritual powers of elders and chiefs has been seen as a necessary precursor to 'bringing our children (i.e. youth who enlisted or were abducted into the LRA) back from the bush'. Tens of thousands of children – boys and girls – are believed to have been abducted by the LRA and forced to enlist in its ranks as soldiers, or in the case of girls often as 'wives' of officers. Girls who were not abducted were often obliged to submit themselves to local men (including soldiers of the Uganda army), often under pressure from violence or poverty, and have given birth to children outside wedlock as a result. Large numbers of youth and young adults have, as a result, willingly or unwillingly, offended against Acholi codes of behaviour. Many people believe that carrying out healing and cleansing rituals is an important strategy for reconciliation.

²³ At time of writing, peace talks are continuing in Juba, southern Sudan.

The Uganda study worked with a group of 'child mothers', young women who had been sexually abused while still children (some, but by no means all, after having been abducted by the LRA) and who had been subject to gross discrimination by their families and communities as a result of becoming pregnant. The findings were that child mothers experience extreme forms of exclusion, not only from the authorities in the form of the police, courts and reception centres, but also from neighbours and family. Girls who were abducted and have returned through reception centres, girls who were abducted and went directly home, and girls who were not abducted but became pregnant in other circumstances while still under age, experience different forms of discrimination: however, certain features are common to all three categories.

The psychological consequences for the girls themselves and their children are severe and long-term, but the discrimination they face has wider repercussions as well. Arguably, a society which victimises large numbers of its young people because of events which were effectively outside their control is storing up the possibility of further social breakdown in future. Furthermore, the alienation and exclusion of the tens of thousands of children that have been born to child mothers over the last 20 years constitutes a major threat to the future stability of Acholi communities.

Burundi

In Burundi, elections held in 2005 marked the end of the UN-supervised transition, and ushered in a majority government. Burundi is now attempting to address its most critical and immediate problems, which are essentially a depressed economy, a virtually non-functioning judicial system, the threats to security posed by the slow pace of demobilisation and army reintegration, and the provision of health, education and judicial services which will restore people's faith in government. As in Angola, poor urban and rural populations are facing the results of years of neglect and destruction, as well as their effective exclusion from a political system dominated by educated elites. As in both Uganda, youth in Burundi face multiple threats to their future aspirations.

The research in Burundi focused on the situation of girls who had suffered violence as a result of the war. This included both child mothers, i.e. those who had been made pregnant as a result of sexual abuse suffered while they were still children (either while at home or after having been abducted) and girls who had joined rebel movements as fighters.

The patterns of mistrust and rejection vary. Girl ex-soldiers suffered terrible privations as child soldiers, just as boys did, and on their return home are often

rejected as dangerous criminals or exploited for their demobilisation packages. While in the armed movements, they were to some extent protected from sexual abuse from fellow soldiers by a strict military code. Most girl ex-fighters (i.e. those who carried arms) have gone through the official demobilisation process, returning home with a demobilisation package and without the stigma of pregnancy. Girls who had been abducted into rebel militia, on the other hand, were made to undertake a range of menial tasks, including providing sexual services. On their return home (generally directly to their homes and without any of the benefits of demobilisation) they and their children are often rejected and excluded, in similar ways to those described for Uganda. A third category of girls were neither enlisted nor abducted, but were forced into sexual relations through poverty, manipulation and the threat of force, by soldiers billeted nearby or by local men. Many men believe that having sexual relations with children cures AIDS and enables men to regain their youth.

The consequences of violence, rejection and extreme poverty are extremely serious. Few girls who have been through violent experiences are able to go back to school, and few projects exist for vocational training. Sexual abuse brings with it a variety of health problems, including HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as psycho-social traumas. Rejected by their families, and often with their own children to support, many are obliged to move to towns to seek petty employment, while some drift into prostitution and crime. Many girls in this position fall into resignation and depression, losing self-respect and isolating themselves from society. Families and communities feel the impact of this crisis too, as families are torn apart and communities struggle to come to terms with increasingly destitute and delinquent youth.

Young people and violent conflict

In Burundi and Uganda the crisis of youth affected by violent conflict is a serious one. Youth are caught in a vicious circle – they are denigrated, exploited and manipulated, they suffer both directly and indirectly from the violence of war, and to the extent that they respond in ways that put them at odds with adult society, adults then blame them for misbehaviour. The adults described by interviewees appear to infantilise youth: their rhetoric is one of offering protection, while the reality is that youth are exploited and deprived of their rights to jobs, health, family life, education, and property.

Respondents in this project are relatively well cared for compared to others in similar situations, since almost all the interviewees were contacted through projects or associations providing some degree of support. Most say that these projects make a critical difference to their ability to confront their futures, and urge that more such opportunities be made available for others in the same situation. Why, then,

are such opportunities so limited? And why, when the international community and national governments are so concerned with re-establishing governance and democratisation in post-conflict situations, are young people not given more encouragement to organise for themselves?

The policy framework

The international community places considerable emphasis on the vulnerability of youth and children in conflict and has created a number of initiatives to support them. In addition to several key instruments of international human rights legislation (referred to in more detail below), the UN Secretary-General has appointed a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and has set up a special UN Programme for Youth addressing youth and conflict as one of several key issues (United Nations 2007).

Children's special vulnerabilities in violent conflict came to the international community's attention during the Second World War. Article 77 of the 1949 Geneva Convention marked the first official international statement on the legal protection of children, stating that 'children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any indecent assault. The parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason.' This early document addressing the vulnerability of young people in conflict was supplemented by the Geneva Convention and its Protocols I and II in 1977, which discouraged states' use of under-18s to carry arms, and which established the legal concept of children as victims during times of war.

The 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) established children's protection from violence, abuse and exploitation as a right to be upheld even during times of armed conflict. Responsibility for upholding this right falls on parents and legal guardians, and also on states themselves, which are enjoined to implement legislative, administrative, social and educational safeguards against all forms of violence, neglect, injury or abuse, physical and mental. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (drawn up in 1990) reinforces these rights in the African context, and requires states to protect children from (amongst other things) sexual exploitation, torture and enlistment in armed forces. It commits African states to protecting the civilian population, including children, from all forms of abuse and violence during the course of hostilities, including internal hostilities and tension.

The 1990s saw a change in the nature of armed conflict with the end of the Cold War and the rise in small-scale conflicts throughout the world. Reports of 'child soldiers' became frequent during this period, challenging the image of children

as passive victims. At the same time, these examples exposed a new form of child vulnerability in violent situations. The Cape Town Principles of 1997³⁴ provided the first official definition of a 'child soldier', as:

'any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.' (UNICEF 1997:12)

As child soldiers were – and to a great extent still are – stereotyped as adolescent boys, the mention of girls in this convention is significant. It is also significant that no distinction is made in the Cape Town Principles between children carrying arms and those providing other services to armed groups: all are defined as 'child soldiers'.

Since 1997, a number of conventions and resolutions have addressed aspects of children and youth and conflict. Article 9 of the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court declares enlistment of children under age 15 to be a war crime. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2002) raised the minimum age of involvement in warfare to 18. In 1999, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) included forced labour recruitment of children under 18 in Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, thereby holding armed movements which recruit children accountable as employers, as well as accountable in humanitarian law, for youth involvement in violent conflict.

A series of United Nations Security Council Resolutions addresses young people and armed conflict on various aspects of the issue. These resolutions make it clear that children (boys and girls) are to be protected from all forms of harm, including gender-based and sexual violence, during armed conflict. They also commit the international community to ensuring that the needs of the girl child are met during armed conflict and its aftermath, that girls are included in all disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes, and that gender mainstreaming is applied to all interventions related to children and armed conflict.

UN Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict

1999: UNSCR 1261 condemns the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict with bodily harm and murder, sexual violence, displacement, abduction and recruitment. It urges parties involved in conflict to 'take special measures to protect children, in particular girls, from rape and other forms of sexual abuse and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict and to take into account the special

³⁴ The Cape Town Principles were the outcome of a symposium organised by UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, in Cape Town in April 1997. The symposium addressed the prevention of recruitment of child soldiers into armed forces in Africa, and their demobilisation and social reintegration.

needs of the girl child throughout armed conflicts and their aftermath, including in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.’(Article 10)

2000: UNSCR 1314 calls for gender mainstreaming in all policies, programmes and projects related to children and armed conflict

2001: UNSCR 1379 urges child protection (including protection from gender-based and sexual violence) be included in all UN peace-keeping missions

2004: UNSCR 1539 demands the inclusion of children, and especially girls, into every disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process, including provision of education and training to prevent re-recruitment

2005: UNSCR 1612 calls for the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism to review progress in halting the conscription of child soldiers, to monitor children’s rights abuses, and to coordinate the international community’s effort to stop the recruitment and conscription of child soldiers

A number of other international instruments, not specifically focused on children and youth, are also relevant and have served as key advocacy tools. These include:

- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, which enjoins the international community to ensure the protection of women and girls in violent conflict and their participation in peace-building and social reconstruction
- the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1986), which affirms the application to Africa of the international human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations
- the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, drawn up in 2003, commits states to protecting civilians, including women, in the event of armed conflict, ensuring that perpetrators of rape as a war crime are brought to justice, and ensuring that no child, especially girls under 18 years of age, take a direct part in hostilities and that no child is recruited as a soldier.

Gaps between policy and action

The insistence in international policy on the rights and protection of children, youth and women in wartime is clear. Yet it is equally clear from the research undertaken in this project that in reality the rights of children and young people are being ignored and abused with impunity. Chapter three in part two of this volume discusses this phenomenon from the point of view of specific areas of rights

legislation. In this chapter we attempt an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the international system.

A range of duty bearers must take responsibility for abuses of children's and young people's rights, including parents, neighbours, governments and international bodies as well as armed groups. Our case studies suggest that international instruments protecting children and young people in and after war are being ignored in three main ways.

Firstly there is the sexual abuse suffered – mainly but not exclusively by young girls – at the hands of soldiers and in some cases of other responsible adults including relatives and neighbours. Both the Burundi and Uganda case studies describe this phenomenon. This is a very direct form of abuse which is not only a clear violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, but which is also within the power of governments and the international community to prevent, or at least to mitigate, by ensuring that mechanisms are in place to pursue perpetrators and provide redress and support to the survivors. The international community and domestic legal institutions are failing effectively and purposefully to pursue the protection of young people and children from sexual abuse and sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Secondly, international legislation, as indicated above, clearly affirms that children and young people have the same economic, social and political rights as adults, and that these are the same in and after periods of conflict as in periods of stability. Yet the young people in our survey are consistently missing out on access to services and opportunities which would be regarded as routine in other circumstances. A common refrain of respondents in all three countries was the frustration and hopelessness that results when they are obliged to abandon, or forego, their education.

Discrimination against young people prevents them from exercising their rights to education and employment, and threatens their rights to family life, to political participation and to property. As described above for Angola, discrimination against youth combines with discrimination against women, different ethnic groups, etc. to create multiple forms of disadvantage for individuals. Governments are failing to identify and overcome the barriers young people face in accessing services, so that, for example, even where universal primary education is in place, certain categories of children (including, for example, girls with small children, young people who have been involved for most of their youth in armed movements, or who are living in isolated rural environments), may be unable, in practice, to take advantage of this provision. This represents a massive loss of social capital and has major implications for the future social health of conflict-affected societies.

Thirdly, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes are failing young people, and in particular young women with children. Again, this failure is not only contrary to law, but also relatively practical to redress, given the requisite political will. As the Burundi case study in this volume suggests, those responsible for managing the demobilisation process, (i.e. military commanders, either government or rebel) are often unaware of international conventions defining all girls associated with military forces as eligible for demobilisation. Indeed, the girls themselves, not having received full information about the nature of the process, may not see themselves as 'child soldiers', but rather as camp followers, and hence make no attempt to access DDR benefits and training. Some may decline to go through the process because the material benefits offered (which may include items such as food and clothing) could mark them out to their communities as being ex-combatants, and thus impede their attempts to reintegrate. Some young women may be held back from entering the DDR process by militia or rebel group leaders who see them as their 'property'.

Governments and UN bodies with statutory responsibility for humanitarian action are the principle duty bearers in upholding the rights of children and youth in situations affected by armed conflict. However, other responsible bodies, such as international and local non-government agencies, bear a share of responsibility too. This is especially the case where statutory provision is not in place, as for example in Uganda, where no formal demobilisation process has yet been set in motion. Interventions from NGOs are particularly important in combating the day-to-day discrimination faced by young people from within their communities in situations affected by armed conflict. However, both government bodies and some NGOs may suffer from the same blind spots as exist in the community at large.

For example, in Uganda, returning ex-combatants can go through a registration process under the Amnesty Act of 2000, and registration confers benefits in terms of access to NGO programmes offering support to ex-combatants. However, girls who, through choice or ignorance, fail to obtain proof of registration, may be excluded from access to these programmes. Respondents in Uganda told us repeatedly of how duty bearers in, for example, the police service, the courts, and NGOs, discriminated against them and dismissed their entitlements, because the individuals concerned were motivated by the same prejudices against child mothers that dominated their relationships with their communities. Efforts to combat this discrimination must therefore be directed simultaneously at the local, national and international levels and linkages sought between them.

The international institutional context - what needs to change?

Policy is scattered, inadequately known, and inadequately monitored: The provisions of international law as it relates to youth and children affected by conflict, summarised above, deliver a clear enough message. However, the message is diluted by being scattered through a bewildering array of conventions, charters, protocols and resolutions. Nowhere are these provisions brought out into a single, clear statement. One of the consequences of this lack of clear policy guidance is the concomitant lack of monitoring of the work of UN agencies and other key actors; no one agency is charged with ensuring that the rights of children and young people in situations of conflict are being protected. At the same time, information about what exactly these provisions are is clearly not getting through to project managers and commanders on the ground. There appear to be no mechanisms whereby those responsible for executing the international community's functions in periods of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction can be held to account.

Gender and youth perspectives are not being mainstreamed into interventions on the ground: Although these combined resolutions and other instruments mark a commitment to address the gendered nature of conflict, implementation has failed to address the different ways in which conflict impacts on men and women, boys and girls. Interventions in favour of people affected by conflict tend to overlook the special position and needs of young people and children. And interventions in favour of women in conflict-affected circumstances tend to overlook the separate needs of girls. Thus there has been a tendency toward a 'women and girls approach' in which the particular needs of girls and unmarried women are eclipsed by programmes that cater to 'women' as a single target group, notwithstanding differences in age, class, rural/urban background and so on (Kirk and Taylor n.d.). The needs of girls will continue to be overlooked, unless a 'double lens' of youth and gender analysis is applied, with a view to identifying the specificity of the needs of men, women, girls and boys (Kirk and Taylor n.d. and Zakaria 2006).

Funding deficiencies in DDR processes pushes women and children to the end of the DDR 'queue': Up to 90% of funding for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration is spent on disarming and demobilising ex-combatants, with little money left over for reintegration. Rehabilitation and reintegration is usually left to UNICEF and non-governmental organisations, and is usually under-funded. Despite a reaffirmation of the UN's commitment to rehabilitating child soldiers, there are no clear funding mechanisms for youth (Kemper 2005).

Adult attitudes to youth preclude support to youth activism: Adults have ambivalent attitudes to youth, and those adults who work in the international peace-building and humanitarian fraternity are no exception. Youth seem to be presented with

the choice of being 'saints' or 'sinners': either they are vulnerable child victims of senseless violence, or they are easily corrupted 'spoilors', who represent a possible trigger for warfare – they are either too helpless or too reckless. Stress in the international policy discourse on youth's right to protection overlooks a right that is equally important: that of participation in the peace process and in programming that will directly affect their lives. The CRC demands that all parties involved allow children to express their views and to give those views 'due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.' (Article 12(1); 2) It also states that children 'shall have the right to freedom of expression', and that this right 'shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers.' (Article 13 (1); 3). Yet children remain spoken for, rather than spoken to, in post-conflict programming.

Young women and girls are especially silent in the peace process, despite being accorded the right to participation in peace-building through UNSCR 1325, which urges member states 'to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.' (Article 1). It also urges UN member states to respect women and girls' special needs during repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction (Article 8a). These two international conventions are strong statements of young women's rights that need to be translated into action.

Conclusions

The research described in this book addresses discrimination against young people in conflict and post-conflict situations. The evidence it has collected suggests that young people do indeed experience a wide variety of forms of discrimination at the hand of adults, including those with a duty of care. The authors of discrimination against the young people described in more detail in the following chapters include virtually all the adults that they come into contact with. Parents reject their daughters who come home with illegitimate children, neighbours give a wide berth to girl ex-fighters for fear of their potential violence, employers dismiss young applicants for jobs as unreliable, courts dismiss the property claims of child mothers, UN peace-keeping missions overlook the rights of girls in international law. These adults are able to exercise this power by virtue of attitudes to youth which both infantilise and demonise them, and indeed which exploit their labour, their bodies and their property.

Discrimination against young people operates at all levels, not only within their own communities and countries, but also among international assistance providers. Despite the clear guidelines set out in international legal frameworks, governments

and international actors have failed to put these into effect with initiatives addressing the needs of young people. The problem is particularly marked in the case of young girls and child mothers, for whom very little support provision is made. Changing this situation would require a regrouping of legal prescriptions, policy frameworks and mission practices, bringing together issues of children, youth, ex-combatants, gender, protection and participation, into one overall framework. It would also require stronger coordination, monitoring and resourcing for initiatives in support of youth protection and participation. For example, the youth groups targeted by the 'Restoring Peace Project' benefited from training in research skills and were given opportunities to learn from each other and to engage in joint reflection and analysis. The inter-country project coordinated and supported the research initiative in Burundi and Uganda in which young people and adult duty bearers participated in collecting oral testimonies presented in this volume.

Chapter six: A Child Turned Combatant: A Case Of Robbed Innocence

'... They said that we kadogo should stand in front during the battles, as the bullets couldn't touch us, that they would hit those behind instead (Ex-Child Soldier in Burundi, July 2006)'

The previous chapter discussed policy framework and how young people are being discriminated against by everybody they come into contact with, including those who are supposed to implement policy. This chapter is slightly different from the previous in that it examines young people's motives for enlistment in armed groups, and the psychological impact of war on young people. The chapter also discusses children's vulnerability to enlistment because of the motives of adults and the technological advancement in weaponry. The question of why policy makers as well as domestic institutions and social structures must focus on addressing the issues and concerns of young people in Africa is addressed in the conclusion of the chapter.

Background and Overview of Conflicts in Africa

In the last two decades, the African continent has been plagued with several armed and violent conflicts. The majority of the 19 major armed conflicts reported in 17 locations worldwide, were fought in Africa (SIPRI, 2005). It is also estimated that three-quarters of all the countries in sub-Saharan Africa are recorded to have witnessed armed conflict since 1990 (Pumphey, 2003). Many of these are civil wars between parties within the same culture, society or nationality fighting against each other for the control of political power. Most of the conflicts are internal and villages and towns become battlefields, resulting in extensive damage to schools and hospitals as well as the mass movements of refugees and displaced persons. Around 8 million people have died of conflict-related causes in Africa since 1991 (Economist, 2004), about 3.3 million are refugees (Menkhaus, 2004), and another 13.5 million are internally displaced persons (Human Rights Watch, 2004). These wars target civilians and make the rural communities unsafe. The civilian death tolls jumped from 14 percent in World War I to 67 percent in World War II and today 90 percent of civilians and children are killed in wars (Randy Miller, Children of War).

Another characteristic of these wars is that they target children as young as 5 – 12 years of age. Children are not only witnesses of unspeakable carnage, many are killed and caused to kill others. Children are soft targets and are vulnerable to recruitment through abduction or they are easily manipulated by ideological propaganda encouraging them to enlist voluntarily. Children have been forced into battle with less training than adults, thus making them attractive recruits.

³⁵ A Swahili word for child soldiers

Technological advances in weaponry and the proliferation of small arms have contributed to the increase in child soldiers as their participation in battle is made easy by the use of simple and light weapons such as AK47's and M16's. An estimated 2 million children and youth have died and 1.5 million displaced as a result of armed conflict (World Youth Report 2003).

Nature of actors in conflict and participation of children

The 1990s has seen a dramatic expansion of civil wars across Africa with a corresponding expansion of child-based warfare, propelling children into the spotlight. Since 2001, the participation of child soldiers has been reported in 21 on-going or recent armed conflicts in almost every region of the world. Youth played a crucial role in armed conflict and civil unrest in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Sudan and Uganda. Child soldiers are used by armed opposition forces, although many are used by government armies. Today, as many as 300,000 children under the age of 18 serve in government forces or armed rebel groups. Some are as young as eight years old. Children under-18 have been recruited into government armed forces, paramilitaries, civil militia and a wide variety of non-state armed groups in more than 85 countries (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Children are uniquely vulnerable to military recruitment because of their emotional and physical immaturity. They are easily manipulated and can be drawn into violence that they are too young to resist or understand. Many are pressed into combat, where they may be forced to the front lines or sent into minefields ahead of older troops. Some children have been used for suicide missions or used like human shields in battlefields as stated by a young Burundian girl: '... They said that we kadogo should stand in front during the battles, as the bullets couldn't touch us, that they would hit those behind instead', (Formerly abducted child in Burundi, July 2006). ' In Uganda, the LRA deceived abducted child soldiers by telling them that the bullets would not touch them if they are smeared with shea butter.

Sometimes the armed forces drugged the children in an attempt to blind them from the atrocities children are made to commit on victims. Although this did not come out of the Uganda and Burundi case studies, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone said: "We smoked jambaa (marijuana) all the time. They told us it would ward off disease in the bush. Before a battle, they would make a shallow cut here (on the temple, beside the right eye) and put powder in, and cover it with a plaster. Afterward, I didn't see any human being having value" (Alieu, Bangura, 14)³⁶. The child soldiers are easily manipulated and encouraged to commit grievous acts, which they are often unable to comprehend. Some of them have witnessed or taken part in acts of unbelievable violence, often against their own families or

³⁶ Tom Masland (2002), Newsweek May 13, 2002.

communities.

Motivation to Participate in Conflict

Motivations for enlistment are varied and complex, some are forced, others choose to join as in Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Burundi. Some children below 15 enlisted in the rebel forces to avenge the deaths of their family members, as was the case of a young Burundian girl who witnessed her father's murder at the hands of government troops, as she stated: "Me, I really had a lot of problems. After I'd realised that there was no point in staying at home while others were fighting for the country, for peace, I decided to join them. That was how I came to enlist in that army – I was 12 years old" (Kigeme Rose was born in 1988 in Ruyigi Province, Kinyinya Commune, Burundi). This child and her father were entitled to state protection as a constitutional right. The lack of protection and betrayal when the state is also the perpetrator of violence may drive victims to seek vengeance thus continuing the cycle of violence and conflict.

In many countries the children are forcibly recruited, "press-ganged" or abducted by armed groups. A child in Uganda had this to say: "I was abducted with my three brothers, on the 30th November 1991 at around 3.00 a.m. in the morning. I tried to resist but I was beaten seriously with a panga (machete). They asked for money and after one of my brothers gave them money they decided to release my three brothers but not me. I stayed in Sudan for six years before I could come back to Uganda" (Monica, Uganda Case Study 2006).

Some children join armed groups because of economic or social pressure, or because children believe that the group will offer food or security. Some children turn to violence and conflict to satisfy their needs since they are promised payment. The social drivers such as unemployment, poverty and peer pressure are what often drives young people to join armed groups. Children are most likely to become child soldiers if they are poor, separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in a combat zone or have limited access to education. Orphans and refugees are particularly vulnerable to recruitment (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

The psychology of war and the changing role of youth in conflict

War has caused lots of destruction to young people's social networks and formation. "A child who does not play is a dying child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)³⁷". These children of war have been forcefully uprooted from familiar environments and led through distorted stages of development characterized by numerous traumatic experiences in the hands of people who do not care about them. Terburgh rightly states that:

³⁷ Cited in Brendtro & Long's "Violence Begets Violence" in JEB-P Spring, 1994

“The mind of a child that is traumatized repeatedly over an extended period of time, after having been violently disconnected from all significant family and social relationships, is a fragmented mind.... The adjustments that the child has had to make in his mind in order to cope and/or survive the reality of war situation, have caused him to adapt his behavior to less socially approved ways of handling situations.”

Children are sometimes forced to commit atrocities against their own family or neighbours. Such practices help ensure that the child is “stigmatized” and unable to return to his or her home community thus forcing them to remain in rebellion³⁸. The child is forced to consider the rebel community as their community identity because the rebels will instil fear in them that people will kill them for what they did if they returned. But the abducted children have risked death and attempted escape to look for their families and relatives. Their resilience to return to the familiar environment of love and identity is a source of hope for their re-socializing into fully functioning and accepted people in society.

Child psychologists Garbarino and Kostelny³⁹ have noted that “the human brain develops through the use that it is put”. It is no wonder that the behavior of children who have grown up in a war situation have been influenced negatively. As a result of war, some young people are alienated from the traditional lifestyles and livelihoods associated with a rural economy. For instance, when conflict in Bundibugyo district in Western Uganda came to an end, a number of young people refused to return with their parents to the rural villages and preferred life in the displaced person’s camps because of social amenities. The wars led to destruction of lives, livelihoods and social services, loss of economic opportunities and young people were victimized by widespread violence and conflict, which impacted on all dimensions of their lives. One of the common social ills is the increase in the numbers of women and child-headed households, and child-mothers.

Peace Efforts: Gaps and implications for youth

Africa and its institutions, including AU and IGAD, are increasingly engaged in conflict resolution, peace keeping and peace building efforts. Peace efforts in Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Angola are finally bearing fruit. But peace initiatives place high emphasis on political peace whilst failing to incorporate social peace and reconciliation. Social peace is about the need to rebuild relationships, restitution, compensation and reconciliation at community and national levels. Excluding the most affected persons like young people from political peace processes is disastrous to lasting peace.

Few peace treaties recognize the existence of child soldiers, or make provisions for

³⁸ The issue of stigma and rejection are discussed in depth in the Burundi and Uganda case studies.

³⁹ Children in Danger: Coping with the Consequences of Community Violence by James Garbarino, Nancy Dubrow, and Kathleen Kostelny (Paperback - Aug 28 1998)

their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Many former child soldiers do not have access to the educational programs, vocational training, family reunification, or even food and shelter that they need to successfully rejoin civilian society. As a result, many end up on the street, become involved in crime, or are drawn back into armed conflict. Few youth organizations are in place to create avenues for young people to articulate their issues. Young people are often spoken for by adults in children's organizations.

Conclusion: Why the Interest on Youth and Conflict in Africa

It is estimated that there are about 300,000 child soldiers in the world (UNICEF 2003). This estimate tells of huge numbers of young people directly affected by war as combatants. The pervasive use of children and youth in fighting forces in conflicts across the African continent is a phenomenon linking violent conflicts to the youth bulge⁴⁰. This is when 15 to 24-year-olds make up 20 per cent or more of the population. In many African countries nearly half the population is aged 5-24 (Krijn Peters et al 2003). The current trend of eliciting young people in African conflicts partially supports the arguments by Political scientist Samuel Huntington that the huge reservoir of young men aged 15-30 provides a natural pool of instability and violence (Samuel Huntington 1993). Furthermore, it is said countries in which young adults comprised more than 40 percent of the adult population were more than twice as likely as countries with lower proportions to experience an outbreak of civil conflict (Population Action International, 2007). There is correlation between youth cohorts and violence/conflict, particularly when poorly performing economies and weak governance combine with a youth bulge in the population (USAID 2005, Goldstone 1991, Fuller and Pitts 1990).

Youth has been described as a 'threat to security' (UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004). The social circumstances of poverty and unemployment are contributing factors that may lead thousands of young people to look at war as lucrative. The youth unemployment rates are generally three to five times that of adults. The armed groups have exploited young people because of these factors and have lured young people to fight for little or no payment for a promise of a better future or for the peace for their countries. Often the young people especially those in displaced persons camps are frustrated because they have dropped out of school or lack of school fees. Such young people have fallen victims of calculated predation by armed groups. Youth have the numbers, energy and devotion, factors that make them effective in the execution of violence and conflict.

The link between youth cohorts and armed conflict may explain why some young people have joined armed forces voluntarily as in the case of Burundi and Liberia.

⁴⁰ A demographic term used by Gary Fuller, director of population studies at the University of Hawaii

However, a voluntary or involuntary enlistment of young people to active military service is criminal according to the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation of African Unity 1990). The youth bulge is a crisis which many African governments must address because of youth vulnerability to enlistment into war and the potential violation of children's and human rights as a result of violent conflicts.

The legal and human rights dimension of youth participation in conflict are discussed in detail in chapter eight of this volume. The following chapter expounds the gendered participation of young people in conflict as perpetrators and their subsequent victimization. Their roles in the armed groups are determined by their genders. While the roles of boys are predominantly military in nature, the girls have borne the extra burdens of meeting the sexual demands of their captors, cooking, and forced motherhood. The horrors of sexual violence and factors of sexuality are factors in the heart of violent conflicts in Africa because sexual violence is not invented in situations of war but are a continuation of the practice in normal situations. The war escalates sexual violence against girls and women, which can be attributed to masculinities, male power and domination over female.

Chapter seven: The Terror facing women and girls in war: Contextualizing Sexual Violence in Conflict

Conceptualizing Gender within a conflict environment

The Young People and Conflict research study that has been carried out in Angola, Uganda and Burundi is an illustration of why gender is an important discourse for conflict resolution and peace building. Conflicts are gendered. The roles men and women play, the experiences they undergo and the threats they get exposed to in conflict are differentiated by the identity, prescriptions and expectations that society automatically attaches to the male or female body (Cockburn, C 1998). Further, women and men have differentiated access to resources (including power and decision-making) during conflicts, this has been recognized by the international community and highlighted in the Platform for Action while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society as well as their sex (Beijing, 1995 para 135). Therefore understanding the gendered elements of a conflict is an important dimension of understanding the overall conflict. Furthermore, the conflicts we have seen and continue to see in Africa and the world over have turned communities into war zones (see Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000) and thus the consequences of violence are increasingly experienced at the level of civilian populations with human bodies especially female bodies becoming the 'battle grounds' of these wars (see IRIN News Report 2004: Our Bodies their Battle Grounds). Thus conflict is not just about the warring parties, but about the communities, families and the women and men affected by it as well.

In many violent conflict situations security is considered a men's affair and is exclusively defined in military terms. For a long time women and girls' accounts and experiences were ignored and missing in the field of conflict resolution and peace building. The very act of absencing women and girls makes gender simultaneously absent and present, as Reimann (2002) points out, most conflict resolution scholars or practitioners do not make their gender blindness explicit, they base their work on particular understandings of gender relations, thus gender is already albeit implicitly inherent in theory and practice. This glaring marginalisation of women in conflict resolution is what resulted in the Burundi and Uganda components of the research seeking to hear young women's experiences from their own standpoint. Young people have also been a marginalised group. Most times their experiences are not considered and where they are, they are narrated by adults. This research brings out their voices and more so, the views of young women and girls who most times get marginalised in the broader gender discourse.

Oral testimony was the best method to gather the primary data from the young girls, this method allowed them to use their own words and understandings of the

chaos and destruction of the conflicts surrounding them. The oral testimony is a qualitative method that exposes lived human experience which has enabled women (and other marginalised groups such as the youth) to have a legitimate way of gathering knowledge and input their experiences in epistemological development. It enables the world to hear, see and understand an experience from a personalised account and thus learn what these girls experienced, what conflict did to them physically, psychologically, emotionally, socially and economically, because we see it from their perspective. The voices of the young people exposes the age centred and patriarchal mediation of their voices, for instance, while the world has been focusing on sexual violence against women and girls in conflict, through these testimonies we are able to see that actually, young girls are preferred targets of sexual crimes both in the fighting zones and in the IDP camps.

Framing young girls’ experiences in conflict

While the Conflict in Uganda is still on-going and there currently are peace talks being negotiated, Burundi is in a post conflict period. The research in Uganda focused specifically on child mothers while the research in Burundi focused on young girls who had a ‘bush’ experience either as fighters, forced sexual slaves, forced workers and consequently child mothers. However what is interesting to note is that the types of violence they experienced were the same and so were its consequences and impact in their lives. Studies elsewhere across the continent also show that the types of violence against women and children have a gender and age dynamic to them⁴¹. Women and girls get violated and victimized just like the men and boys but this is also done in ways attached to their femaleness. The following table based on the social exclusion analysis summarises the common issues from the testimonies from Uganda and Burundi as follows;

Indicator	Issue
Type of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual abuse/rape • Abduction • Abandonment • Forced marriages
Impact/result (Immediate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation from families • Lack of security • Trauma • Exclusion by all • Lack of alternatives/opportunities and choice • Rights violation as children and youth • Increased responsibility and vulnerability • Internalize violence

⁴¹ OCHA/IRIN (2005): Broken Dreams-Broken Bodies: Violence against women exposed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of institutional and legal support • Children born to children • Rejection • Mistrust • STDs including HIV/AIDS • Prostitution • Crime • Low self respect and depression • Family disintegration • Prejudice • Stereotyping
Impact/result (Long term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threat to stability and peace • Deepen grievances even within the same community • Ignoring the problem endangers future development by reducing human rights capability and development • Providing more fuel to the cycle of violence • Increased gender inequality and women/girls exclusion • Lack of security and increased marginalization • Failure of DDR to address girls is causing more mistrust and deepen the inequalities • More skewed power relations and hence structural inequalities • Increased poverty • Chances of balance society is meager, hence pose a hurdle to genuine participation and democratization processes
Actors /perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict parties • Army soldiers • Police • Judges • Families • Community • International Actors • Projects by NGOs • Peace process mechanisms (DDR) • Multiple/compound
Type of Exclusion Actor/Respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INGOs • UN agencies

- Civil society (HR and women groups)

Sexual Violence in times of conflict

Sexualised violence is a form of violence intentionally directed against a person's most intimate sphere and aims to demonstrate power and superiority by humiliating and debasing the person (Medica Mondiale 2005). Sexual violence, refers to any act, attempt or threat of a sexual nature that results, or is likely to result, in physical, psychological and emotional harm. Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence. Although the majority of victims/survivors are women and children, boys and men are also targets of sexual and gender-based violence especially in situations of conflict. It is inherent in the very structural inequalities and the skewed power relations that exist and are reinforced by laws, customs and traditions in our societies. Sexual violence is not a phenomenon that only emerges in conflict, sadly it is rife within most societies. Conflict only provides a platform for sexual violence to happen on a larger scale, become more systematic and conspicuous. Sexual violence crimes are systematically inflicted on women and girls in conflict, as a weapon to defeat resistance of counter armed groups, instill fear in local communities, destroy bonds within communities and families, undertake ethnic cleansing and supply combatants with sexual services amongst many other reasons. It is an experience of suffering, deprivation and discrimination (UNICEF 2006).

Some facts and accounts on sexual violence in conflict within Africa Country Reports (UNICEF 2006)

Rwanda * Of a sample of Rwandan women surveyed in 1999, 39 percent reported being raped during the 1994 genocide, and 72 percent said they knew someone who had been raped.
 * it is suspected that between 250,000 to 500,000 women were raped during the genocide
Liberia 74 percent of a random sample of 388

Liberian 74 percent of a random sample of 388 Liberian refugee women living in camps in Sierra Leone reported being sexually abused prior to being displaced from their homes in Liberia.

Democratic Republic of Congo
55 percent of women experienced sexual violence during displacement. In the Republic of Congo, approximately 2,000 women sought out medical treatment for sexual violence, 10 percent of whom reported rape-related pregnancies

Congo Brazzaville United Nations officials estimate that 5,000 women and girls

were raped in one single wave of Violence in Congo Brazzaville

Sierra Leone	Based on the outcomes of a study undertaken in 2000, researchers concluded that approximately 50,000 to 64,000 internally displaced women may have been sexually victimised during Sierra Leone's protracted armed conflict
Burundi	19 percent of 1,575 Burundian women surveyed by the United Nations Population Fund in 2004 had been raped; 40 percent had heard about or had witnessed the rape of a minor.
Sudan (Darfur)	Between October 2004 and February 2005, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) treated almost 500 rape victims in Darfur, Sudan. Since that time, incidents of rape have continued, and MSF strongly believes the number of women who have been raped is much greater than the number of those who have received medical care.

The types of sexual violence that have been reported during armed conflict and in emergency settings include rape, sexual assault, sexual slavery/bartering, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, forced prostitution, forced abortion, forced pregnancy and forced sterilization and intimate partner violence to name a few. Sexual slavery and trafficking of displaced women and girls is gaining attention, and is generally believed to be a growing problem in conflict situations. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence in armed conflict, simply by the virtue of their gender, age and status in society. Men and boys are also targets of sexual violence in such settings and may face particular problems. However women and girls are the greater number of the victims of sexual violence. Statistics show that between 40-60% of sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16⁴². The testimonies presented in this book also reveals that in the front lines of conflict, young girls are specifically preferred by the rapists who commit these crimes.

"As soon as we were separated from the men, the rebels started coming to our room and touching all the women. If they find that you are still a girl they tell you to get up and follow them. Once outside, they were asking them whether they are still girls and not yet married. If you say yes they ask you whether you are ready to accept whatever they are going to do to you. In that situation we could not say no because we were scared and full of fear. That day they raped almost all the girls including me. They slept with us the whole night, and being young, some of them were not in a position to walk the next day, but for fear of our lives we had to".
Doreen's Testimony Uganda

⁴² Refugees Magazine, UNHCR

The Perpetrators

A large majority of perpetrators are the fighting groups including law enforcement agents. In addition, peace keeping missions who serve as law enforcement agents in such fragile settings further compromise justice. High incidences of this have been reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where UN 'peace keepers' were found guilty of sexually violating women they were expected to protect and more recently in Southern Sudan where both UN and Africa Union 'peace keepers' have been reported to have sexually violated women. A study by World Vision also shows how young children are particularly targeted in Internally Displaced People's camps by immediate family members, people in their community and others known to them (World Vision 2007). These violators it seems take advantage of the state of lawlessness prevailing in conflict situations.

The State of the World's Children 1996 refers to incidences of rape of young girls by young boys. During Mozambique's conflict, young boys, who themselves had been traumatized by violence, were reported to threaten to kill or starve girls if they resisted the boys' sexual advances. The gender framework enables us to analyse the actions carried out by women and men and the power relations between the sexes. Instead of just asking what happened to the women we also can ask why the man raped, why and how he got away with it. Further to that it is important to also ask why he is not stigmatized or punished for the crime of rape. The near total impunity granted to rapists during conflict discourages many victims from reporting or attempting to begin legal action against them. Instead the victims are blamed for sexual crimes committed against them. For example the girls are often blamed for coming out in the night to ease themselves or even asked why they move in the night or why they were alone.

Sexual Violence and sexuality

Sexual violence is not a phenomenon unique to conflicts but is deeply rooted in our societies and communities in 'normal' times. High incidences of domestic violence, rape and incest are increasingly being reported in newspapers in most African cities. It is however inflamed during conflict and as highlighted above is now being used as a weapon of war. Statistics show that 1 woman is raped every 15 seconds in South Africa, in Kenya it is 1 in every 30 minutes. The youngest rape victim in Zimbabwe is a 3 day old baby girl. Thus sexual violence in war time is deeply rooted in the paradigm of 'sexuality' which is responsible for such crimes when there is no armed war. This has a lot to do with power relations and patriarchy and how women's bodies and sexuality are appropriated by the dominance of males and the subordination of women (MacFadden P 2001). The gender identities attached to males and females informs the acts of these sexual crimes. Men are raped to be

humiliated and women are raped still to humiliate the men in their communities (Nabukeera-Musoke H. 2007).

Women's sexuality remains a taboo, unspoken of, as if it does not exist. African women are confused with respect to how their identities are shaped and influenced by negative attitudes, values, customs, traditions and prejudices. Much of this is because of our cultures, religions, our past and current history of continuous economic exploitation and current global patriarchal policies. The systematic denial and unbreakable silence on sexuality and sexual related issues is a conspiracy against women as independent human beings. Due to the way we are socialised, it is still difficult for women to discuss their own bodies. Furthermore, discussing our bodies is negotiated between the public and the private. In May 2005 when the play *The Vagina Monologues*⁴³ was to be hosted in the country, the Ugandan government, for instance, banned the women of Uganda from discussing their bodies, sexuality, the sexual pleasure and/or abuse they experience. Women's sexuality remains linked to immorality. Thus even when women get raped, they will not talk about it or report it. The victim gets blamed, stigmatised and punished by society for being raped. This testimony from a rape survivor in Burundi illustrates this:

"Then the others came to where I was in the room and they raped me. There were three of them, I kept quiet about it. You see in those days, when such things happened to a girl, she would keep it a secret right at the bottom of her heart, so that no one would know what really happened. If you shared your sorrows with someone who you considered a friend, she would start laughing and making fun of you so that when you passed by everyone would point a finger at you, saying 'She was taken by the rebels' or 'She was raped by so-and-so'. That's why I said nothing to anyone. It stays inside me like a personal secret".

Conclusion

We need to break the silence on sexuality in Africa. Not only sexual violence in war or post conflict time but also in normal times. Women's sexuality is dialectically related to women's integrity and humanity. It is futile to work on women's advancement and equality without working on sexuality. Breaking the stereotyping of the victims is an important part of the social transformation we have to undertake. Operationalising international and regional standards and norms espoused by conventions and protocols on women's rights is an important step.

In most discussions of gender and conflict, gender tends to be equated with women, but we know little about male gender roles in relation to violent conflict. Male identities, the link between masculinity and violence, and the particular situation of young males have received very little attention. Men are the primary perpetrators of

⁴³ *Vagina Monologues* is a play written by American Feminist Eve Ensler that explores women's sexuality and abuse that has been going around the world creating a platform for women to talk about their sexuality.

violence in times of conflict. What makes certain groups of men perform atrocities such as sexual crimes? Peterson (2001)⁴⁴, a journalist who covered the conflicts in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda relates an eyewitness account of young militia men tearing up and eating a live chicken to hype themselves up for attacking villages in Sudan.

To erase wars and armed conflicts these questions have to be considered in order to realise that gender does not mean women's issues and that gender is central in conflicts and thus it is imperative to interrogate and understand the gendered identities or the parties involved. By beginning to challenge and probe these masculinities we may unlock key answers needed to build on efforts to stop conflicts, sexual and gender based violence or at least successfully build sustainable peace post conflict.

While shame, stigma and fear of rejection have forced many girls and women to keep silent on their experiences of rape perpetrated by the armed groups, their silence is contributing to systemic violation of their rights. The following chapter elaborates the types of crimes committed against young people in situations of conflict, especially crimes against young girls and women. These crimes are best understood from the framework of human rights and international humanitarian laws which govern the protection of civilian persons in situations of war.

⁴⁴ Peterson, S. (2001) 'Me Against My Brother: at War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda'

Chapter eight: Armed Conflict and the Law: Mates or Foes?

***“There were lots of girls who suffered violence during the war”
(Gakobwa Marie, Burundi Case Study)***

A. Introduction

This chapter evaluates the legal protection of young people during armed conflict. Experience suggests that in times of war human rights of combatants and non-combatants alike are not always respected. Indeed, the discussion in the earlier chapters affirms this position. This chapter points out some of the human rights violations that occur during war and armed conflict and examines the international legal framework for the protection of victims of armed conflict.

Generally speaking, there are two bodies of law at the international level that seek to protect young people in situations of war: human rights⁴⁵ and international humanitarian laws. International humanitarian law (or the law of armed conflict) counterparts are contained in a number of treaties⁴⁶. Collectively, this body of law sets international standards for the protection of adults and children i.e. persons below the age of 18 (article 1 of the CRC). Notably, Articles 31 and 26 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties requires treaty provisions to be interpreted in ‘good faith’.

This chapter, which is divided into three parts, examines the extent to which the promises contained in international human rights and humanitarian instruments are enjoyed on the ground. In particular it examines some of the violations that occur during war, like the prohibition relating to the use of child soldiers as well as prostitution and rape of young people in times of conflict. Also considered is the right to life that is promised to all. Furthermore, the chapter examines issues surrounding maintenance of children by parents. It is argued that there is a wide gap between the law in principle versus what is put into actual practice. The chapter concludes with the proposition that, in order to provide effective protection to young people in times of war, more is needed than the formal protection framework.

B. Forms of Violation/Gaps in the Law

Although there are several forms of violation that occur in time of conflict, this chapter will focus on the following: use of child soldiers, rape/forced prostitution, threats on the right to life and livelihood as well as the maintenance of children born of combatants. But this is not to deny the existence of other forms of violations. Rather, these violations are used as examples to examine the law in theory and practice.

⁴⁵ Key human rights treaties include: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (UDHR); International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights, 1966 (ICCPR); African (Banjul) Charter on Human & Peoples’ Rights, 1986 (Banjul Charter); Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990 (CRC); International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights, 1976 (ICESCR)

⁴⁶ Namely: Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 1949 (Fourth Geneva Convention); Protocol Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, 1977 (Protocol I); Protocol Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 1977 (Protocol II)

1. Rape and Forced Prostitution

Rape is a violation that is found both in conflict and non-conflict situations. Unlike rape, incidents of forced prostitution are less likely to occur outside of armed conflict situations than in times of war. Perhaps, this state of affairs may be explained by the breakdown of law and order that is found in many war situations. As a result, this gap is likely to create a suitable environment for the forceful engagement of young people in prostitution. Even so, incidents of rape and forced prostitution remain key challenges that need to be addressed in armed conflict situations.

In an effort to address these violations both international human rights and international humanitarian laws seek to prohibit the rape and forced prostitution of children during armed conflict and in peace time. Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires States to 'take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms' of violence. Further, under Article 34 of this treaty, States have undertaken to protect children 'from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse'. In particular, they are required to take measures to prevent:

- (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;

Similarly, the law on armed conflict prohibits sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention accords children protection from 'threats' or 'acts of violence'. It also prohibits rape and forced prostitution. A similar prohibition is contained in article 4(2) and 76 of the 1977 Protocols I and II respectively.

In a nutshell, the law in the books provides adequate protection to young people at all times. But the situation on the ground is somewhat different. As the findings of this research demonstrate, children have been exposed to the violations that international laws seek to protect. Empirical data shows that many have been sexually violated. The following narratives affirm this position:

"I was often taken into the forest by rebels, carrying their booty. Often, they kept me during the night and took me back ... at dawn. They raped me. They did that three times"(Gakobwa Marie, Burundi Case Study)

"When the war broke out I was in 6th primary. We had to live in a displaced person's camp. Where we stayed, there were lots of soldiers. At night, when we went outside, to the toilets for example, the soldiers would be waiting to rape us"

(Karondo Spes, Burundi Case Study).

This evidence suggests that it is not only rebels who sexually violate young people. Government forces are also engaged in such practices. Who then is supposed to protect these future leaders in such instances?

2. Threats to Life

Few would deny that the right to life is the most important human right. This is because without this right it is difficult to see how a person can enjoy any other human entitlement. It is for this reason that most national constitutions provide for the enjoyment of this right. International human rights laws also underscore the universality of the right to life. Starting with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) subsequent treaties like the 1967 ICCPR and, more recently, the 1984 CRC have recognized this entitlement. Article 3 of the UDHR guarantees 'everyone' the 'right to life'. Reinforcing this right, articles 6 of the ICCPR and the CRC provide that every person 'has the inherent right to life'. The ICCPR states further that this 'right shall be protected by law'. Regional treaties like the (African) Banjul Charter also offer similar guarantees. Under article 4 the right of every person to life is provided for. International human rights laws bestow a positive and negative obligation on states with respect to this entitlement. First, they have a positive obligation to promote the right to life. Additionally, they have a negative obligation to refrain from acts that would curtail the enjoyment of this right.

Let us now look at the situation on the ground. The right to life is constantly under threat in times of peace. In situations of armed conflict the threat levels are likely to increase dramatically. Nonetheless, state and non-state parties are still obligated to protect lives of those who do not take an active part in hostilities. Field data shows that this obligation is not always met. Listen to the words of Gakobwa Marie, recounting her experience:

"If a girl or a woman tried to denounce the man who raped her, [he] would kill her because it was a war situation" (Child-mother, Burundi Case Study, 2006).

This experience captures an excuse that is often put forward to justify taking away of one's life in situations of armed conflict—we are at war, so anything goes. The next example also relates to the issue of rape/forced prostitution that was addressed in section one above. According to Gakobwa Marie:

"Girls who didn't get pregnant didn't escape from sexually transmitted such as HIV/AIDS ...".

This evidence is quite troubling. They show how close young girls are to death in situations of armed conflict. This evidence demonstrates that those who are lucky to survive from being killed immediately may not be fortunate enough to escape from slow deaths arising from diseases like HIV/AIDS.

3. Child Soldiers

"[We carried] munitions, rockets and food provisions, the dead & wounded. [The soldiers said] that we kadogo should stand in front in battles, as the bullets couldn't touch us" (Gakobwa Marie, Burundi Case Study)

International human rights and humanitarian laws prohibit the use of child soldiers i.e. persons who have not attained the age of 18 years. Emphasis is placed on protecting, rather than using children as soldiers. In keeping with its general objective, the CRC requires States to undertake 'feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict'. Unlike the CRC, which focuses on States, the ambit of Protocol I is wider. It centers on State and non-State agencies. The Protocol requires parties to hostilities to protect children from 'any form of indecent assault'. Rather, they should seek to provide them with 'care' and 'aid'.

International law nominates two ages for instances where children engage in active hostilities. Article 38 of the CRC places an absolute prohibition on States from recruiting persons who are under the age of 15 years. This article requires them to 'refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces'. They are also required to 'take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained [this] age do not take a direct part in hostilities'. This article allows States to recruit into their forces children who are between 15 and 18 years. But they need to 'give priority to those who are oldest'. These provisions reiterate earlier provisions of international humanitarian law, which were set out in article 77 of the 1977 Protocol I. But, unlike the CRC, the ambit of Protocol I is wider. Article 77(2) of Protocol I provides:

The Parties to the conflict shall take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years the Parties to the conflict shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.

Other international humanitarian law treaties also accord special protection to

children during war. These include the Fourth Geneva Convention (articles 14, 17, 23, 24, 38) and Protocol II (article 4(3)).

Despite the protection sought to be granted by international law, it is notable that these rules are not always observed. Granted, in some cases children themselves volunteer to engage in active hostilities. But in a number of cases they are conscripted into armies by State and non-State agencies. The narrative/example given in this section supports this argument. This research found several instances where international law rules regarding child soldiers were breached. The experience shared by the child soldier in this section also demonstrates the risks that children are exposed to in times of war. Rather than seeking to protect children in the war theater, some use them as human shields. This experience also shows how vulnerable children are. Further, it demonstrates how some of them are easily manipulated. Aside from international human rights and humanitarian law considerations, this state of affairs is quite troubling. The long-term effect on these young people is something to think seriously about.

4. Maintenance

The family is the basic unit of any society (article 16 UDHR; article 18 Banjul Charter). It is through this institution that new members of any political community are introduced and nurtured. Generally speaking, this institution is primarily responsible for teaching children cultural and religious values as well as skills necessary to become self-supporting adults (Sarah Norton-Stall: 1994, 30). While formally recognising the important role that a family plays in any political community, international human rights laws have prescribed measures that are designed to keep this unit intact. Commencing with the 1948 UDHR, key international human rights treaties such as the 1976 ICESCR, the 1976 ICCPR and, more recently, the 1990 CRC have formally underpinned the role of family in society.

As the UDHR, these treaties recognise the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. These instruments bestow an obligation upon states as well as society in general to undertake measures that will safeguard rather than put this institution at risk. In order to safeguard this institution, international human rights law places a joint obligation on both parents for a child's upbringing. Article 18 of the CRC requires States to 'use their best endeavours' to ensure the recognition of this principle. This article further provides that 'parents or ... legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child.

Despite these guarantees the situation on the ground in times of armed conflict is troubling. This research found a number of instances where one parent failed to meet their obligations towards their child. This was particularly in instances where children were born out of rape. Indeed, this demonstrates failure of the State to ensure that both parents perform their duty. The following examples underscore

the challenges that single girls face:

“You have to do everything on your own, no one to support you, no one to help you bring the children morally, and no one to show to the children that, that is your father, grandfather and worst still not even a clan where they belong. I almost committed suicide because I could not see the end to this suffering.” (Child-mother, Uganda Case Study, 2006)

“The problem with us girls is that if someone deceives you & you get pregnant, he will abandon you immediately. [H]e won’t help you [T]he father of the child [will not] acknowledge you.

I brought these two children up myself, with no-one to help me.” (Karondo Spes, Burundi Case Study)

C. Conclusion: The Way Forward: Broad Based Approach?

“Well, I love this child whose father I don’t know, & I love him just because like the other children. I love him because it was me who gave birth to him, and to me he’s just the same as the others. And as well as that, I thank God for what He has done for me, because I think all my children are gifts which He has given me, because not everyone is able to have children.” (Child mother, Burundi Case Study 2006)

The challenges that young girls face in time of war are enormous. As the research that this book is based upon demonstrates, there is a wide gap between the law in the books and actual practice. Indeed, this study shows that legal measures are unable to offer a lasting solution to the plight of young girls who are caught up in conflict situations as well as in the post-conflict era. As such, addressing some of the challenges that have been identified in this chapter requires a broad based approach. This would entail undertaking legal and non-legal measures. It is important to study the laws in Burundi and Uganda to determine compliance to international standards as a precursor to legal undertakings to protect young girls and women’s rights in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Firstly, it is important to strengthen the rule of law, particularly in the pre-conflict era. It is apparent that the time to educate the public on human rights and humanitarian issues is when there is relative peace. Experience shows that in times of conflict the main objective of many is to save their lives. Accordingly, it is less ideal a time to impart information on how parties should conduct themselves.

In addition, considering the trauma that many young girls experience in time of armed conflict, it is crucial to provide social and psychological support in the post war period. The aim should be to rehabilitate the girls, and turn them into functional

members of society. Absent measures of this nature, it is difficult to see how this category of persons can feel welcomed into society. This may in turn significantly affect the healing process, and their reintegration into society.

Further, an African adage recommends: If you want to climb a tree, start at the bottom. Applying this advice to any conflict situation would mean that more emphasis needs to be paid to addressing the root causes of civil war and strife. Few would deny that this is the most durable solution. This research has identified the inadequacies in the law. Trying to find out why people go to war is close to treating the disease, rather than the symptoms. Approaches of this nature are also likely to promote the right to peace that article 23 of the Banjul Charter⁴⁷ recognizes. If successful, peace building measures are likely to check on possible outbreaks of conflict.

Lastly, there is need to invest in further research. Granted, it is difficult for any research to be all encompassing. In many instances, studies will have limitations. But we also need to examine the experiences of young boys in times of war. It would be interesting to compare and contrast these experiences with those of young girls in conflict zones. There is also a need to educate the young boys and the perpetrators so that they also share the responsibility and become part of the solution.

⁴⁷ The Banjul Charter was adopted by African States in 1981. It came into operation in 1986. The treaty was passed because Africans wanted to 'eradicate all forms of colonialism' (see preamble). Notably, however, it reiterates most of the well-known international human rights and duties. The Banjul Charter establishes a Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to promote and ensure that everyone on the African continent enjoys these entitlements. Even so, as this chapter demonstrates, there is still a long way to go for the promises contained in this treaty to be turned into real rights.

Chapter nine: Conclusion and lessons for advocacy

Revisiting the Research Hypothesis

The basic framework within which the 'Voices of Youth' study was conducted was the Social Exclusion Analysis (SEA). This has proved useful in understanding the realities of the lives of vulnerable young women. It enabled researchers not merely to see these realities as tragic outcomes of war, but also to analyse them as part of a broader pattern of relationships, characterized by systemic discrimination. A key factor contributing to this discrimination is the stereotyping of affected girls and young women as having infringed norms of behaviour and therefore being deserving of rejection, even though these infringements were forced on them through the violence meted out to them by others. At the root of such injustice are attitudes, values and beliefs that relegate children, young people and women to an inferior status, and which are upheld by relationships of power in society generally. These relationships are not significantly challenged by the international community intervening in conflict situations. Indeed, in spite of policy statements to the contrary, the international community effectively connives in the discrimination faced by these young women, principally by turning a blind eye to their rights and needs.

The research set out to explore four hypotheses. First, it was thought that young people experience a wide variety of forms of discrimination at the hands of adults, including those adults who have a duty of care towards them. The young women interviewed in Burundi and Uganda do indeed carry a double burden of victimisation: mistreated at a vulnerable time in their lives, and bearing the scars and long-term consequences of that mistreatment, they now face discrimination from the very people who should be offering them support in rebuilding their lives. While one encounters occasional examples of adults lending them a helping hand, discrimination is the more characteristic response, and comes from an extraordinary wide range of peers and duty bearers: parents, teachers, neighbours, friends, potential partners, local police, lawyers and other authorities, service-providing organisations, the army, peace-keeping forces, and so on.

The second hypothesis was that the power relationships which make this discrimination possible are rooted in culturally sanctioned ideologies, in which youth are, at one and the same time, both demonised and infantilised. Respondents' experiences have exposed them to things (violence, sex, living an unregulated life 'in the bush') that children are normally protected from. On their return to society they are expected to behave as adults, fending for themselves and their children with little support from others, while their labour and their property are often exploited by others. Moreover, they are seen as feckless, irresponsible and a danger

to those who come into contact with them, bringing disgrace and disaster to their communities. Yet at the same time, the fact that they have shown extraordinary capacity and resilience, have made independent decisions about their lives, and have generally taken responsibility for the children they have borne in such difficult circumstances, is consistently overlooked by adults in positions of decision-making power.

A third hypothesis was that discrimination against young people operates at all levels: within their own communities, amongst local and national institutions such as employers, schools, and the police, and amongst intervention agencies, both local and international. This too has been amply borne out by the evidence of the research, as seen through the testimonies of the girls themselves as well as interviews with those in authority. The problem is not one of policy inadequacy alone, as much of the discrimination comes directly from the girls' own communities even when policies are in place. On the other hand, those who are in positions of decision-making with regards to policies and resources have done little to influence the girls' reception in their communities.

Finally, the research predicted the absence of post-war initiatives addressing the needs of young people, and more specifically that address the needs of young girls and child mothers. This too appears to be the case. The wars in Uganda and Burundi have had massive and varied impacts on those countries' people, society and economy, while nevertheless affecting groups within the population in different ways. Reconstruction and peace-building interventions should recognise that different responses are required, as are appropriate for each category. Yet projects designed for this group are few and far between, despite evidence that the young people encountered through the 'Restoring Peace Project' respond to opportunities, where they exist, with enthusiasm and commitment. 'Restoring Peace Project' empowered young people through supporting their practical needs including livelihood skills, life skills, and building young people's capacities to exercise their civic rights. The advocacy work of the project was based on meeting practical needs at the community levels.

Research Conclusions

The case studies and the analysis chapters in this book clearly points out two facts; that there is no armed conflict without youth participation, and that young people are negatively affected by armed conflict. Their involvement in conflict is both as victims and as perpetrators. While the majority of young people are forcefully conscripted into armed groups, a few join 'voluntarily'. A child's decision to join armed groups cannot be justified and accepted as normal or legitimate. Sometimes the reasons for 'voluntary' enlistment by young people are vengeance,

the constraints imposed on their lives by the lack of opportunities, the pressures on them by adults to join up, politicization and ideological propaganda to defend national interests, and the lack of protection of civilians in armed conflicts by their governments. Experience suggests that in times of war children's rights whether they are combatants or non-combatants are not always respected or even defended. At such times a lot of attention is given to addressing deprivation through humanitarian aid and resolving the conflict, but not on defending human or children's rights.

There is a wide gap between the law in theory and actual practice especially in situations of conflict. The insistence in international policy on the rights and protection of children, youth and women in wartime is clear. Yet it is equally clear from the research undertaken in this project that in reality the rights of children and young people are ignored and abused with impunity. A range of duty bearers must take responsibility for this, including parents, neighbours, governments and international bodies as well as armed groups. Not only are young people's rights to protection, and access to services denied in times of war, but their rights to participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction which includes policy formation is equally denied. On the one hand young people are forced to participate in wars but on the other hand their interests and unique experiences and perspectives in conflict are not considered important in the public sphere and peace agreements. The young people affected by conflict ought to be part of the solutions. The largest part of the solutions to young people's problems should emerge from their own initiatives, resilience and creativity.

Another fundamental problem arising from the research is that of sexual violence against young girls. Not only are the girls forced to join armed groups but they are also violated sexually with the consequence of becoming child-mothers and contracting HIV and AIDS. Aside from the everyday survival trials for both the abducted and non-abducted child-mothers, these girls are blamed for their predicaments, their children rejected and discriminated by communities in addition to losing forever the opportunities to develop into wholesome adults. These girls bear the scars of wars because their bodies have been battlefields. Sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war with the objective of spreading terror and fear, inflicting psychological damage, disabling the enemy by destroying the bonds of family and society or even ethnic cleansing. Concerned governments should domesticate and institutionalize systems of reparation for these girls and to severely punish the perpetrators of sexual violence, whether they hold powerful positions in governments or are the rank and file in the armed forces.

Lessons from the Research

The lessons of the research are clear. It is critically important that the communities to which affected young women belong recognize, and convey to the young women concerned, that they bear no responsibility for the misfortunes that have befallen them. They must also redouble their efforts to set up effective local mechanisms which protect minors against sexual abuse, as well as providing all young people in difficulty (including, for example, orphans, rape victims, and those who have been rejected by their families) with effective, accessible, community-based support. However, governments, the international community, and civil society also need to recognize - and overcome - the inadequacies of the support they have provided up till now.

Governments could revise legal frameworks to bring them into line with international legislation and policy, and should overhaul systems for training and monitoring statutory agencies such as the police and social services. Development actors could increase investment in projects with young people in mind, ensuring their participation in the design of such projects, and ensuring equal opportunities for boys and girls. Civil society has a critical role to play in raising issues around young people affected by war, and in lobbying for their acceptance and reintegration into society, in advocating for the defence of young people's rights, and in promoting young people's own organizations.

At the same time, donors and the international community should redouble their efforts to ensure that gender equality is a priority criterion in programmes they fund, and that the benefits of these are shared equally between men and women. In particular, they have a responsibility to set up adequate monitoring mechanisms concerning gender-based violence, and to ensure compliance with existing policy, both within-country and in the international organizations themselves. Moreover, donors can exert their influence to ensure that adequate attention is given to youth in post-conflict reconstruction programmes, and that this should include enhanced strategies for providing young people (men and women) with education, training and employment opportunities.

Participation and Protection of children and youth

The modern day conflicts in Africa are becoming increasingly fought by young people. The fighting forces consist almost entirely of youth, for example the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)⁴⁸, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)⁴⁹, the MAI MAI⁵⁰ etc, yet too often, youth voices and opinions are marginalized in peace and security discourses. Young people form a great percentage of all fighting forces but they are continuously absent from national, sub-regional, regional, and

⁴⁸ The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was a rebel army that fought a failed ten-year insurrection in Sierra Leone, starting in 1991 and ending in 2002.

⁴⁹ The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), formed in 1987, is a rebel group operating mainly in northern Uganda and parts of Sudan.

⁵⁰ Mai-Mai, also known as Mayi-Mayi, is a general term referring to a broad variety of Congolese militia groups who were active in the Second Congo War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The majority of Mai Mai are active in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu

⁵¹ Betty Kaari Murungi (2007): Analysis of the legal issues arising out of the case studies from Burundi and Uganda from a human rights perspective. Paper presented at the ACORD Seminar on challenging impunity on sexual violence in times of conflict 28 March 2007 in Nairobi Kenya

international fora where peace, security and policy decisions are made. Not only must all post conflict programmes including DDR's and peace negotiations include the perspectives of youth and children at all stages. Children's and youth needs, perspectives and concerns must also be included in peace agreements that provide framework for post conflict reconstruction. Other mechanisms where youth participation and representation is absent are both transition justice mechanisms and reparation schemes. The African culture and tradition often militate against young people's right to be heard. Actors should therefore employ strategies that encourage the elders to value youth and their perspectives. Strategies such as youth funds and youth ministries have been tried in post conflict societies like Rwanda (Betty Kaari Murungi, 2007)⁵¹ but a lot of attention should be given to include the concerns and views of children and youth affected by conflicts.

Reparation requires the mobilization of political will

One of the assumptions this research investigated is that there is absence of post-war initiatives addressing the needs of young people, and more specifically that address the needs of young girls and child mothers. Experiences of girls and young women of being combatants, sex slaves, abductees, forced labourers, and experiences of forced conscription of young boys and girls by armed groups are not addressed adequately despite the clear guidelines set out in international legal frameworks. For example, reparation policies provide for repairing the harm or the loss an individual suffered as a result of violations to and destruction of the person and/or the property of the individual. Reparation is understood as being: (a) psychological – acknowledgement, satisfaction, according dignity to the person wronged; (b) social – rehabilitation, reconciliation, restitution; (c) economic – compensation, indemnification; (d) religious or moral – forgiveness, atonement, pardon; (e) political – balance of power, democracy, freedom; (f) legal – obligation, responsibility, rights, claims and justice⁵². These responsibilities are over and above services provided by non-state actors. They are the primary responsibility of the state, yet the state has failed to provide these services to the victims of violence, especially young girls who have suffered sexual violence in times of war.

There is lack of political will. Unless the relevant decision makers, at the national or international level want something to happen it won't. Gareth Evans "rightly notes that we can have the concepts right, the analysis right, the resources and capacity available, but still remain totally inert in the face of situations which seem to cry out for an active response" (Gareth Evans, 2007)⁵³. The failure by governments to implement international instruments by domesticating them into National Laws is indicative of the lack of political will by governments. The impunity that attends sexual violence in countries that are not in classical conflict provides indicators of the seriousness with which our governments treat cases of sexual violence. There is

⁵² Redress's publication on Torture Survivor's Perspectives on Reparation (TSPR) (www.redress.org), quoted in a draft workshop paper titled "Women's Rights to Reparation", by Rights and Democracy, March 2007, Nairobi, Kenya.

⁵³ Closing Keynote Address by Gareth Evans, President of the International Crisis Group, to the University of Toronto Peace and Conflict Society Conference before the Crisis Breaks: Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Preventive Diplomacy in the 21st Century, Toronto, 4 February 2007

need for actors to mobilize the political will through engaging effectively with key institutional branches of governments instead of remaining at the analysis level and lamenting the lack of political will. The experiences of young people documented in this book provide excellent arguments for mobilizing political will at local, national and international levels.

Breaking the silence on impunity for sexual violence

Article 11 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa urges States to protect asylum seeking women, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, against all forms of violence, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, and also urges them to ensure that such acts are considered war crimes, genocide and/or crimes against humanity and that their perpetrators are brought to justice before a competent criminal jurisdiction (Betty Kaari Murungi, 2007). However, lessons from these testimonies show that sexual violence of girls and women in times of conflict are treated with impunity. In this book young girls have testified in their own words naming the sexual crimes committed against them but have not received justice. Justice is often overlooked in the peace negotiations and the re-building agenda in post conflict. Little regard is given for investigating or prosecuting sexual and gender based crimes both during and after conflicts. There are sufficient laws and mechanisms for holding perpetrators of sexual crimes accountable. Human rights and women's rights activists and all those concerned about social injustice and gender injustice should hold African governments accountable for protecting victims of sexual violence and bringing to justice the perpetrators of such crimes. Regionally adopted norms and standards must be domesticated into national laws and practices and sufficient resources be allocated to enable justice to take place.

Annex 1: Key Background And Reference Material

Annex 1.1: General references

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