

EUROPEAN MASTER'S DEGREE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION 2006-2007

GIRL 'CHILD SOLDIERS' LEFT BEHIND IN SIERRA LEONE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the problematic of girls associated with armed forces or armed groups (GAAFs) and their reintegration into community after armed conflicts, focusing on their discrimination both in society and by reintegration programmes. It is divided into two main chapters. Chapter I provides a general overview of the situation GAAFs find themselves in during their time with the fighting forces and during the reintegration process. Chapter II comprises of a case study of GAAFs' reintegration in Sierra Leone. In this chapter I will examine the experiences of GAAFs during the armed conflict and their demobilisation and reintegration after the end of the armed conflict, with a specific focus on the involvement of GAAFs in the official DDR Programme, the adequacy of that Programme to address GAAFs's specific needs, problems encountered during their reintegration, the phenomenon of self-demobilisation along with an analysis of UNICEF's Girls Left Behind Project, the use of cleansing ceremonies in GAAFs' reintegration, specific issues relating to GAAFs' reintegration and an analysis of the impact of a lack of funding on their reintegration. In a final part I will show that a window of opportunity to improve gender relations has opened up in the aftermath of Sierra Leone's armed conflict after which I will analyse whether the actors involved in the reintegration of GAAFs have taken this opportunity to create more gender equality in the post-conflict society.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	=	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CAAF	=	Child Associated with Armed Forces of Armed Groups
CBR	=	Community Based Reintegration
CDF	=	Civil Defence Forces
CEDAW	=	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEIP	=	Community Education and Investment Programme
CC	=	Children's Club
CCF	=	Christian Children's Fund
COOPI	=	Cooperazione Internazionale
CRC	=	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CREPS	=	Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools
CWC	=	Child Welfare Committee
DDR	=	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FAWE	=	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGC	=	Female Genital Cutting
FGM	=	Female Genital Mutilation
GAAF	=	Girl Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups
GLB	=	Girls Left Behind
ICC	=	Interim Care Centre
IDDRS	=	Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
ILO	=	International Labour Organisation
IRC	=	International Rescue Committee
MSWGCA	=	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
NCDDR	=	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
NFEP	=	Non-Formal Education Project
NGO	=	Non Governmental Organisation
RUF	=	Revolutionary United Front
SCUK	=	Save the Children United Kingdom
Sefafu	=	Sealing the Past, Facing the Future
SLA	=	Sierra Leone Army
STD	=	Sexually Transmitted Disease

TEP	=	Training and Employment Programme
TSA	=	Transitional Subsistence Allowance
UN	=	United Nations
UNAMSIL	=	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNICEF	=	United Nations Children's Fund
US	=	United States

INTRODUCTION

The reintegration into society of girls associated with armed forces or armed groups (GAAFs) is a relatively new field of studies that still shows major gaps. Research into the issue stands for large parts still in its infancy, with all studies written in the past five years. Moreover, there exists a lack of attention on the international plane to the distinct situation GAAFs find themselves in as compared to boy ‘child soldiers’, leading them to be largely invisible during the demobilisation and reintegration process.

The recent formulation by the Special Court for Sierra Leone of its first judgements could have provided an excellent opportunity to focus attention to the dire situation GAAFs find themselves in, both within the fighting forces during the armed conflict as well as during the demobilisation and reintegration phase in its aftermath. Unfortunately, the Special Court merely acknowledges the existence of girl ‘child soldiers’ and does not go further in depth on the issue. On the contrary, when indicating which use of ‘child soldiers’ leads to a crime under its Statute, the Court sums up a wide variety of roles that are performed by ‘child soldiers’ but neglects to mention the sexual functions that were performed by the majority of GAAFs in Sierra Leone, leaving them for separate indictments under the provision against rape and other sexual offences. It moreover fails to recognise the ‘bush wife’ phenomenon as a separate function of GAAFs within the fighting forces. Both these assessments of the Court are in contravention with the definition of children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFs) given in this thesis.

Until recently, I myself had not heard of widespread use of girls by fighting forces during armed conflicts, nor of the difficulties, including discrimination, they encounter during the demobilisation and reintegration process in the aftermath of these conflicts. This lack of knowledge and the desire to fill that gap has led me to write this thesis. I chose to approach the issue through a case study of the situation in Sierra Leone since this country has recently gone through an armed conflict in which the use of CAAFs, including many girls, was a widespread practice in all fighting forces and because the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Programme organised in the aftermath of the armed conflict has been widely hailed as a best practice for the demobilisation and reintegration of CAAFs, while it at the same time has been criticised for failing girls.

When commencing my research, I formulated a triple objective that I wanted to achieve in writing this thesis. The first objective I aim to achieve is to give a comprehensive description of GAAFs' experiences – in general and in Sierra Leone in particular – both during their time with the fighting forces as well as during the demobilisation and reintegration process. While conducting preliminary research I soon discovered that the vast majority of GAAFs were left out of the official DDR Programme in Sierra Leone. This led me to include a second objective in my research, namely to analyse the reasons for this invisibility of GAAFs in the official DDR Programme and to analyse the measure in which a successful reintegration of GAAFs has been achieved by the 'unofficial' reintegration programmes established to provide a safety net for the girls that were left behind by the official Programme. In analysing the official and 'unofficial' reintegration programmes I have focused on discriminatory practices and gender bias towards girls in both programmes. A third and final objective I have set out to achieve is to analyse whether a window of opportunity exists in the aftermath of the Sierra Leonean armed conflict to improve gender relations and create more gender equality and to assess which roles the different actors have to play in this respect.

In conducting my research I was able to make a two week research trip to Sierra Leone. This trip has not only allowed me to gather a comprehensive set of documents, reports, articles and interviews in order to be able to write a detailed case study, but has also provide me with the opportunity to observe the Sierra Leonean society from up close. As a result, I have been better able to write a thesis that is based not only on theoretical knowledge gathered from the wide variety of sources that have been available to me, but of which the general framework is also based on more personal and practical experiences.

A final preliminary remark I wish to make at this point is the fact that data and statistics are not easy to come by in Sierra Leone. Moreover, the vast majority of statistics are merely estimates and almost every time I decided to use certain figures I found alternative sources that indicated (slightly) different figures. I therefore always chose the statistical information coming from the most reliable source and/or that was backed up by other reliable sources. This has to be kept in mind by the reader when viewing the statistics given in this thesis, as well as the fact that the statistics generally do not contain absolute truths, as indicated by the use of prefixes such as 'estimated'.

CHAPTER I. GIRLS ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES OR ARMED GROUPS

SECTION I. DEFINING THE NOTION: CHILD SOLDIERS OR CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES OR ARMED GROUPS?

When media, or even NGOs and United Nations specialised agencies such as UNICEF, report on the use of children in armed conflicts around the world, they often conjure up the image of young boys handling a light weapon, usually an AK-47, referring to these boys as child soldiers. While it is undoubtedly true that a large proportion of the over 250.000 children involved in armed conflicts across the globe are boys that take active part in hostilities, it is also true that an at least equally big proportion of these children perform functions that do not involve any actual fighting.¹ Moreover, estimates suggest that in some countries up to 40% of all ‘child soldiers’ are girls,² who can be used both to fight as well as to perform other functions. Children who join armed forces or armed groups or are forcibly recruited by them, perform a wide variety of roles. They are used as porters, spies, messengers or for physical labour such as in mining areas. They can be required to lay or defuse mines, to steal food in nearby villages or to perform domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. Girls are moreover often used for sexual purposes and/or obliged to become the ‘wife’ of a male member of the armed group. Therefore, referring to these children as child soldiers neglects the fact that they are required to perform a wide variety of functions and are not solely used as combatants. This may in turn lead to a lack of attention to those children associated with armed forces or groups who do not take any active part in the fighting. These children, and especially girls since they tend to be used more often for other than fighting purposes, run the risk of becoming invisible and of receiving inadequate attention when the armed conflict ends and the donor community is requested to provide funding for the programmes that are set up to demobilise the children and reintegrate them back into their community. It is therefore advisable, also from an academic point of view since it reflects the reality better, to use the

¹ United Nations, Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 7 September 2005, A/60/335, para. 5.

² United Nations, Secretary-General Study on Women, Peace and Security submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), 2002, para. 410, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf> (consulted on 17 April 2007). Here-on after: Women, Peace and Security Study.

broader term ‘children associated with armed forces or armed groups’³ (CAAFs) instead of the too narrow term ‘child soldiers’. The most elaborate and correct description of CAAF’s can be found in the Paris Principles, a set of principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups adopted at an International Conference in Paris hosted by the French government and UNICEF in February 2007 and attended by official representatives of 58 countries.⁴ The Paris Principles define a child associated with an armed force or an armed group as “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities”.⁵ Although the Paris Principles do not entail any legally binding guidelines, its definition of CAAF’s will be used in this thesis, since no legally binding international treaty or other document defines the term child soldier and since the definition in the Paris Principles offers the broadest description of CAAF’s that reflects the reality of their lives in the armed forces or groups best. The concept of CAAF’s as defined in the Paris Principles, and before that in the Cape Town Principles,⁶ is also gaining ground on the international level where it is increasingly used by the United Nations, UNICEF, the European Union and other organisations active in the reintegration of CAAF’s, such as the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.⁷

³ Armed forces are forces organised and/or controlled by the government, including the army, armed militias, paramilitary groups and civil defence forces, while armed groups refers to armed opposition groups. Armed forces and armed groups combined will further-on be referred to as fighting forces.

⁴ International Conference in Paris on children involved in armed forces and armed groups (5-6 February 2007), The Paris Principles. Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/IMG/pdf/Paris_Conference_Principles_English_31_January.pdf (consulted on 6 March 2007). Here-on after ‘Paris Principles’. This document is a review of the so-called Capetown Principles of April 1997, that defined a ‘child soldier’ as “any person under 18 years of age who is part of any 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 for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms”.

⁵ Paris Principles, p. 7.

⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷ See *e.g.* European Commission and Council of the European Union, EU concept for support to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), 14 December 2006, para. 13, available at http://www.epllo.org/documents/EU_Joint_concept_DDR.pdf (consulted on 5 June 2007); Secretary General of the United Nations, Report to the Security Council of 11 February 2000, S/2000/101; United Nations, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/framework.php> (consulted on 11 April 2007). Here-on after IDDRS.

SECTION II. THE PROHIBITION OF THE USE OF CAAFs

A. International legal standards

A wide variety of international treaties prohibits the use of CAAFs. However, large inconsistencies can be found between these instruments, both what concerns the minimum age for recruitment and the situations to which they apply. Since the aforementioned problems with these instruments have been widely documented, I will limit myself to giving a short overview of the most important provisions containing a prohibition of the use of CAAFs, analysing only a few more in depth.

Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits States from recruiting children under the age of 15 into their armed forces and requires States to take all feasible measures to ensure that children under the age of 15 do not take a direct part in hostilities.⁸ The CRC's obvious limitation is that it can only be binding on States Parties and therefore does not apply to armed opposition groups, who generally use CAAFs to a greater extent.⁹ A further shortcoming of the CRC is that it appears to differentiate between a direct participation in hostilities, which is prohibited, and an indirect participation, *e.g.* through acts of spying, carrying weapons or cooking, which seemingly remains allowed. Lastly, the CRC fails to raise the minimum age for recruitment to 18. Article 38 of the Convention is the only article that abdicates from the general protection standards of the CRC connected to the description in article 1 of a child as every human being below the age of 18. The apparent reason for this shortcoming is the fact that the Convention is based on the prohibitions on the use of CAAFs that can be found in international humanitarian law and simply incorporates them into human rights law.

Article 77 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, applicable to international armed conflicts, is the provision on which article 38 CRC is mirrored.¹⁰ It requires States to take all feasible measures to ensure that children under the age of 15 do not take a direct part in hostilities and prohibits them from recruiting these children in their armed forces. Article 4 of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions prohibits the

⁸ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, A/RES/44/25. Ratified by Sierra Leone in February 1990.

⁹ However, States remain obliged under paragraph 3 of art. 38 to take all feasible measures to ensure that children are not recruited by armed opposition groups.

¹⁰ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims in International Armed Conflicts, 8 June 1977. Ratified by Sierra Leone in 1986.

recruitment of children under the age of 15 in armed forces or groups and moreover disallows their participation in hostilities.¹¹

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts partly corrects the shortcomings of the CRC by raising the minimum age for recruitment and participation in hostilities to 18, albeit subject to a number of qualifications.¹² Articles 2 and 3 of the Protocol regulate the recruitment by States, prohibiting States Parties to forcibly recruit persons under the age of 18 into their armed forces. However, article 3 leaves open the possibility to accept voluntary recruits aged below 18. Article 1 requires States Parties to take all feasible measures to ensure that all persons below the age of 18 that are part of their armed forces do not take a direct part in hostilities. Article 4 is directed at armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of the State and provides that they should not, under any circumstances, recruit persons under the age of 18 years or use them in hostilities. States are required to take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use.

On the one hand the Optional Protocol offers a few advantages over the CRC and forms a big step forward in the prevention of the use of CAAFs. Firstly, it raises the minimum age of recruitment to 18 years, leaving only an option for voluntary recruitment into government armed forces for children under 18. Secondly, the Protocol also directs itself at armed opposition groups, although the choice of phrasing, “[a]rmed groups [...] should not”, clearly shows that the Protocol recognises that it can not bind them. On the other hand however, the Protocol suffers partly from the same disease as the CRC, since it merely requires States to take all feasible measures to ensure that children who voluntarily joined their armed forces do not take a direct part in hostilities, instead of outright prohibiting their use in any capacity in connection with hostilities.

Under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities constitutes war crimes.¹³

The Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone describes the conscripting or enlisting of children under the age of 15 into armed forces or groups or using them to actively participate in hostilities as other serious violations of international humanitarian law under its

¹¹ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 8 June 1977. Ratified by Sierra Leone in 1986.

¹² Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, 25 May 2000, A/RES/54/263, entered into force 12 February 2002. Ratified by Sierra Leone in 2002.

¹³ Article 8 (b) (XXVI) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 17 July 1998. Entered into force on 1 July 2002. Ratified by Sierra Leone on 15 September 2000.

article 4.¹⁴ It is worth noting that the Special Court for Sierra Leone has clarified that active participation in hostilities is not limited to participation in combat but that “[a]ny labour or support that gives effect to, or helps maintain, operations in a conflict constitutes active participation. Hence carrying loads for the fighting faction, finding and/or acquiring food, ammunition or equipment, acting as decoys, carrying messages, making trails or finding routes, manning checkpoints or acting as human shields are some examples of active participation as much as actual fighting and combat”.¹⁵ The Court thus goes a long way towards acknowledging the wide variety of roles performed by CAAFs, but unfortunately fails to recognise the domestic and sexual roles performed by girls as a factor that might bring them under the description of ‘child soldiers’ contained in the Statute.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child requires States Parties to take all necessary measures to ensure that no children under the age of 18 take a direct part in hostilities and prohibits them from recruiting children.¹⁶

The ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour defines a child as any person under the age of 18 and requires all States Parties to take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, under which it includes the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.¹⁷

Finally, it is worth noting that most national laws on recruitment set 18 years as the minimum age, although there are some exceptions and the provisions are more lenient when it comes to voluntary recruitment into government armed forces.¹⁸

B. The notion of childhood: international legal standards vs. African tradition

International legal standards described above generally define a child as any person below the age of 18. Based on this concept of childhood they prohibit the recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups and their use in hostilities. One can ask the legitimate question as to the source of this definition of childhood. The 18-year demarcation line seems to

¹⁴ Article 4 of the Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, 16 January 2002, <http://www.sc-sl.org/scsl-statute.html> (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁵ Special Court for Sierra Leone, Judgement of 20 June 2007 in the case of Prosecutor v. Brima, Kamara and Kanu, para. 737, <http://www.sc-sl.org/documents/SCSL-04-16-T-613.pdf> (consulted on 8 July 2007).

¹⁶ African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49. Ratified by Sierra Leone on 13 May 2002.

¹⁷ International Labour Organisation Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 17 June 1999. Entered into force 19 November 2000. Signed but not ratified by Sierra Leone.

¹⁸ Brett, 1998, p. 157.

originate from a Western concept of childhood that is based on a legal definition of a child according to which maturity is reached at a pre-defined moment in time, *i.e.* as soon as the child reaches the age of 18. However, other criteria are being used in African traditions to signal the passage of children into adulthood, begging the question whether the use of CAAFs can be legitimate under the African conceptualisation of childhood or, *vice versa*, whether African tradition should adjust to international legal standards that define a child as any person below the age of 18.

What exactly constitutes a child, and when a boy or a girl ceases to be a child and becomes an adult, is often very unclear in the African context. In Sierra Leone for instance, there exists great diversity when it comes to the concept of childhood. Under Sierra Leonean law there does not exist one age of adulthood. Instead, the definition of a child depends on the law consulted. Since Sierra Leone has ratified the CRC, it accepts the Convention's definition of a child as any person below the age of 18. However, national laws provide for a wide variety of ages indicating adulthood in one way or another. According to common law, the age of majority is 21. Under the Constitution, voting rights are given to citizens aged 18 and above. Criminal responsibility starts at the age of ten, while the main legislation on children and juvenile justice defines a child as a person under the age of 14. The draft of the Child Rights Bill that is currently under debate at the Sierra Leonean Parliament defines a child as any person below the age of 18 and could lead to a harmonisation of existing legislation.¹⁹ Under customary law there exists no fixed age of adulthood.²⁰ A variety of concepts can be found depending from one ethnic group to the other and on the purpose for which it is considered. However, a widely accepted practice in traditional societies is to perform initiation rites on boys as soon as they reach puberty, marking their entrance into adulthood. A girl child is culturally defined as a woman as soon as she gives birth to children of her own. Marriage also constitutes a step towards adulthood for girls.

An important remark that needs to be made at this point is the fact that in Sierra Leone there exists no established hierarchy between written law and customary law. The Constitution treats both laws on the same level, defining them both as "law", and merely provides that both need to be interpreted in such a manner as to bring them into conformity with the

¹⁹ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 57.

²⁰ Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 3 B, para. 64-66. Here-on-after TRC Report.

Constitution.²¹ However, as further on will be shown, the Sierra Leone Constitution itself does not provide for an adequate protection against discrimination, *inter alia* based on sex. This lack of protection combined with the absence of an established hierarchy between written law and customary law leaves Sierra Leonean women and girls vulnerable to many discriminatory customs.

Both in Western and African societies, children are considered to need protection until they reach the stage at which they can function independently as adults. However, this stage is considered to be reached at different ages in both societies. While the age until which children are deemed to need protection and until which they are therefore not yet seen as adults is set at 18 in Western societies, this is a luxury African families simply cannot afford due to the much shorter life expectancy, combined with a constant struggle against economic hardship, poverty and hunger.²² They often need the help of their children to create a more or less sustainable income. This causes African children to grow up a lot faster than in Western societies. Although one should avoid generalisation when it comes to describing African traditions, it can be noticed that in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the use of age grades is omnipresent, tradition dictates that the passage from one age grade to the next is accompanied with rites of passage, the most common of which is the initiation ritual performed on boys as soon as they reach puberty.²³ Once the ritual has taken place, boys are no longer perceived as mere children but usually only gain some of the qualities of adulthood.²⁴ This state of ambiguity as to their maturity leaves open the possibility for exploitative practices such as their recruitment as CAAFs.

The argument based on African traditions for a ‘flexible’ age for the use of child soldiers instead of a fixed one is for instance made by the defence in the AFRC-case in front of the Special Court for Sierra Leone where one of the defendants stated that the age of 15 years – the age under which conscripting, enlisting or using child soldiers is considered a serious violation of international humanitarian law by the Statute of the Special Court – is ‘arbitrary’

²¹ Articles 170 and 171 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, <http://www.statehouse-sl.org/constitution/constitution-xii.html>; <http://www.statehouse-sl.org/constitution/constitution-xiii.html> (consulted on 5 June 2007).

²² [Unknown author], Using Children in Armed Conflict: A Legitimate African Tradition?, p. 14, <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/Monographs/No32/UsingChildren.html> (consulted on 11 March 2007).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5 and 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

as “the ending of childhood [in the traditional African setting] has little to do with achieving a particular age and more to do with physical capacity to perform acts reserved for adults”.²⁵

Although one might consider a re-conceptualisation of Western notions of childhood to adjust them to the African context, in my opinion one cannot simply embrace non-Western concepts of childhood that are linked to rites of passage primarily since there exists a realistic possibility of abuse of these traditional conceptions in order to legitimate the use of CAAFs. Moreover, since African states, no matter what their tradition says, are bound by international legal standards prohibiting the recruitment and use in hostilities of children under the age of 18, the argument in favour of the use of CAAFs based upon African concepts of childhood, fails. Finally, evidence suggests that African military tradition never permitted or encouraged the use of children in combat, especially girls, and that African states are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the right to education and the ratification of international legal standards, leads to a required prolonging of childhood dependency.²⁶

SECTION III. GIRLS ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES OR ARMED GROUPS (GAAFs)

Over the past decade girls have been part of armed forces or armed groups in 55 countries and have been involved in armed conflicts in 38 of these countries.²⁷ However, the number of girls in all fighting forces is generally underestimated, mainly due to a focus on their role as ‘wives’, leading to their redefinition as ‘camp followers’ which are not considered to be part of the fighting forces, but merely associated with individual combatants, and therefore are not entitled to enter the official DDR programmes and enjoy the benefits offered by these programmes.²⁸

There are a multiplicity of reasons that lead girls to enter fighting forces. However, a broad distinction can be made between cases of ‘voluntary’ joining and compulsory recruitment.

²⁵ Special Court for Sierra Leone, Judgement of 20 June 2007 in the case of Prosecutor v. Brima, Kamara and Kanu, para. 730, <http://www.sc-sl.org/documents/SCSL-04-16-T-613.pdf> (consulted on 8 July 2007).

²⁶ [Unknown author], Using Children in Armed Conflict: A Legitimate African Tradition?, p. 16, <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/Monographs/No32/UsingChildren.html> (consulted on 11 March 2007).

²⁷ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 21.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 114. The United Nations defines a ‘camp follower’ or ‘dependant’ as “[a] civilian who depends upon a combatant for his/her livelihood. This can include friends and relatives of the combatant, such as aged men and women, non-mobilized children”. See IDDRS.

Girls have ‘voluntarily’ joined armed forces or groups for the following reasons: to respond to state or local violence, to improve their education or career options, to seek protection from abuse or problems at home, the struggle for equality, the presence of a husband, parent or sibling in the fighting force and financial gain.²⁹ One can easily question the voluntary nature of most of these reasons. For instance, when a girl sees no other option to escape the state violence in her area than to join an armed group or when she ‘decides’ to join the armed forces in order to survive the threats of poverty and hunger, how voluntary can one really call her choice? Moreover, how can one expect under-age girls to ever make a fully informed and in that sense voluntary choice to join an armed force or group? Furthermore, many reasons for joining are not considered compulsory recruitment but can hardly be called voluntary. For instance cases in which a girl is born into a fighting force, is conscripted as part of compulsory service or when she is ‘given’ to an armed group by her parents as a form of debt payment.

In the majority of cases girls are forced to join an armed force or group. Although compulsory recruitment can take many forms, such as abduction or gang-pressing,³⁰ they all involve the use of violence or the threat of violence to involve girls in fighting forces.

The stereotyped perception of GAAFs is that they are only used as sexual slaves or ‘wives’ of the combatants and hardly in any other functions. However, the reality proves that girls perform a wide variety of functions within armed forces and armed groups.³¹ They are used in many different roles that are directly or indirectly connected with the actual fighting, for instance as combatants, mine sweepers, suicide bombers, informants, messengers, intelligence officers, commanders and/or spies. Besides that, they perform functions within fighting forces that are more independent from the military action such as gathering and preparing food, looting, carrying goods or weapons, taking care of children and providing physical labour. They are moreover used in the abduction and training of other children, the looting of villages and in reconnaissance missions.³² Most or even all of these functions are also performed by boys.³³ However, the stereotype is not completely incorrect in that a distinct feature of

²⁹ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 22.

³⁰ Gang-pressing refers to a use of physical force or forced coercion to enlist girls in armed forces or armed groups and therefore holds a middle ground between abduction and recruitment.

³¹ Women, Peace and Security Study, para. 8-9; McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 24.

³² F. T. Holst-Roness, Violence against girls in Africa during armed conflicts and crises, Second International Policy Conference on the African Child: Violence Against Girls in Africa, organised by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Addis Ababa, 11-12 May 2006, p. 13.

³³ G. Machel, Report to the United Nations Secretary-General on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, 26 August 1996, A/51/306, p. 13. Here-on after Graca Machel report.

GAAFs is that they are often, although not always, used for sexual purposes, being forced to provide sexual services to the male members of their armed force or group.³⁴ Moreover, in armed groups, most girls are also assigned to a combatant or commander and thus become his 'wife'.³⁵ This phenomenon of unofficial marriages of girls to members of their armed group, is usually referred to as 'bush marriages'. The girls themselves are called 'bush wives'.³⁶ Paradoxically, being forced to become the 'wife' of one of her rebel-captors might protect a girl against sexual violence by other members of the armed group because she is seen as the private property of that one combatant.³⁷

After the armed conflict ends, or sometimes while the combat is still going on, GAAFs leave the fighting forces and face the challenge of reintegrating back into community. Many factors have an impact on the success of this reintegration, *inter alia* the nature of the fighting force they were in, the manner in which they 'joined' this force, their length of stay within the force, the role they played, the manner of return and whether they conceived children while in the fighting forces or not.³⁸ For example, when girls have spent several years within an armed force or group, they are often reported to behave in a violent, anti-social and disobedient manner upon return to their community, in violation of traditional conceptions of gender roles.³⁹

In general, girls are underrepresented in official DDR programmes, being neglected during demobilization and reintegration or at best treated in the same manner as all other 'ex-combatants' which prevents their specific needs from being addressed.⁴⁰ Only a small proportion of GAAFs go through official demobilisation and reintegration programmes. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that these programmes, at least in the past, usually target males above the age of 18 who fit the international definitions of soldiers.⁴¹ At present, guidelines to DDR programmes still sometimes require the handing over of a weapon as a general precondition for entry into the programme, both for adults and for children.⁴² Even

³⁴ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 58. However, sexual abuse of girls in fighting forces is by far not omnipresent. In certain armed groups sexual activity is prohibited such as in the New People's Army in the Philippines. See Brett, 2002, p. 8.

³⁵ Although this is not always the case. In Uganda, for instance, only half of the girls within the LRA reported serving as 'wives'. See McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 73.

³⁶ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 184.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 35.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁰ De Watteville, 2003, p. 227.

⁴¹ Women, Peace and Security Study, para. 396.

⁴² McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 114

when there is no such official requirement for children, there often exists confusion both within the officials responsible for the demobilisation of CAAFs and the boys and girls themselves, leading them to incorrectly assume that a weapon is required to be able to enter the DDR programme. This particularly affects girls because they are more often used in non-combat roles and therefore usually do not possess a weapon of their own. Another reason for the underrepresentation of GAAFs in DDR programmes is the fact that armed forces and groups conceal the use of CAAFs. Particularly governments tend to hide the use of CAAFs, and especially the abduction and sexual enslavement of girls, in their armed forces, while highlighting their use in armed opposition forces to gain a political advantage.⁴³ In order to prevent GAAFs' visibility, governments block their entrance in official reintegration programmes. Members of armed groups often consider abducted girls as their property or wife and therefore refuse relinquishing them as long as possible, also because of the fact that they can still be of value to them as maids or cooks, while boys generally no longer serve a purpose once the armed conflict ends.⁴⁴

As a result of these factors, spontaneous reintegration, or self-demobilisation, is by far the most common exit-strategy girls use to leave their fighting force and return to the community.⁴⁵ In my opinion, this adversely impacts their reintegration into community since the degree of preparation of both the girls and their family for reunification is a critical factor for successful reintegration, especially after long separations and when GAAFs have given birth to children of their own while in the fighting forces.⁴⁶

Apart from the external push-factors described above, girls often voluntarily choose to return home directly without going through official DDR programmes for fear of stigmatisation. In large parts of the world a taboo still rests on girls being part of a fighting force, especially when they have participated in combat, since this contravenes traditional conceptions of girls as docile and obedient, while the sexual abuse they suffered during their time with fighting forces causes their family and community to regard them as impure and 'unmarriageable'.⁴⁷ The latter is linked to the importance that is traditionally attached to a girl's virginity.⁴⁸ Therefore, girls choose to return home in silence in order to be able to keep

⁴³ Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁴ Women, Peace and Security Study, para. 405; Paris Principles, para. 7.23.

⁴⁵ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 34.

⁴⁶ Mazurana & McKay, 2003, p. 24.

⁴⁷ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 37; Graca Machel report p. 14. However, in some cases, such as in El Salvador, girls do not report stigmatisation by family or community due to having sexual relations and bearing children outside of marriage. See B. Verhey, 2001, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Brett, 2002, p. 8. The TRC Report states that "the virginity of a woman "belonged" to the family and constituted the honour of the family". See TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 81.

their former identity as GAAF hidden.⁴⁹ This has the advantage of avoiding community rejection due to stigmatisation, but at the same time has major disadvantages.⁵⁰ Girls who self-demobilise never go through the official DDR programme and therefore miss out on essential medical and psychosocial help that should be provided to them when they leave fighting forces. As a consequence of the sexual violence directed at GAAs within their fighting force, the majority of returning girls suffers from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and/or is infected with the HIV-virus or has AIDS.⁵¹ However, since they do not go through a rehabilitation or interim care centre, they are often not diagnosed and treated. Moreover, GAAs who self-demobilise are not eligible for many of the official reintegration programmes that are set up after armed conflicts to reintegrate demobilised CAAs. This in turn leads to the incapability of these girls to take charge of their lives and have economic prospects in the long term, since they lack the education and/or vocational training to create job opportunities for themselves. This can especially cause problems for girls who do not have relatives to return to or who have given birth during the armed conflict and therefore need to take care not only of themselves, but also of their children. It moreover explains why many girls decide that it is in their best interest to remain with their ‘bush husband’ because he might be the only person who is able to provide for them. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that girls might also choose to stay with their captor because their relationship, while started with abduction and sexual violence, is often sustained over several years and can sometimes be transformed into real family units.⁵² Therefore, in my view, it cannot be blindly assumed that girls should be separated from their ‘bush husbands’ at all costs. On the contrary, they should be consulted and counselled on the options open to them, including the question whether they wish to continue or end the relationship they were forced to engage in while in the fighting forces.⁵³

A particularly vulnerable group of GAAs are girl mothers. These are girls that have given birth while part of the armed forces or groups. During their time in fighting forces, they encounter a wide variety of problems including compulsory abortion using inappropriate techniques which may lead to the death of both the baby and its mother, an increased risk of

⁴⁹ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 36.

⁵⁰ UNIFEM, Gender-aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: a Checklist, p. 4, <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/issues/ddr/ddrenglish.pdf> (consulted on 11 May 2007). Here-on after UNIFEM DDR checklist.

⁵¹ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 62.

⁵² Women, Peace and Security Study, para. 418.

⁵³ Paris Principles, para. 7.59; IDDRS, p. 217.

death while giving birth due to unsanitary conditions and an inability to breastfeed their children thus jeopardizing the babies' health.⁵⁴ After the end of armed conflicts, girl mothers usually return home without going through official DDR programmes, like most GAAFs, but find it much harder to hide their former identity due to the physical proof of their former association with armed groups, their children, and are often stigmatized by their family and/or community because they have conceived 'rebel children'.⁵⁵ Therefore, they find little or no support both within the international community and in their own family and/or community for themselves and for their babies, causing them to often lack basic food, shelter, clothing and health care.⁵⁶ The precarious economic situation they find themselves in, having to provide not only for themselves but also for their children, combined with the insufficient capabilities to find a job, caused mainly by their lack of education and vocational training due to their time with the fighting forces, may leave these young mothers with no other choice than to engage in prostitution in order to survive.⁵⁷ Another way for these girls to survive and be socially reaccepted in the community is to marry their 'bush husband', following community customs on marriage and dispute settlement, according to which one means of redeeming sexual abuse is for the offender to marry the girl he has abused. If her 'bush husband' is accepted by her family and community, a young girl mother avoids the traditional stigma attached to unmarried mothers and the cultural fear that she is not wanted by a man,⁵⁸ thus ameliorating her chances of a successful social reintegration.

A particularly interesting issue concerning girl mothers is the difference in perception between child protection workers and the girls themselves when it comes to their state of maturity. While the former tend to treat these girls in the same way as any other child, in order to avoid 'privileging' this particular vulnerable group over others, the girls often self-identify as women and not as children, following traditions that equate motherhood with womanhood.⁵⁹ It is my estimation that this may lead to inappropriate decisions on how to best work with these girls. Child protection workers might for instance emphasise the need for

⁵⁴ S. McKay & D. Mazurana, 'Girls in Militaries, Paramilitaries and Armed Opposition Groups', *The International Conference on War-Affected Children*, Winnipeg: 10-17 September 2000, unpublished, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Even if the girls themselves are accepted, their children are often not, especially when the father is unknown. Families are also often reluctant to take in a new member since their dire economic situation would become even more stressed with the extra mouth to feed. See McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 53; TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 372.

⁵⁶ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 53.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 54; Women, Peace and Security Study, para. 415.

⁵⁸ This stigma is caused by various reasons. In the Mende tradition for instance every woman must be affiliated to a man if she is to find acceptance in the community. This insistence is rooted in the belief that a woman's prayer goes to God through a man. Consequently, a woman without a man is not considered to be "complete" by other members of the community. See TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 82.

⁵⁹ UNIFEM DDR checklist, p. 2.

education of the girl mothers while the girls themselves stress the need for a sustainable income, thus prioritising skills training in order to find a job that can supply them with enough money to provide for themselves and their children as soon as possible.

SECTION IV. DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR) PROGRAMMES AND GAAFs

DDR programmes are considered to be a crucial step on the road to sustainable peace since they form a process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking them out of military structures and helping them to reintegrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods.⁶⁰ Thus, a successful transition from war to peace becomes possible.

Recently, the United Nations has launched an initiative, entitled the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards, which provides a comprehensive set of policies, guidelines and procedures for an integrated approach on the planning, management and implementation of DDR programmes, based upon best practices drawn from experiences of various UN agencies involved in DDR.⁶¹ These IDDR Standards provide valuable insight into the contemporary conception of DDR programmes and their role in demobilising and reintegrating CAAFs.

There are three separate stages in DDR programmes, namely disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. The IDDRS define disarmament as “the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population”.

Demobilisation is described as “the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or armed groups”. When it comes to the demobilisation of CAAFs, the IDDRS clarify that all CAAFs need to be included in the process, no matter what their role within the fighting force was, and that this process is very brief, involving the removal of a child from a military or armed group as swiftly as possible.

The final stage in the DDR process, that of reintegration, is defined as “the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income.

⁶⁰ IDDRS.

⁶¹ United Nations, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <http://www.unddr.org/iddrs/framework.php> (consulted on 11 April 2007).

Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance”. In terms of reintegrating CAAFs, the IDDR Standards refer back to article 39 CRC, which states that “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote [...] social reintegration of a child victim of [...] armed conflicts”. They subsequently sum up the crucial factors in the reintegration of CAAFs. These include family reunification, medical screening and health care, schooling and/or vocational training, psychosocial support and social and community-based reintegration.

In the context of their reintegration, children are given DDR packages that differ from programme to programme.⁶² In Sierra Leone for instance, the official DDR programme provided that demobilised CAAFs were to be given either a 6 month skills training package, including a graduation start-up kit comprising everything they needed in order to start up their own business, or formal education, which included payment of tuition fees and school uniform. They were also provided with medical, psychological and other care at Interim Care Centres (ICCs) and were given an ID-card that proved their demobilisation. While not the case in Sierra Leone, in some countries, such as in Liberia, demobilised CAAFs are given a Transitional Subsistence Allowance (TSA). The payment of TSAs is problematic due to a number of reasons. Firstly because it can create feelings of injustice within communities who regard the payment of the TSA to the CAAFs as a ‘reward’ for the brutalities they have committed against the community during the armed conflict, thus negatively impacting their social reintegration.⁶³ Secondly because it may lead to manipulation and profiteering of CAAFs by the commanders of armed groups. For instance, commanders have been known to include children who were never in the fighting forces, such as their own children or those of their relatives, on demobilisation lists to gain the benefit of the TSA, while excluding actual CAAFs.⁶⁴

A particularly important characteristic of the IDDRS in light of this thesis is the fact that they recognise that DDR programmes need to be planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated in a gender-responsive manner to meet, *inter alia*, the different needs of female and male ex-

⁶² Save the Children, Girls formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through formal demobilisation: Save the Children UK’s experience in West Africa, March 2005, unpublished, p. 9.

⁶³ Secretary General of the United Nations, Report on Children and Armed Conflict, 9 February 2005, A/59/695, para. 144.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 142.

combatants. Moreover, the IDDRS take account of the fact that GAAFs perform multiple and complex roles during armed conflicts and that there are various obstacles to their participation in DDR programmes once armed conflicts end.⁶⁵ They consequently offer recommendations to promote the inclusion of GAAFs in DDR programmes such as discarding weapon possession as a criterion for eligibility in DDR programmes, since this has often led to the exclusion of girls.⁶⁶ When it comes to the reintegration of GAAFs, the IDDRS promote gender equality by expressing the fact that specific interventions are necessary to make the access of women and girls to social and economic reintegration opportunities on an equal basis with men and boys easier.⁶⁷

The European Union has recently also developed a specific approach to DDR, in which it on the one hand emphasises the importance of a gradual shift from a focus on the needs of the individual ex-combatant to those of the wider community and on the other hand recognises that DDR programmes should be gender-sensitive, in that they should pay special attention to girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage and should focus more on specific needs of GAAFs in general.⁶⁸

SECTION V. DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF REINTEGRATION

As noted above, article 39 CRC requires States to take measures directed at the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, which includes CAAs. As can be noticed from the aforementioned definition of reintegration given by the UN, the notion of reintegration is very broad and it is therefore not always clear what is precisely meant by it.⁶⁹ However, it is crucial to grasp the exact meaning of the concept in order to be able to analyse the reintegration of GAAFs and the problems associated with this process in the next chapter. This section will therefore provide an overview of what different actors active in the field of DDR programmes

⁶⁵ IDDRS, p. 194.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶⁸ European Commission and Council of the European Union, EU Concept for Support to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), 14 December 2006, as found on http://www.eplo.org/documents/EU_Joint_concept_DDR.pdf (consulted on 5 June 2007), paras. 3, 14, 16 and 48.

⁶⁹ A clear example of a meaningless definition of reintegration is the one used by the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Sierra Leone, that describes reintegration as “assistance measures provided to former combatants that would increase the potential for their economic and social reintegration into society”. See TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 542

understand under the term reintegration, combined with the views and expectations of CAAFs and GAAFs themselves.⁷⁰

However, a preliminary question that needs to be asked is: reintegration into what?⁷¹ Reports, articles and other documents on CAAFs generally speak about the need to reintegrate these children back into community at the end of armed conflicts. But, on the one hand, many of these children, having grown up in fighting forces amidst the terrible realities of armed conflict, have never known what civilian life is like. Consequently, a variety of questions need to be asked. How are they expected to reintegrate into a life that is unknown to them?⁷² Moreover, can one really speak about reintegration in these cases? Is it not more appropriate to describe the process as integration or socialisation? On the other hand it is not only children associated with fighting forces that have suffered the terrible consequences of war. The communities and society at large have suffered as well. Roads, schools, houses, hospitals, etc. are destroyed. The economy of a country is usually left in ruins after war and needs to be built up from scratch. Many people, including CAAFs' parents or close relatives, die during the armed conflict as direct or indirect victims of the fighting. Community ties are broken and traditionally strong supporting mechanisms organised by these communities might not be able to provide the assistance demobilised CAAFs require.

When describing the notion of reintegration, it must foremost be noted that reintegration is not a single event, but a complex process designed to offer former members of fighting forces a support programme that gives them a viable alternative to military life and that requires the sustained allocation of resources.⁷³ This process of reintegration is usually divided into two components, economic and social reintegration. Economic reintegration requires measures both on the short and on the long term. On the short term the provision of benefits such as education, vocational training and a demobilisation package containing food, clothing, sanitary products, etc., is crucial in order to grant CAAFs with the immediate necessities for their survival. On the long term more sustainable measures need to be taken, mainly in order to provide for income generating activities or education for all former members of fighting

⁷⁰ Sources used are: Women, Peace and Security Study, paras. 413-415; Williamson, 2006; UNICEF, 'Case Study of Children from the Fighting Forces in Sierra Leone', Document prepared for *The International Conference on War-Affected Children*, Winnipeg: 10-17 September 2000;

⁷¹ Peters, 2007, pp. 3-4.

⁷² Heykoop, 2006, p. 10.

⁷³ Save the Children UK, No Place Like Home? Children's Experiences of Reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone, p. 29, http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/suck_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/1958_No_Place_Like_Home_Oct04.pdf (consulted on 23 March 2007); IDDRS, p. 219.

forces, including CAAFs. These measures include the establishment of credit programmes, such as micro-credit schemes for women, following local traditions; land reform and land allocation; further professional vocational training; continued education; the creation of jobs through public works; and the rebuilding of an economy that can ideally in the long term offer jobs to all members of society. A major obstacle I recognised on the road to economic reintegration is the fact that local communities are usually impoverished due to years of armed conflict and therefore do not have the means to assist in the economic reintegration of all ex-combatants. Combined with traditional conceptions of the role of women, this particularly creates difficulties for the reintegration of GAAFs and women ex-combatants, who generally receive limited skills training and have only few job opportunities, especially in the formal sector. This can have serious implications for GAAFs, in particular for girl mothers, since they have dependants of their own to take care of, and is one of the factors that may contribute to these girls turning to prostitution for survival.

Social reintegration has been described in a variety of ways. The easiest and most comprehensive manner of defining the notion is to focus on the wide diversity of aspects it entails. Social reintegration includes, *inter alia*, the sensitisation of communities to assist in reconciliation in order to integrate ex-combatants back into these communities; family reunification for CAAFs in order for them to feel accepted back into a loving and caring environment as opposed to the hardships of war; physical and psychosocial care, in particular for specifically vulnerable groups such as GAAFs who have been sexually abused, pregnant GAAFs and girl mothers.

Since this thesis focuses on GAAFs and their reintegration into community, to me it is valuable to offer some insight into the manner in which girls (and boys) formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups define reintegration. Research shows that CAAFs have identified a multiplicity of factors as essential for successful reintegration. The factors identified include reunification with family and community; being loved and cared for by their families; being accepted by and actively involved in the community; living in peace and unity with others; having basic needs such as food, shelter and water, met; and being able to make productive contributions to society through skills training, school or work.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Save the Children UK, No Place Like Home? Children's Experiences of Reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone, p. 5
http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/suck_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/1958_No_Place_Like_Home_Oct04.pdf
(consulted on 23 March 2007)

To conclude, the outcome of an inter-agency workshop in 2006 on the reintegration of CAAFs according to me offers the most accurate analysis of factors leading towards successful reintegration.⁷⁵ The four main indicators described are: (i) acceptance of children by their family and community which entails inclusion, belonging and support; (ii) non-discriminatory access to basic services, such as health provisions; (iii) re-building self-esteem of children, through reconciliation, participation in communities and taking advantage of their strengthened resilience and (iv) opportunities to access safe and sustainable economic opportunities.

⁷⁵ [Unknown author], Meeting the Challenges, February 2006, proceedings of the Inter-agency workshop on the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict in West and Central Africa 7-10 February, 2006, Saly, Senegal; as found in Heykoop, 2006, p. 13.

CHAPTER II. CASE STUDY OF GIRLS ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES OR ARMED GROUPS IN SIERRA LEONE AND THEIR REINTEGRATION INTO COMMUNITY

SECTION I. BACKGROUND: DISCRIMINATION OF GIRLS IN SIERRA LEONE PRIOR TO THE ARMED CONFLICT

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”.⁷⁶ States Parties to the Convention are required to achieve the principle of gender equality through legislation and other appropriate means and are to refrain from engaging in any act or practice that discriminates against women.⁷⁷ They are moreover obliged to take all appropriate measures to modify or abolish all existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against women.⁷⁸ Furthermore, States are required to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on stereotyped roles for men and women.⁷⁹ Finally, States are requested to take all appropriate measures in all fields, including the political, economical, social and cultural field, to ensure the full development and advancement of women in order to achieve gender equality in the exercise and enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms.⁸⁰ In particular, States are required to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of education by providing them with the same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as

⁷⁶ Art. 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm> (consulted on 5 June 2007). Here-on after CEDAW. Ratified by Sierra Leone on 11 November 1988.

⁷⁷ Art. 2 CEDAW.

⁷⁸ Art. 2 (f) CEDAW.

⁷⁹ Art. 5 CEDAW.

⁸⁰ Art. 3 CEDAW.

well as in urban areas.⁸¹ States should furthermore reduce female student drop-out rates and organise programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely.⁸² States are moreover obliged to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage, *inter alia*, by ensuring equal rights to choose a spouse freely and to enter into marriage only freely and with full consent.⁸³ The latter brings with it the fact that the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage.⁸⁴

Since Sierra Leone has ratified CEDAW in 1988 it is since then bound by all the provisions of the Convention cited above.⁸⁵ However, in practice traditional conceptions of the role of girls in Sierra Leonean society did not follow principles of gender equality. Girls were viewed as inferior to and less important than boys. This has led to a deep seeded discrimination of girls that was apparent in many fields of society.

Sierra Leone's 1991 constitution prohibits the promulgation of discriminatory laws in its article 27. However, this provision is fundamentally flawed since it excludes areas such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, which are the areas that affect women's and girls' lives most, from its field of application.⁸⁶ Especially customary laws, to which 85 % of the population is subject, are highly discriminatory of girls and women, precluding them from attaining gender equality.

Firstly, customary laws on sexual abuse are highly discriminatory against girls. Under Sierra Leonean customary law the consent of a girl to sex is not required.⁸⁷ Girls who have become the victim of sexual abuse, this includes GAAFs who have been raped during their time with the fighting forces, do not have any say in what happens to the perpetrator. Customary rules for the redress of rape prescribe direct settlement of the issue between the family of the victim and the perpetrator, leading to a culture of impunity.⁸⁸ The perpetrator is requested to pay

⁸¹ Art. 10 CEDAW.

⁸² Art. 10 (f) CEDAW.

⁸³ Art. 16, 1 CEDAW

⁸⁴ Art. 16, 2 CEDAW.

⁸⁵ Sierra Leone has not made any reservations on CEDAW.

⁸⁶ Article 27 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, <http://www.statehouse-sl.org/constitution/constitution-iii.html> (consulted on 5 June 2007).

⁸⁷ TRC Report, Volume 3 A, para. 335.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 336.

monetary compensation or compelled to enter into marriage with the underage girl.⁸⁹ The latter customary ‘solution’ to a case of sexual abuse of girls is to me utterly unacceptable since it clearly contravenes the right for girls/women to choose their own spouse as guaranteed by CEDAW and the provision in CEDAW that opposes early marriages.

In my opinion, it is highly probable that these and other traditional practices and conceptions on the role of girls, viewing them more as an object that can be owned than as a subject of individual human rights, has contributed to some extent to the mass abduction of girls by fighting forces in order to use them as sex slaves and ‘bush wives’. Some of the armed groups simply did not consider it an aberration to rape girls or use them as sex slaves.⁹⁰

Secondly, prior to the armed conflict, there was a historic prevalence of early and forced marriage of girls in Sierra Leone, with legislation not providing a nation-wide applicable minimum age for marriage nor a legal preclusion of the custom of early marriage.⁹¹ Moreover, under customary law, there was no minimum age for marriage.⁹² Traditionally, girls were viewed by some ethnic groups to be eligible for marriage as soon as they had reached puberty, *i.e.* when they started developing breasts and started menstruating, and had been initiated in the secret societies.⁹³ Consequently, girls as young as twelve were forced to engage in early marriage. This practice was especially prevalent in rural areas where ‘mature’ girls were practically obligated to get married.⁹⁴ Moreover, under Islamic and customary law, even prepubescent girls below the age of ten may be given in marriage.⁹⁵

Thirdly, Female Genital Cutting (FGC) was widespread in Sierra Leone, with nearly all ethnical groups practicing some form of FGC.⁹⁶ Estimates suggest that more than 90 % of all Sierra Leonean women underwent FGC prior to the armed conflict.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 85.

⁹¹ Ibid., para. 41 and 65.

⁹² Melchiorre, 1999, p. 97.

⁹³ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 84; Interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.

⁹⁴ Brock, C. & Cammish, N., Factors affecting female participation in seven developing countries, 1997, p. 117, <http://www2.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/facparfemedpaper09.pdf> (consulted on 10 April 2007).

⁹⁵ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 98.

⁹⁶ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report of Sierra Leone, 14 December 2006, CEDAW/C/SLE/5, para. 12.5.5.

⁹⁷ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 24.

Fourthly, culture and tradition as they existed before the armed conflict have to a large extent contributed to the lack of education for girls by preventing them from accessing education.⁹⁸ Especially in rural areas in Sierra Leone, where poverty was extremely high even before the war due to the economic crisis the country was going through, preference was usually given to the education of boys over girls.⁹⁹ Girls were kept at home to assist in domestic chores, which was also a preparation for their (early) marriage.¹⁰⁰ This traditional favouritism of males has contributed greatly to the vast disparity in men and women's education before the armed conflict, with the latest census before the war indicating that 91, 5 % of Sierra Leonean females over the age of five were illiterate.¹⁰¹ Their lack of education and high illiteracy level also affected girls and women in other domains, such as the political sphere, where women were traditionally ignored and their issues relegated to the back.¹⁰² Their lack of education moreover precluded women from attaining adequate job opportunities, with the vast majority of them being engaged in low-income activities such as petty trading prior to the war.¹⁰³

Another widespread practice in Sierra Leone dictates that pregnant girls or girls that get married are expected to quit school.¹⁰⁴ This practice clearly violates the right to equal access to education for all boys and girls, as enshrined in art. 10 CEDAW.

All these factors have led to significantly lower percentages of girls enrolled in primary education, compared to boys. Prior to the armed conflict an estimated 29, 6 % of girls in the five to nine age category were enrolled in primary schools, compared to 42, 6 % of boys in the same age category, while only 15, 6 % of girls between ten and fourteen were enrolled in secondary school, compared to 25, 7 % of boys.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 35.

⁹⁹ Ibid. This practice is rationalised by the belief that families, by educating their men they will support their own kin, whereas by educating their women they will benefit the families those women marry into. See Ibid., para. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., para. 40.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Combined initial, second, third, fourth and fifth periodic report of Sierra Leone, 14 December 2006, CEDAW/C/SLE/5, para. 4.1.2.

¹⁰² TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 42.

¹⁰³ Ibid., para. 70.

¹⁰⁴ UNICEF, The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF Response, February 2005, p. 23, <http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Impact-final.pdf> (consulted on 6 March 2007).

¹⁰⁵ C. Brock & N. Cammish, Factors affecting female participation in seven developing countries, 1997, p. 119, <http://www2.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/facparfemedpaper09.pdf> (consulted on 10 April 2007).

SECTION II. INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone has recently gone through an armed conflict that started with the incursion of a relatively small number of rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) into Sierra Leone from the neighbouring country Liberia in 1991, but rapidly grew into a full-blown civil war that only came to a definitive end in 2002, with the signing of the Abuja Peace Agreement. The decade-long armed conflict in Sierra Leone is renowned for the many atrocities committed by both sides, including mass killing, mutilation, rape and amputation. The role diamonds played in fuelling the armed conflict has also been well documented. Moreover, all parties involved in the conflict, the government Sierra Leone Army (SLA), the government-sponsored Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the rebel-led RUF and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), made extensive use of children in their fighting forces. One of the fighting forces, the Civil Defence Forces, requires some additional explanation. The CDF formed a network of militias, supported and supplied by the government, who had transformed traditional hunters' societies, of which the most well known were the Kamajors,¹⁰⁶ into fighting forces in order to defend local communities against both the RUF and a SLA that had started attacking, burning and looting villages as well.¹⁰⁷ Although they laid claim on still being traditional hunters, the overwhelming majority of their members were in reality disaffected youths who were often forcefully recruited into the CDF through ceremonies of 'initiation'.¹⁰⁸

Most of the children associated with armed forces or armed groups were abducted by these fighting forces. Especially the RUF relied heavily on mass abductions of children in order to replenish their ranks. One of the most shocking and brutal episodes of the civil war, the incursion of Freetown in 1999 by the AFRC and the RUF, led to the killing of at least 5.000 people and the abduction of nearly as many children by both armed groups on their retreat.¹⁰⁹ Estimates suggest that up to 60% of children abducted during the Freetown incursion were girls.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ However, some CDF, such as the Gbhetis, were newly created and did not have a history as a traditional group of hunters.

¹⁰⁷ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 347.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF, *The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002*, June 2005, p. 1-2.

¹¹⁰ Secretary General of the United Nations, *Report on Children and Armed Conflict*, 10 November 2003, A/58/546, p. 8.

Moreover, as Table 1 shows, nearly 30% of all members of the fighting forces during the armed conflict in Sierra Leone were children, with girls amounting up to 25% of all CAAFs.

Table 1. Estimated number of CAAFs and GAAFs used during the armed conflict in Sierra Leone.

Fighting force	Total members	CAAFs	GAAFs
RUF	45.000	22.500	7.500
AFRC	10.000	5.000	1.667
SLA	14.000	3.500	1.167
CDF	68.865	17.216	1.722
Total	137.685	48.216	12.056

Source: McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 92.

This chapter will focus on girls associated with armed forces or armed groups in Sierra Leone and their reintegration into community. In section III girls' experiences within the various fighting forces will be discussed, describing their entry, their use and the roles they performed. Section IV will analyse the demobilisation and reintegration of GAAFs in Sierra Leone, starting out with a brief sketch of the DDR programme and subsequently discussing GAAFs' involvement in the official DDR programme; their specific needs; the problems they encounter during reintegration; the phenomenon of self-demobilisation, including an analysis of UNICEF's Girls Left Behind Project; the use of traditional rituals in assisting GAAFs reintegration; an overview of some specific issues, namely STDs and HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and prostitution; and an analysis of lack of funding as a major stumbling block in GAAFs' reintegration.

SECTION III. EXPERIENCES OF GAAFs DURING THE ARMED CONFLICT IN SIERRA LEONE

A unique feature of the armed conflict in Sierra Leone is the forcible recruitment of children, including girls, by all fighting forces.¹¹¹ Although the vast majority of GAAFs were abducted

¹¹¹ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 126.

or in another way forcibly recruited into the fighting forces in Sierra Leone,¹¹² some girls reported having voluntarily joined armed forces, such as the CDF, in order to protect themselves and/or their close relatives against atrocities committed by other fighting forces, such as the RUF.¹¹³ A particular form of recruitment of children took place within the CDF when the Paramount Chief of a community supported a specific unit of the CDF.¹¹⁴ This would lead to a requirement for all families in the community to contribute a member, on occasion a girl, to that unit.

Studies indicate that GAAFs' primary roles within all fighting forces were fighters and cooks, followed by domestic labourers, porters, 'wives', sex slaves and food producers.¹¹⁵ They usually also performed secondary roles which could be any of the aforementioned roles, but also messengers, spies, nurses, carers for young children within the force or labourers in diamond mines.¹¹⁶

Younger girls were usually not used as fighters immediately but began their 'career' within the fighting forces as porters and domestic labourers, to later on 'graduate' and become sex slaves and combatants.¹¹⁷ However, sources indicate that there were many exceptions to this rule, with reports of girls as young as four being abducted and forced into sexual slavery.¹¹⁸ Older GAAFs were sexually abused in all fighting forces.¹¹⁹ For many girls abducted by the rebel forces, the first introduction to bush life was rape.¹²⁰ Girls were often treated as mere sex objects, being moved around from one combatant to another and forced to have sex with whoever demanded it whenever it was demanded.¹²¹ They would consequently be raped by multiple perpetrators over an extended period of time, causing many of them to

¹¹² UNICEF, *The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002*, June 2005, p. 17.

¹¹³ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 13, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 92.

¹¹⁶ Ibid; UNICEF, *Submissions to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, TRC Report Appendix 2, p. 477.

¹¹⁷ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 132.

¹¹⁸ UNICEF, *Submissions to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, TRC Report Appendix 2, p. 477.

¹¹⁹ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 170. This phenomenon led to the explicit provision in art. 2 (g) in the Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and any other forms of sexual violence constitute crimes against humanity.

¹²⁰ UNICEF, *The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002*, June 2005, p. 17.

¹²¹ UNICEF, *Submissions to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, TRC Report Appendix 2, p. 477.

bleed to death, especially if they were still relatively young.¹²² Within the RUF and AFRC girls were usually ultimately forced to become the ‘bush wife’ of one of the combatants or commanders, or would ‘voluntarily’ seek the protection of one member of the armed group in order to protect themselves from further gang rapes.¹²³ Within the CDF male members initially followed secret society rules forbidding them to have sexual intercourse while performing their societal duties, in order not to diminish their magical powers such as immunity to enemy bullets or invisibility, traditionally believed to have been attained during their initiation ritual.¹²⁴ However, this practice did not last. As the armed conflict progressed, the need for more recruits caused a lapse in recruitment standards. Newer initiates no longer followed societal rules and members of the CDF began abducting girls on a large scale in order to use them as their sex slaves as well.¹²⁵

As a result of the sexual abuse, the majority of girls became pregnant while in the fighting forces.¹²⁶ However, their pregnancy did not protect them against further sexual violations by their abductors, leading many girls to miscarry.¹²⁷ While in some cases rebel forces would release pregnant girls because they did not want to deal with the excess burden of a baby and the decreased capacity of the mother to perform labour,¹²⁸ girls were also often forced to abort, especially when the pregnancy coincided with the timing of an important attack, because the presence of babies might give away the rebel position.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, many girls gave birth to children of their own while with the fighting forces and were thus faced with the terrible burden of not only needing to look after themselves but also to care for the result of their rape, their babies. The following testimony of a GAAF in front of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) who was 12 years young at the time of her abduction, gives a clear picture of how horrifying the life of a young mother in the RUF could be, leading her to desperately flee the fighting forces, leaving her children behind:

“The second bush husband who took me was too jealous. He used to sex me all the time and the day I said I was unable or tired, he would beat me up mercilessly. I was

¹²² UNICEF, *The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002*, June 2005, p. 17.

¹²³ UNICEF, *Submissions to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, TRC Report Appendix 2, p. 477.

¹²⁴ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 349.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, paras. 351-353.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 174.

¹²⁷ UNICEF, *Submissions to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, TRC Report Appendix 2, p. 477.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

*denied food each time there was confusion between us. [...] While I was pregnant, he would beat me up and at one time when I tried to run away from him, he chased me, caught me and dragged me up. My left hand wrist got sprained, up till now. I finally escaped from him, leaving the two children behind.”*¹³⁰

Adding to the aforementioned roles GAAF's perform in all armed conflicts, the Sierra Leonean armed conflict witnessed girls performing some distinctive roles.

Many girl members of the CDF fulfilled the specific function of herbalist, collecting and mixing herbs into the food of the fighters to keep their magical powers intact.¹³¹

Within the RUF specific units of young girls, the so-called Small Girls Units (SGU), were organised. These units were comprised of six to fifteen year old girls and were primarily used for looting villages and spying, although they were also sent to fight and were forced to commit some of the worst atrocities against local communities, such as killings and mutilations.¹³²

Not all GAAF's were mere victims, being used as sex slaves by all members of their fighting force, or raped on a daily basis by their 'bush husband'. In the RUF, for example, 'wives' of commanders were able to exercise a substantial influence within the encampment, basically being in charge when the commander was absent.¹³³ These girls had a variety of responsibilities, not only dividing looted goods among the members of the RUF, but also deciding on who would fight, raid villages, go on spying missions, etc. Commanders' 'wives' were also in charge of Small Boys Units¹³⁴ or Small Girls Units. Sometimes, they would use the power they had over the loot to prevent members of the Small Boys Units from abusing girls. They moreover would on occasion assist their commander-husband in the planning of combat manoeuvres. However, the more or less privileged position commanders' 'wives' had, came with a price. When a commander grew tired of his 'wife' and replaced her with a new or younger one, she would generally be sent to the front lines to fight.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ TRC Report, para. 174.

¹³¹ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 96.

¹³² D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone, January 2004, p. 14, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹³³ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, pp. 93-94.

¹³⁴ SBU were comprised of boys the same age as girls in SGU and performed similar tasks.

¹³⁵ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone, January 2004, p. 14, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

SECTION IV. THE DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION OF GAAFs IN SIERRA LEONE

A. The DDR Programme in Sierra Leone

The foundation for the DDR Programme in Sierra Leone was laid in the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord. This peace accord was at that time unique in its kind, since it was the first one to contain a provision that explicitly requires the government to address the special needs of CAAFs in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes.¹³⁶ Subsequently, a National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) was established that designed the country's DDR Programme with specific provisions for children.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) has distributed a document stipulating the procedures for the processing of children in the DDR Programme.¹³⁷ This document clearly states that all child 'combatants' were to be accepted into the DDR Programme, whether they surrendered a weapon or not. However, children were only eligible for entry into demobilisation centres if they met certain criteria indicating military experience. UNAMSIL's procedures furthermore provided that CAAFs should be transferred from the demobilisation site to Interim Care Centres (ICC) within a maximum of 48 hours, where the children would be accommodated while awaiting reunification with their family.¹³⁸ CAAFs who did not meet the eligibility criteria for entry into the demobilisation centres were not left out of the DDR Programme, but were to be taken directly to an ICC.

ICCs were seen as a bridge towards children's reintegration into community.¹³⁹ Children had to remain there for at least a week so that their family could be traced, while the ID cards were being produced for those demobilised. The procedures further indicate that children should not remain at these sites for longer than two months and that some essential services would be provided to them, such as family tracing; the provision of clothes, food and medical services; family and community mediation; education and recreation. Girls would be

¹³⁶ Article XXX of the Peace Agreement between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, signed in Lomé, Togo, on 7 July 1999.

¹³⁷ UNAMSIL, Procedures for Processing Children through the DDR Programme, April 2000, 368/DDR/OPS.

¹³⁸ In reality, children who had been part of the CDF were not taken to these ICCs but were allowed to go straight home since the general assumption was that they had remained part of their community and in close contact with their family during the entire conflict and therefore did not require family tracing and specific support.

¹³⁹ UNICEF, The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002, June 2005, p. 14.

provided with specialised sexual abuse counselling and, if they were pregnant, with full medical assistance.

After leaving the ICC, upon reunification with their family, CAAFs were to be provided with reintegration assistance by UNICEF and its implementing partners. For that reason, two separate programmes were set up. The Community Education and Investment Programme (CEIP) was designed to support formal education or accelerated learning programmes in communities including CAAFs, while the Training and Employment Programme (TEP) was mainly aimed at 15 to 17 year old CAAFs who were not able to return to formal education, providing them with vocational training.¹⁴⁰ These programmes were part of the larger Community Based Reintegration Programme (CBR), designed by UNICEF to ensure demobilised CAAFs' protection and care at the community level, by providing them with educational, vocational and psychosocial support, while at the same time establishing or strengthening child protection systems at community level, such as Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Children's Clubs (CCs).¹⁴¹

The Sierra Leone DDR Programme is largely viewed as a success and even considered as a best practice example, prompting officials from neighbouring countries and even the Great Lakes Region to visit Sierra Leone in order to prepare for their own DDR Programme.¹⁴² The impact the programme had on CAAFs, reuniting most (98%) of the nearly 7.000 demobilised children with their families and absorbing some 3.000 of them into the community education programmes set up by UNICEF, is also widely considered a success, leading the UN to advocate its application in other peacekeeping operations.¹⁴³ However, as the next section will prove, the DDR Programme in Sierra Leone has largely failed girls, begging questions of latent discrimination. While the vast majority of GAAFs has been left out of the programme, the specific needs of those girls that did enter were often not met.

¹⁴⁰ Government of Sierra Leone, National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, The DDR Programme: Status and Strategies for Completion, 14 November 2002, p. 8, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SIERRALEONEEXTN/Resources/ddr_status.pdf (consulted on 1 May 2007).

¹⁴¹ J. Alexander, Community Based Reintegration: Programme Evaluation, August 2006, pp. 7-8, unpublished.

¹⁴² UNAMSIL, Factsheet 1: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unamsil/factsheet1_DDR.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

B. The involvement of GAAFs in the DDR Programme

Table 2 shows the number of CAAFs that participated in the DDR Programme in Sierra Leone, disaggregated by gender.

Table 2. Participation of CAAFs in the DDR Programme, disaggregated by gender.

Fighting force	Boys	Girls
RUF	3.229	436
AFRC	375	41
SLA	445	22
CDF	2.003	7
Total	6.052	506

Source: NCDDR, 2002.

Several relevant conclusions can be drawn from these figures. It is first of all obvious that girls were involved in the DDR Programme to a much lesser extent than boys, representing a mere 8, 5 % of all demobilised CAAFs, while they made up an estimated 25 % of all children associated with the fighting forces (see Table 1). Secondly, it becomes possible to compare the percentage of all male CAAFs that went through the DDR Programme with the percentage of girls. While 12, 5 % of all boys that were estimated to have been part of the fighting forces went through the DDR Programme, only 4 % of all girls were involved in the programme.¹⁴⁴ Thirdly, one can analyse which fighting force ‘sent’ the most GAAFs, relatively speaking, through the DDR Programme. The results of these calculations are as follows: RUF (6 %); AFRC (2, 5 %); SLA (2 %); CDF (0, 5 %). The very low percentage of girls released for DDR by the CDF is especially worth noting.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from these figures is that GAAFs were significantly underrepresented in the DDR Programme in Sierra Leone.

Broadly speaking, two main categories of reasons caused this underrepresentation.

A first set of reasons is related to external factors that blocked girls’ entry into the programme. A major reason for the exclusion of girls from the DDR Programme was the negation of the presence of GAAFs within the CDF by influential government officials,

¹⁴⁴ These percentages are attained as follows: for boys: $6.052 / 48.216 * 100$; for girls: $506 / 12.056 * 100$.

including the then Deputy Minister of Defense and National Coordinator of the CDF, Hinga Norman.¹⁴⁵ This perpetuated myth led on the one hand to the government preventing the vast majority of GAAFs associated with CDF from entering the DDR Programme and on the other hand to a lack of effort to reach out to these girls.¹⁴⁶ A second reason was the classification of girls abducted by the RUF, AFRC and SLA into the near-exclusive category of ‘wives’, thus labelling them as ‘camp followers’, who were not eligible for formal entry into the DDR Programme according to DDR officials.¹⁴⁷ In my opinion, this indicates that a too narrow definition of ‘child soldiers’ was used in the DDR Programme in Sierra Leone, diverging from the wider definition of CAAFs which includes ‘bush wives’ and could at that time be found in the Capetown Principles. A third reason that highly contributed to the exclusion of girls from DDR was a widespread misconception on the need for children to hand in a weapon as an eligibility criterion for entry into the programme. While the official procedures did not require children to perform a weapons test, reports were made of serious inconsistency among the UN, government officials and NGO staff in practice, as to the requirement of a weapon for entry into the DDR Programme, with the weapons test being repeatedly administered to children.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, reports indicate that, especially as funding became constraint, access to the DDR Programme was facilitated when children had a gun to hand over.¹⁴⁹ All the above particularly affected girls since they were used in non-combat roles more often than boys and a large part of them therefore did not own a gun.¹⁵⁰ Even if GAAFs did own a weapon, their commander would often take it away, within the CDF to deny girls’ presence in the force, within the RUF and AFRC to give it to commanders’ relatives or male

¹⁴⁵ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 20, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3; McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 101, where an example is given of a CDF commander who, requested by UN officials to gather his troops for disarmament by the government, summoned his troops, including 500 fully initiated women and girls. However, the government only took the men and boys with them, leaving behind the women and girls. When asked by the commander why they acted in this manner, the government officials reportedly informed him that “females were not part of the CDF”.

¹⁴⁷ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 102; TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 399. The categorisation of girls primarily as ‘wives’ is for instance clear in UNAMSIL, *Procedures for Processing Children through the DDR Programme*, April 2000, 368/DDR/OPS, para. 18.

¹⁴⁸ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 3, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007); J. Williamson, *Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, February 2005, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Save the Children, *Girls formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through formal demobilisation: Save the Children UK’s experience in West Africa*, March 2005, unpublished, p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ J. Williamson, 2006, p. 5.

rebels so that they could enter the DDR Programme.¹⁵¹ The confusion moreover created the false rumour between girls that they would not be able to access the programme if they did not have a weapon, causing many to decide to not even try to enter.¹⁵² A final external factor that blocked GAAFs' entry into the DDR Programme was the fact that girls who had been forced to become the 'wife' of a male member of their fighting forces were often prevented from entering the DDR programme by their 'bush husbands' because these feared the loss of the advantages their 'bush wife' could still offer them.¹⁵³

The second set of reasons is linked to the 'voluntary' decision of the girls themselves to not enter the DDR Programme. The primary reason why GAAFs decided not to enter the DDR Programme, returning home directly and anonymously instead, was the earlier-on described feeling of shame for having overstepped traditional expectations of female obedience and docility and for having violated the importance attached to virginity, combined with the fear for stigmatisation and rejection by their family and community as a result of their actions.¹⁵⁴ Another reason why girls decided not to enter the DDR Programme was insecurity about the adequacy of the programme to meet their specific needs.¹⁵⁵ They moreover feared the violent situation in the demobilisation sites.¹⁵⁶ Especially fear of reprisals kept many girls at bay.¹⁵⁷ Girls who had been part of the CDF particularly feared the large presence of former RUF-members at the demobilisation camps and ICCs, with interviews conducted by DDR staff at the latter sites not protecting their affiliation with a particular fighting force.¹⁵⁸ A further reason why GAAFs did not enter the formal DDR Programme was the fact that they 'chose' to stay with their 'bush husband', either out of fear for his reaction otherwise, because of a lack of viable economic alternatives or simply since they loved him and/or had built up a family with him, often with children.¹⁵⁹ Finally, a whole range of other reasons led girls to prefer an immediate return home over an entry into the DDR Programme:

¹⁵¹ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 3, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 19. 46 % of all girls interviewed in connection with this study cited not having a weapon as the reason for not having entered the DDR Programme.

¹⁵³ J. Williamson, *Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, February 2005, p. X.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; Chapter I, Section III.

¹⁵⁵ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 401.

¹⁵⁶ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 101.

¹⁵⁷ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 20, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Save the Children UK's experience in West Africa, March 2005, unpublished, pp. 15-16.

lack of knowledge on the existence of the DDR Programme, leading to questions concerning the adequacy of the dissemination of information on the programme by all actors involved;¹⁶⁰ having escaped from or having been abandoned by their fighting force prior to formal demobilisation; and logistical problems with certain demobilisation sites, such as the close proximity of children's camps to adult sites, creating fear within girls that their commander would find out that they had demobilised against his will.¹⁶¹

A particular reason linked to traditional conceptions of child- and adulthood in Sierra Leone, caused some girls to enter the DDR Programme as adults instead of as children. When underage girls had borne children of their own, they would often report as an adult at demobilisation sites since they were now culturally defined as such.¹⁶² Combined with difficulties in assessing the correct age of older children, these traditional definitions of childhood would on occasion lead to the acceptance of a girl mother into the adult DDR Programme, causing her to lose out on the specific support programmes for CAAs.¹⁶³

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the above is that many of the external factors that contributed to the exclusion of CAAs from the formal DDR Programme in Sierra Leone constitute direct or indirect discrimination of girls. This discrimination is obvious in the case of government officials negating the presence of CAAs in the CDF, thus effectively denying them access to the DDR Programme. The indirect discrimination caused by the inconsistency as to the requirement for children to hand over a weapon in order to be eligible for entry into the DDR programme is even more striking, because of the major impact it had on the underrepresentation of CAAs in the programme. Moreover, the DDR Programme ignored the multiple roles played by CAAs during the armed conflict, labelling them as 'wives' and thus effectively excluding many girls from the DDR process. Finally, the programme took the specific needs of girls insufficiently into account, leading many of them

¹⁶⁰ Information campaigns were focused on the district capitals, neglecting rural areas; radio messages were not provided in all the local languages or were broadcasted at inappropriate times of the day, when most people in rural areas had already left for the fields; etc. See Save the Children UK's experience in West Africa, March 2005, unpublished, p. 12.

¹⁶¹ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 20, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007); Save the Children, *Girls formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through formal demobilisation: Save the Children UK's experience in West Africa*, March 2005, unpublished, p. 11; TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 403.

¹⁶² D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 21, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

to prefer going home directly. The level of indirect discrimination of girls in the design and implementation of the DDR Programme and the lack of attention to their specific situation and needs, led the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission to in my opinion correctly describe the programme as “male-biased”, concluding that “men and boys were favoured over women and girls in the disarmament and reintegration processes”.¹⁶⁴

C. The adequacy of the DDR Programme in fulfilling the specific needs of GAAFs

The GAAFs that did go through the DDR process had some particular needs that required specific attention. Some of these needs, such as medical and reproductive care and psychological support, were the result of their experiences within the fighting forces. The vast majority of GAAFs in Sierra Leone had attracted STDs due to unprotected sexual contact with male members of the fighting forces. They often suffered from vaginal and anal injuries and from damage to the bladder or uterus, due to repeated (gang)rapes. Many girls were also pregnant at the time of demobilisation and/or had given birth to children of their own. Girls moreover suffered from particular psychological effects of fear, worry and anxiety that they would be rejected by their community and would not be able to find a husband, therefore being condemned to a life of shame as ‘unmarriageable’.¹⁶⁵ Other needs, such as hygienic concerns related to the menstrual cycle, were not particular to GAAFs but more generally applicable to girls and women. Nonetheless, these needs required specific attention within the DDR process.

Research indicates, however, that the DDR Programme did not take the different situation of boys and girls sufficiently into account in the demobilisation stage, which led to inadequacy in providing for the specific needs of GAAFs.

Although the official guidelines for the DDR Programme required the provision of basic supplies and services to all children in demobilisation centres and ICC, this did not always happen in practice, as indicated by the results of a 2003 study for which a number of girls who had gone through the DDR process were interviewed about their experiences with the programme.¹⁶⁶ 43 % of them reported not having received adequate clothing; 54 % reported a lack of proper hygiene materials, such as soap and menstrual supplies; and 23 %

¹⁶⁴ TRC Report, Volume 2, para. 536; Volume 3 B, para. 401 and 404.

¹⁶⁵ Mazurana & McKay, 2003, p. 36.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

reported not being granted with medical care when they requested.¹⁶⁷ Other research indicates further problems such as the lack of provision of separate and secure shower and toilet facilities.¹⁶⁸

To conclude, the insufficient attention paid to the need for separate and gender-specific services for girls shows that the design and implementation of the demobilisation stage of the DDR Programme was not gender-appropriate and consequently failed girls. The various actors responsible for the planning of the DDR Programme, including UNAMSIL and the Sierra Leonean government, have thereby acted in contravention with the demand expressed in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to consider the different needs of male and female ex-combatants while planning the DDR Programme.¹⁶⁹

D. The reintegration of GAAFs in Sierra Leone

1. *Problems encountered during reintegration*

The following story of a now 17 year old girl in the Kailahun District, sketches the wide variety of problems connected with the reintegration of GAAFs:

“When our village was attacked I was captured by my commander, and have now spent 13 years with him. My mother was killed and I don’t know whether my father is alive or not. My family members have returned here but have rejected me, partly because of my association with the RUF. Some of the community children provoke me because I am still with an ex-combatant. When I was first captured by my commander, I could not refuse him. But now when I refuse to have sex with him, he drives me out of this house. While an international organisation provided me with sewing materials for needlework, these are now finished and I have no money to buy more.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶⁸ UNICEF, *From Conflict to Hope: Children in Sierra Leone’s Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000 S/RES/1325 (2000), para. 13.

¹⁷⁰ See Save the Children, *Girls formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through formal demobilisation: Save the Children UK’s experience in West Africa*, March 2005, unpublished, p. 16.

This story first of all indicates the importance of the initial step in the reintegration of GAAFs, the reunification with their family, either with parents or with members of the extended family. While research indicates that parents usually accepted their daughters back in a relatively loving and caring manner, there are indications that GAAFs that are reunited with extended family members run an increased risk of exploitation and abuse.¹⁷¹ However, possibly the biggest problem GAAFs encountered in their social reintegration was the stigmatisation they faced upon return by the wider members of their community, which in a few cases led to actual community rejection. While boys also faced problems being accepted back into the community due to the atrocities they had been forced to commit during the armed conflict, at times against their own communities, and the violent behaviour they often demonstrated upon return, social reintegration was even harder for girls for several reasons. Firstly, because traditional conceptions of their roles and character describe girls as docile, vulnerable and obedient, exacerbating the difficulties communities have with dealing with their behaviour that has been described as disrespectful, aggressive, idle and unruly.¹⁷² These expectations furthermore stand in glaring contrast with the violent and sexual activities these girls were often forced into during their time with the fighting forces, causing community members to for instance brand girls as ‘rebels’ upon their return from the RUF or as ‘kolonkos’ (= prostitutes).¹⁷³ A second reason why communities would approach returning GAAFs in a negative manner was their loss of virginity, Sierra Leonean girls spoke of ‘devirginisation’, caused by the sexual violence they had been exposed to by the male members of their fighting forces.¹⁷⁴ Girl mothers were even at greater risk of being stigmatised because they had brought the results of their sexual abuse, their ‘rebel children’, back from the bush. The stigma attached to sexual activities and a loss of virginity before marriage, combined with a perception that girls themselves were somehow responsible for getting involved with the fighting forces, created major difficulties for girls to be (re)accepted by their family and community. Moreover, sexually abused GAAFs were sometimes referred to as ‘faded cotton’, perceived as used and of little further use.¹⁷⁵ Their stigmatisation made it

¹⁷¹ Ibid.; Save the Children, Girls formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through formal demobilisation: Save the Children UK’s experience in West Africa, March 2005, unpublished, p. 19; Heykoop, 2006.

¹⁷² C.A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, *The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future*, p. 3.

¹⁷³ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 37; C.A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, *The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁴ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 37.

¹⁷⁵ Save the Children UK, *No More Faded Cotton. Working with girls formerly associated with fighting forces who did not go through a formal demobilisation*, p. 1.

in addition more difficult for these girls to get over the sexual abuse, as evidenced by the following story of a now 20-year old girl from Makeni:¹⁷⁶

“I suffered through this alone, without any punishment for the abuser, because family members were afraid of our family to be scandalized [...] My mother told me not to talk about it because if I do I will bring shame to the family and people will laugh at me and it will be difficult for me to get married.”

In Sierra Leone, community sensitisation was used on a large scale to help overcome the obstacle stigmatisation formed for girls’ reintegration. In the context of CAAs’ reintegration, sensitisation usually means that NGOs and grassroots organisations prepare families and communities for children’s return by helping them to change their awareness and by educating them about children’s rights.¹⁷⁷ An important aspect of these sensitisation talks is usually the conveying of the message that children, including sexually abused girls and girl mothers, were abducted, forced and/or drugged and were therefore not responsible for what they did.¹⁷⁸ Although sensitisation talk seems to have been a very helpful tool in convincing families and communities to (re)accept former CAAs in Sierra Leone, it is sometimes argued that it is imposed on the communities as an external factor and does not always lead to behavioural changes, and that therefore community based techniques such as community problem-solving, non-violent conflict resolution, community dialogue and mediation are more appropriate means for overcoming community stigmatisation.¹⁷⁹

A factor exacerbating the effect (fear of) stigmatisation had on CAAs’ reintegration was the shame girls themselves felt for what had happened to them. Girls felt ashamed for having been raped; having participated in combat; having identifiable scars, tattoos and carvings; having committed atrocities such as brutal killings; having participated in taboo behaviour such as eating human flesh; and for not having been able to carry out traditional behaviour such as menstrual hygiene.¹⁸⁰ These feelings of shame were caused by girls’ perception that they had in one way or another violated community expectations by engaging in these

¹⁷⁶ M. Utas, Traditional Healing of Young Sexual Abuse Survivors in the Aftermath of the Sierra Leone Civil War, p. 19, unpublished.

¹⁷⁷ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 41.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 44-46.

activities that were in contravention of traditional gender roles, thus leading many of them to attempt to hide their former identities as GAAFs.

The performance of traditional rituals is a particularly interesting technique that was used in Sierra Leone to assist families and communities on the one hand and girls on the other hand in surmounting the stigmatisation and shame associated with the experiences girls had gone through while in the fighting forces. These rituals will be discussed further-on, along with their advantages and disadvantages.

The story mentioned above, also points us towards another problem GAAFs encountered during reintegration, namely the continued influence their ‘bush husbands’ exercised over them. Due to various reasons, it was extremely difficult for many girls to abdicate their relationships with former combatants who still considered them to be their ‘wives’.

Although there were widespread assumptions that many GAAFs were being coerced by their ‘husband’ to remain with them after the DDR process, research indicates that these assumptions may have been incorrect.¹⁸¹ However, there were various other factors that indirectly forced girls to stay with their ‘bush husband’. Some of them have been described earlier on and will not be repeated here, while others are mentioned below since they have a specific connection with GAAFs’ reintegration.

When girls had given birth to children during their time with the fighting forces, the cultural fear attached to not being wanted by a man or not having a husband led to a situation in which they would be positioned more advantageously than single girl mothers with a view to reintegration if their ‘bush husband’ would officially marry them, following community customs of dispute settlement.¹⁸² Reports have been made of child protection workers encouraging girls to stay with their ‘bush husband’ for this and other reasons, such as economic considerations, reflecting a patriarchal view of women’s situation in Sierra Leone.¹⁸³

This problem was further exacerbated by flaws in the design of the DDR Programme and the gender-biased attitude of some DDR officials. In the latter stages of the DDR Programme, it was decided that ‘wives’ of former combatants would be allowed to apply for micro-credit in order to be able to maintain their family, partly because the men complained

¹⁸¹ J. Williamson, Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone, February 2005, p. 13, where he refers to an evaluation UNICEF had made in the context of its Girls Left Behind Project.

¹⁸² McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 56.

¹⁸³ See Ibid. and the example of a female child protection worker for the NCDDR given there.

about their inability to take care of their ‘wife’ and children.¹⁸⁴ However, ‘wives’ could only access these micro-credit schemes if they were accompanied by a ‘husband’ who could identify the women or girl as his ‘wife’.¹⁸⁵ In other words, no women or girl could apply for micro-credit alone, no matter how many children she had. Girls were therefore often unable to end the relationship with their ‘bush husband’ when they needed the access to reintegration benefits for their economic survival. This was not considered a problem by DDR officials, one of which reportedly said that “even if they were raped and abducted, 70% of the women and girls want to be with their ‘husbands’”.¹⁸⁶ The described policy and attitude appears to stem from a patriarchal view of women as submissive and dependent on their husbands, the latter being responsible for earning and controlling the family income. In my opinion, this has led to discrimination of women and girls and has created a situation in which they are almost forced to stay with their ‘bush husbands’ in order to be able to provide for themselves and their children.

Finally, the story of the 17 year old girl in the Kailahun District signals the importance of economic reintegration for GAAFs through education and vocational training.

In light of their economic reintegration, UNICEF designed and provided specific education programmes for CAAFs as part of the official DDR Programme. These programmes included the Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS) initiative, providing an accelerated three year programme for primary education, and the CEIP that provided incentives, such as teaching or learning materials, to schools that enrolled CAAFs.¹⁸⁷ By providing benefits directly to the school, the CEIP assisted the community as a whole, since all children who are enrolled in the school enjoyed the benefits and not merely the individual CAAFs. The CEIP thus also facilitated social reintegration of CAAFs by avoiding jealousy towards these children.

However, since the vast majority of GAAFs did not go through the official DDR Programme, they did not enjoy the benefits these programme offered. In order to redress this

¹⁸⁴ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone*, January 2004, p. 18, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., para. 437.

indirect discrimination of girls, other programmes aimed at the facilitation of access to education for self-demobilised GAAFs had to be developed.

A particularly important actor in this respect is FAWE. This African regional NGO specifically directs itself at girls and young women, including self-demobilised GAAFs and girl mothers, offering them primary education to support their development and has thus contributed to a large extent to the promotion and provision of education for GAAFs. Moreover, FAWE is the only organisation in Sierra Leone that allows pregnant girls in the classroom, under the motto that “pregnancy should not be the end of a girls’ education”.¹⁸⁸ They therefore provide child care to girl mothers, offering them a room inside the school building where they can leave their child so that they are able to continue their education after having given birth.¹⁸⁹ This is particularly important for GAAFs who have children of their own, because their families and communities often refuse to take care of their ‘rebel’ children, since they form an unwanted additional economic burden on an already stressed budget.

Another reintegration programme directed at the education of self-demobilised GAAFs is UNICEF’s Non-Formal Education Project (NFEP). This programme reaches out to CAAFs, especially girls, without access to primary education, with the goal of reducing illiteracy levels.¹⁹⁰

The official DDR Programme also provided skills training to all demobilised CAAFs, including girls, under the TEP. This programme offered a nine-month training in skills such as hairdressing, weaving, soap making and gara tie-dyeing for girls, supplementing it with the payment of a monthly allowance and providing a start-up kit to all participants upon completion of their training.¹⁹¹ However, as indicated earlier-on, only a small proportion of all GAAFs took part in the official DDR Programme, while most of them returned home directly. As with the educational programmes, these self-demobilised girls did not have access to the TEP, thus necessitating the development of additional programmes for GAAFs who were not eligible for entry into this official vocational training programme.

The most important of these programmes, UNICEF’s Girls Left Behind project, will be extensively described further-on with a thorough analysis of its achievements and major drawbacks. Another example of a skills training programme specifically directed at (self-

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Margaret Musa, Human Rights Officer, FAWE, Freetown, 30 March 2007.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.; interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.

¹⁹⁰ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 438.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., para. 465.

demobilised) girls, the Sefafu programme, will also be discussed later-on. A last example of a skills training programme is the one provided by FAWE. This organisation directs itself specifically at girls and young women, offering them not only primary education, but also the option of vocational training. After the training period is over, FAWE extends certificates to these girls as proof of their newly acquired skill. They furthermore support the forming of groups of girls that have been taught in the same or complementary skills so that they can combine the start-up money they are provided with to buy materials and start up a joint business.¹⁹² Most notably, FAWE does not, unlike all other reintegration programmes, offer only training in traditional skills such as weaving, tailoring and soap making to girls, but also trains them in non-traditional skills such as carpentry, welding and masonry.¹⁹³

In order to assist CAAFs and GAAFs in their reintegration into community, UNICEF has developed a comprehensive reintegration programme that approaches the problematic from the side of both main actors involved, recognising that the child as well as the community have to make certain adjustments in order to facilitate CAAFs' reintegration into community, while ensuring that not only the needs of CAAFs but also those of the community at large are addressed. This programme, entitled the Community Based Reintegration Programme, relies on a set of programmes directed at the reintegration of CAAFs, such as CEIP and TEP, and the establishment of a number of bodies in order to ensure the programme's implementation and success, such as CWCs and CCs.

Unfortunately, the structures established within communities to ensure the promotion of children's wellbeing do not seem to be functioning correctly or are not inclusive of girls. While CWCs were considered extremely valuable in assisting with family reunification during the emergency period immediately following the end of the armed conflict, they are regarded as having lost much of their effectiveness afterwards, mainly due to the fact that their functions have not been redefined and a lack of supervision.¹⁹⁴ CWCs moreover appear to focus insufficiently on their goal of promoting and supporting children's wellbeing, proven by the fact that children are often unaware of the existence of CWCs in their community, while certain children who are aware of their existence reported CWC members keeping

¹⁹² Interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.

¹⁹³ Interview with Margaret Musa, Human Rights Officer, FAWE, Freetown, 30 March 2007; interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.

¹⁹⁴ T. Pihl & D. Lamin, *Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone*, 2006, p. 56.

materials intended for children for their own use.¹⁹⁵ Although CCs from their side are considered to be functioning effectively, their main drawback is the lack of inclusiveness, with girls being grossly underrepresented.¹⁹⁶ This is partly due to the fact that CCs mainly direct themselves towards school going children, while girls are often unable to attend school due to a variety of reasons, such as parents' preference towards boys' education and a lack of economic resources.

Another problem with the CBR Programme is the fact that it was unable to meet the high expectations of children, who thought they would be provided with a \$300 TSA and immediate enrolment in school, vocational training or employment, leading them to feel betrayed.¹⁹⁷ These unrealistic expectations of children should have been mitigated from the start by communicating the benefits extended under the programme more efficiently and clearly.

An example of a programme specifically directed at the support and promotion of the reintegration of GAAFs, is the Sealing the Past, Facing the Future programme (Sefafu) developed by the Christian Children's Fund. This community-based reintegration programme was run in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sierra Leone from 2001 until 2005 and had set itself as a goal to enable sustainable reintegration, psychosocial wellbeing and community-based protection for 600 sexually abused GAAFs, including but not specifically targeting girl mothers.¹⁹⁸

The programme relied extensively on community engagement, dialogue with families, chiefs and elders and sensitisation in order to raise awareness about the girls' situation and their experiences during the armed conflict, while emphasising the fact that the girls had been forced to do bad things and that they had suffered enormously in the fighting forces.¹⁹⁹ An original aspect of the programme was the appointment in each community of a so-called community mobiliser, who was responsible for monitoring the girls' situation, raising awareness about the programmes and methods to support the girls, and assisting in addressing

¹⁹⁵ Save the Children UK, No Place Like Home? Children's Experiences of Reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone, p. 21, http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/suck_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/1958_No_Place_Like_Home_Oct04.pdf (consulted on 23 March 2007).

¹⁹⁶ J. Alexander, Community Based Reintegration: Programme Evaluation, August 2006, pp. 5 and 15.

¹⁹⁷ UNICEF, The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002, June 2005, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ C.A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 7

problems that arose.²⁰⁰ The programme proved that some of the best community mobilisation can come from within the community, as noticed by the organisation by several communities of Sexual Violence Committees, in order to prevent sexual and other violence directed towards the girls, that later took on a larger role in promoting girls' protection and wellbeing and monitoring how they were doing in the reintegration process and were consequently renamed Girls' Welfare Committees.²⁰¹

Sefafu focused on three main factors essential for or contributing to GAAFs' reintegration. The programme provided health screening, promoted traditional cleansing rituals and provided vocational training and other measures supporting girls' economic reintegration, such as the establishment of so-called rotating loan schemes.²⁰² The provision of these benefits also contributed to improved results in other elements essential for a successful reintegration, such as education, shown by the fact that nearly half of the girls in the programme villages were able to go to school, while only 10 % of girls in non-programme villages were attending classes.²⁰³ This was according to my assessment due to the fact that the girls in the programme villages were able to afford tuition fees and school materials because of the income creating abilities they had gained under the programme.

The three key lessons learned from the programme were: (i) the viability of income generation programming, indicated by the fact that repayment rates of vocational loans as high as 90% had been attained under certain circumstances (ii) the importance of health screening, proven by the fact that the majority of the girls and their babies had several health issue, such as STDs, but had received no medical screening or care prior to establishment of the programme and (iii) the usefulness of traditional cleansing ceremonies, believed to be necessary by both girls and communities for riding the girls of impurities, especially in the Northern provinces.²⁰⁴

In general, the programme achieved its goal of promoting social reintegration of GAAFs into their communities. This is shown primarily by the fact that GAAFs in the program villages showed higher rates of marriage and family acceptance, lower rates of stigma and isolation, and increased likelihood of being seen as contributing, self-reliant citizens compared to GAAFs in the non-programme villages.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 9-12. Rotating loans are loans that are extended to one girl who uses it to, alone or in group, start up some sort of business to be then given to another girl once the first girl pays back her loan.

²⁰³ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

However, the programme has also met several challenges that indicate some problems concerning the reintegration of GAAFs. One of those problems is a scarcity of resources and a lack of long-term funding. In the Sefafu programme this was shown by the fact that the number of girls that met the criteria for joining the rotating loan scheme exceeded the available resources, leading many girls to be initially left out of the project, creating great feelings of jealousy and a possible ground for conflict within the community.²⁰⁶ This problem was solved by CCF by continuing the loan rotations beyond the funded period of the programme, thus allowing additional girls to benefit.²⁰⁷ Another challenge the programme has been unable to tackle is the continued stigmatisation of girl mothers' babies. While the programme had assumed that reducing the stigmatisation of the girl mother would also reduce the stigmatisation of their children, this assumption has proven to be incorrect, indicating an underestimation of the complexities involved in the reintegration of girl mothers.²⁰⁸

2. Self-demobilisation and UNICEF's Girls Left Behind project

As noted above, the vast majority of GAAFs returned to their community directly, without passing through the official DDR Programme. There were many reasons for this phenomenon of self-demobilisation, including gender-bias and indirect discrimination in the DDR Programme and a desire among girls to hide their former identity as GAAFs in order to avoid stigmatisation.

The major disadvantage of self-demobilisation is that, by not participating in the official DDR Programme, girls miss out on the many benefits and facilities provided as part of the reintegration phase of this programme, potentially complicating their reintegration. Moreover, many GAAFs have become girl mothers and are therefore in need of means to provide for their children. Once UNICEF had caught up on the fact that many young women and girls were being left behind by the DDR Programme, the agency initiated a programme entitled the Girls Left Behind (GLB) project, that would be implemented by various NGOs, namely Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children UK (SCUK) and Caritas Makeni. The implementing partners for the project

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

identified over 1.000 former GAAFs who had self-demobilised and eventually registered and provided services to 714 of them.²⁰⁹

The GLB project offered many facilities and benefits to GAAFs, providing them with the economic, social and psychosocial assistance essential for their reintegration. Since the girls themselves identified the socioeconomic challenges they faced, often being unable to secure even the most basic needs such as food and shelter, as the major obstacle in their reintegration, the key component of the project focused on the development of skills in the beneficiaries.²¹⁰ Former GAAFs, especially girl mothers, generally emphasised the need for skills that would provide them with immediate financial returns.²¹¹ Consequently, the girls were taught both practical skills such as cloth weaving, hairdressing, gara tie-dying and soap making as well as literacy, numeracy and business skills training.²¹² Other components of the project included the provision of family tracing and reunification services,²¹³ health and medical services, including reproductive healthcare, and psychosocial counselling, *inter alia* to help them overcome the trauma caused by the sexual abuse many of them had suffered.²¹⁴ Notably, the project did not provide for the opportunity of education. While it is the case that the option of returning to school was not really feasible for the majority of girls who now had a family and financial responsibilities, they nonetheless often expressed the desire to be educated.²¹⁵ Moreover, their lack of education during their time with the fighting forces has become a major impediment towards their capacity to make a living of their own. The skills training component of the project attempted to address this problem, while at the same time offering the girls some education in literacy and numeracy. However, one must not forget that these types of classes, training girls in writing and reading, cannot replace the formal education they lack.

Overall, the GLB project is considered to be a success in assisting GAAFs' reintegration due to a number of factors.²¹⁶ Firstly, the community-based sensitisation and awareness-raising

²⁰⁹ J. Williamson, Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone, February 2005, p. 8.

²¹⁰ K. Barnes, Mi hart don col. An evaluation of the Girls Left Behind project, June 2005, p. 7.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹² *Ibid.*.

²¹³ It is worth noting that out of the 500 girls who were reunited with a member of their (extended) family, half of them did not stay with their family but chose to return to their 'bush husband' or to live independently. See UNICEF, The impact of conflict on women and girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF response, p. 18.

²¹⁴ K. Barnes, Mi hart don col. An evaluation of the Girls Left Behind project, June 2005, p. p. 9.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

activities have helped raise links between the girls and their community. Secondly, through the training, support and guidance girls received at the centres, they were better able to handle disputes, were less aggressive, showed greater respect for others and were generally perceived as contributing members of society, both by themselves and their communities.

The impact of the project is different for its two main components: the economic and the psychosocial one.²¹⁷ While there was no substantial economic impact of the project in the short term, with only a few girls actually able to earn a small income out of their gained skill, in my opinion this impact will most likely only be felt in the long run. The psychosocial impact has been more profound, with almost all girls reporting greater levels of respect from the members of their community and having a more positive outlook for the future, hoping to gain financial independence and being able to provide a better standard of living for themselves and their families.

However, the project has met some obstacles and there were several problems that required solution.²¹⁸

The skills training component, while in general described as very useful by the participating girls, has known several constraints. One shortcoming was the inconsistency that existed in the standard of literacy and business skills training that the girls were receiving, mainly due to different approaches by the various implementing partners. This caused many girls to receive inadequate training in one or both skills, which will impact negatively on their ability to engage in sustainable economic activities.²¹⁹ A second problem is related to the types of skills taught. Nearly all the girls have learned traditional skills that offer immediate financial returns such as gara tie-dyeing, mainly because they expected immediate income from the skill they were gaining and because there was little or no demand for girls in non-conventional areas such as carpentry. An issue that might arise due to this gender-stereotyped training is increased competition in what is already a limited job market. If all girls are learning the same limited number of skills, inevitably some of them will not be able to establish a business in their field because the market is already flooded. Therefore, encouraging girls to take up non-traditional trades might have been necessary, although it is unclear whether it would actually have been possible for girls to get a job in a non-conventional skill, such as carpentry or auto mechanics, since former boy-CAAFs have also

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-5, 15-22.

²¹⁹ Even after months of weekly (or in some cases daily) literacy training, a significant majority of the girls were unable to read and write simple sentences, and not all could even write their own names.

been taught these skills *en masse*. A third problem with the skills training is linked to the start-up kits that were to be handed out to the girls once they had finished their training. During their training, girls were often left in the dark as to when or what kind of kits would be distributed, leaving them with unacceptable insecurity about their economic future. A more appropriate and correct information distribution mechanism would have been desirable. Moreover, reports indicate that eventually some girls never received a start-up kit at all. A final problem with the skills training component of the project was the short time-frame of six months for completion of training, which was considered too short, both by the beneficiaries and by the implementing partners, to teach the girls some of the provided skills. This problem was solved by extending the skills training programmes for an additional six months.²²⁰ In my opinion, an alternative solution that would have been more appropriate would have involved differentiating from the start between the different skills taught and assigning a period of training based upon the complexity of the skill, since soap-making would undoubtedly take less time to learn than for instance hairdressing.

Another major problem the GLB project faced was a lack of funding. This led to a necessity to cut several benefits that were initially extended to girls in order to make it possible for them to attend the skills training classes. Caritas Makeni, for instance, was forced to cut back on daily meals provided to girls during the training sessions due to a lack of funds.²²¹

Other identified problems the project faced are related to a lack of standardisation between the different implementing partners. These include the significant disparities in access to health care and counselling services and the frequency and form of treatment provided; the fact that project files were not kept up-to-date; and the fact that a central database with all records of girls' history and current involvement in the programmes did not exist.²²² Moreover, in the view of this author, the regular reports sent to UNICEF by the implementing partners offered only very limited insight into the overall progress made, mainly recapulating the objectives of the programme and the number of girls involved, complicating the possibility for UNICEF to discover flaws in the design or implementation of the project.²²³

²²⁰ As indicated by reports by COOPI, accessed at their main office in Freetown.

²²¹ K. Barnes, *Mi hart don col*. An evaluation of the Girls Left Behind project, June 2005, p. 12. The provision of food is essential since girls have even less time than usual to gather or buy food and prepare it since they spend their days in skills training classes.

²²² *Ibid*.

²²³ Analysis based upon the insight into the monthly progress reports designed for UNICEF by COOPI.

3. *The use of cleansing ceremonies in GAAFs' reintegration*

Traditional rituals such as cleansing ceremonies have been used to a fairly large extent in Sierra Leone in the reintegration of GAAFs, especially in the Northern region of the country.²²⁴ Cleansing ceremonies have helped girls to deal with the physical harm and psychological trauma caused by their sexual abuse and have improved their psychosocial wellbeing, while at the same time assisting in overcoming community stigmatisation, thus facilitating social reintegration of GAAFs.²²⁵

An interesting preliminary question linked to the use of traditional rituals in order to improve GAAFs' physical and psychological health, relates to which form of medical diagnosis and treatment is most appropriate in the context of post-conflict African countries. The until recently dominant view was that Western ideas on diagnosis and treatment of physical and psychological wounds, based upon Western understandings of trauma and emphasising individual treatment, should be exported to African countries in the context of post-conflict rehabilitation.²²⁶ However, this view has been increasingly criticised for ignoring social networks and existing resources in the local communities that could facilitate the healing process.²²⁷ It moreover seems inappropriate to apply Western psychology with its emphasis on individual 'insides' in countries such as Sierra Leone, where mental illness is traditionally perceived as 'outside' the body and the result of bush devils or evil spirits.²²⁸ Therefore, an alternative approach to psychological interventions has been formulated, based on the assumption that psychological problems have a social and cultural dimension, since in many places in Africa, including Sierra Leone, health is traditionally defined in terms of relationships between individuals and their communities and ancestors.²²⁹ This approach consequently relies heavily on community resources and supports local coping strategies, such as cleansing ceremonies.²³⁰

²²⁴ A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, *The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future*, p. 11.

²²⁵ Stark, 2006, p. 1.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ M. Utas, *Traditional Healing of Young Sexual Abuse Survivors in the Aftermath of the Sierra Leone Civil War*, p. 25, unpublished.

²²⁹ Stark, 2006, p. 1.

²³⁰ Ibid. For an insightful critique on this approach, see Dyregrov, Gupta, Gjestad & Raundalen, 2002.

As noted above, in Sierra Leone, GAAFs were often stigmatised because of the sexual abuse they had suffered during the armed conflict, making them ‘impure’. They were moreover insulted for prostituting themselves to support their babies, verbally and physically attacked and prohibited from marrying.²³¹ Furthermore, their spiritual pollution, or ‘noro’, caused by the sexual abuse and the atrocities girls had committed during the armed conflict, was believed to lead to misfortune, bad harvests and health problems for both the girls and the broader community.²³² Cleansing ceremonies appear to have helped girls and communities in overcoming these reintegration problems, due to two factors.²³³ Firstly, they represented a symbolic gesture of community reconciliation in which both the girls and the community had prescribed roles and demonstrated a willingness and desire to be reconciled. Secondly, cleansing ceremonies allowed for a spiritual transformation in which the girls were able to shed their contamination by ‘noro’ and leave behind the bad luck, anti-social behaviour and negative self-perceptions that they had brought with them from the war. Girls believed that ‘noro’ affected their relationships, including their ability to get married and also linked this bad luck to their inability to function within society, for instance by impacting negatively on their ability to earn an income.²³⁴ Their ‘contamination’ would moreover make girls feel isolated from the rest of the community and unable to be a part of community life.²³⁵ The following two stories of girls who have been ‘cleansed’ indicate why the ritual was often seen as necessary both by the girls and the community and the beneficial impact it has had on GAAFs’ lives.²³⁶

“They said they would cleanse me because of my bad luck. My bad luck came from being used by several men. My bad luck showed itself in different ways. For example, it was hard for me to realize a profit. I lost money. [...] I felt that the part of the 3 days that was the key to my healing was the washing by the stream. I could feel the bad luck leaving me [...] My luck has improved. Now I am earning money and have better clothing.”

“[The cleansing] made the community happy. It was important because when I got back from the bush, I wasn’t feeling happy and I was bored. I wanted to be cleansed to

²³¹ Stark, 2006, p. 2.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Williamson, 2006, p. 15; L. Stark, 2006, p. 1.

²³⁴ Stark, 2006, p. 10.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ The stories of Fatmata and Jeriatu, given in Ibid., p. 6.

take away the bad luck. I had lost my virginity to someone I did not like at all when I was raped. Also, my business was not good and physically I was not fine. My bad luck affected my family because I slept in the same bed as my mother. Her business was also not going well and she was stigmatized for sharing a bed with a rebel.”

Research indicates that the success of the cleansing ceremonies was mainly caused by the fact that both the girls and the community played an important role in the ritual, with the support of both parties for the cleansing ceremony being more important than who took the initial decision to cleanse.²³⁷ By organising, financing and performing the cleansing ceremonies, community members showed concerns and care for the girls, while the girls from their side showed a willingness to shed the spiritual pollution that had been ‘poisoning’ themselves and their community since their return from the bush.²³⁸ Although girls usually associate their newfound place in the community, their educational and economic successes and their improved behaviour to the loss of ‘noro’,²³⁹ it is clear to me that the entire cleansing process itself is a form of reconciliation, with girls and community (re)accepting each other, thus overcoming stigmatisation and improving GAAFs’ reintegration.

In my opinion, it is moreover obvious that many aspects of the cleansing ceremonies are directed at creating a symbolic break between the life girls had while in the fighting forces and their new life in the community. The act of washing the girls, usually with black ash soap, is a clear example of this. The fact that girls would leave their old clothing at the waterside and would come back into town in new white clothing is another one. Perhaps the most important ceremonial gesture associated with cleansing ceremonies occurred when the girls and the traditional healers returned to the community from the bush after the cleansing of the girls. Upon return, girls were hailed back into the community and ‘reintroduced’ to the chief and the rest of the community by way of a large feast, with sharing of food and singing and dancing.²⁴⁰ Especially the sharing of a communal meal was a sign that the community was now ready to accept these girls as complete and viable members of the community.²⁴¹

In my assessment, overall, cleansing ceremonies are not as different from Western types of psychological support as they at first sight may appear. Traditional healers often

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 8 and 10.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 8.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴¹ Ibid. The importance of this gesture is related to the fact that in Sierra Leone, family meals are commonly eaten off of one plate or out of one bowl. For a family member to be excluded is grave, with multiple instances before the cleansing when families did not provide girls with food or allow them to eat with the family.

spend several days with a group of girls in the bush where they have group talks about their experiences and tell stories. Some so-called Mammy Queens, female leaders of the secret Bundu societies, also combined ritual cleansing with ‘talk’, turning the ritual into a form of therapy.²⁴² Thus girls are able to come to terms with their sexual abuse and at the same time learn that they are not alone and that people still care for them and are there to support them. They are moreover tutored in appropriate behaviour and manners, facilitating their (re)adjustment to civilian life.²⁴³ The main difference with Western types of psychology seems to me to be the fact that cleansing ceremonies take place in groups with a close involvement of the entire community, while Western psychology highly emphasises the individual.

Because of their success in assisting in the reintegration of GAAFs, cleansing rituals have been hailed almost as a best practice on the international level, with actors such as the United Nations and the World Bank promoting their use.²⁴⁴ However, in my opinion one must exercise careful precaution when assessing the impact of these ceremonies and promoting their use, mainly because by supporting these types of traditional rituals one might appear to also endorse harmful traditions such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Since FGM is a widespread phenomenon in Sierra Leone, with an estimated 90 % of the female population undergoing female genital cutting as dictated by tradition,²⁴⁵ this is a realistic danger that needs to be taken into account when supporting cleansing ceremonies. Reports have been made of rituals involving FGM taking place upon GAAFs’ return to their community, with secret societies such as the Bundu society viewing genital excision as necessary in order for girls to be reaccepted into society.²⁴⁶ Moreover, research also indicates that, in some cases, healers took note of which girls had not been circumcised in the preparation of cleansing ceremonies.²⁴⁷ According to me, this problem is further compounded by the fact that many of the cleansing ceremonies for girls are performed within the secret Bundu societies, of which

²⁴² McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 49.

²⁴³ C..A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, *The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future*, p. 10.

²⁴⁴ See IDDRS, p. 220; World Bank, *Child Soldiers: Prevention, Demobilisation and Reintegration*, May 2002, p. 3, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2003/03/29/000094946_03031804015625/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf (consulted on 13 March 2007).

²⁴⁵ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Rights, *Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone*, March 2006, p. 24.

²⁴⁶ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 50; *Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers*, 2004, p. 97.

²⁴⁷ C.A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, *The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future*, p. 7.

an estimated 95 % of Sierra Leonean girls and women are part,²⁴⁸ thus complicating the possibility for external monitoring to ensure that girls' rights are not being violated during the cleansing.

4. *Specific issues relating to GAAFs' reintegration*

a. STDs and HIV/AIDS

Sexually Transmitted Diseases are a major problem for GAAFs, with estimates suggesting that 70 to 90 % of girls who have been sexually abused during the armed conflict are suffering from one or multiple STDs.²⁴⁹ It is my estimation that the social stigma attached to sexual abuse complicates the issue since it leads many girls to deny their diseases and avoid treatment, thus increasing the risk of spreading of infections. A further risk associated with STDs is the fact that a simple infection can easily develop into pelvic inflammatory disease and eventually cause infertility.²⁵⁰ This causes problems for GAAFs' social reintegration since in Sierra Leone, as in most African societies, an enormous social stigma is attached to infertility.²⁵¹

HIV, on the other hand, does not appear to be as prevalent in Sierra Leone as in other parts of Africa, with statistics estimating that less than 2 % of the population aged over 15 is infected with the virus.²⁵² However, in my opinion the situation of GAAFs is one that needs specific monitoring, including medical screening, since their exposure to rape and other forms of sexual abuse has made them particularly vulnerable to HIV-infection.

²⁴⁸ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 24.

²⁴⁹ UNICEF, The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with the Fighting Forces. Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone 1998-2002, June 2005, p. 23.

²⁵⁰ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 461.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² UNICEF, At a Glance: Sierra Leone. Statistics, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_statistics.html#26 (consulted on 11 April 2007).

b. Prostitution

As described above, GAAFs are particularly vulnerable to entering commercial sex work or organised prostitution since the dire economic situation girls, and especially girl mothers, find themselves in often leaves them with little other alternatives than to prostitute themselves in order to survive or pay for their education and/or provide for their children.

Research suggests that alarmingly high numbers of GAAFs in Sierra Leone are supporting themselves by ‘voluntarily’ engaging in commercial sex work.²⁵³ Moreover, girls’ carers, especially when they are living with extended family, sometimes push them into prostitution to supplement the family income.²⁵⁴

This phenomenon, that is even more worrying since it exposes girls to an increased risk of attracting STDs and/or HIV/AIDS, once more signals the importance of economic reintegration for GAAFs, either through formal education or through vocational training.

c. Drug abuse

The fact that forced drugging was the norm for both boys and girls in all fighting forces during the armed conflict, causing them to become more obedient, fearless and able to commit the worst atrocities, has been widely documented.²⁵⁵ However, little research has been done in the effects drug addictions have on the reintegration of CAAFs or GAAFs. Although it may be assumed that the treatment of drug addiction is part of the health services and psychosocial counselling provided to boys and girls who have been part of the fighting forces, in my opinion further research into its specific impact on the reintegration of GAAFs, in particular with a view to possible stigmatisation by the community, is required.

²⁵³ Save the Children UK, No Place Like Home? Children’s Experiences of Reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone, p. 26, http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/suck_cache/seuk/cache/cmsattach/1958_No_Place_Like_Home_Oct04.pdf (consulted on 23 March 2007).

²⁵⁴ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 34; D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone, January 2004, p. 36, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

²⁵⁵ See for instance TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 197, 210-211, 254 and 293-296. CAAFs were exposed to a wide variety of drugs in Sierra Leone, with the most prevalent ones being marihuana and cocaine. A commonly used technique to administer cocaine was by packing the drugs into incisions made in the children’s lower legs.

E. Lack of funding as a major stumbling block in GAAFs' reintegration

Ideally, sufficient funds should be available to finance all programmes relating to the demobilisation and reintegration of GAAFs up until the moment where long term reintegration can be considered achieved. However, this requires serious amounts of funding since both the official DDR Programme and other, 'unofficial' programmes aimed at the demobilisation and/or reintegration of CAAFs bring major costs with them. It is therefore no surprise that many programmes in Sierra Leone came to face funding problems and had to be scaled down or even shut down because they simply could not be sustained financially.

The official DDR Programme suffered from major funding problems. Paradoxically enough, the lack of funding was caused by the success of the programme in reaching out to male combatants and boy CAAFs, with more than twice the people going through the demobilisation process than anticipated.²⁵⁶ However, donor contributions to fund the programme did not swell along with the growing number of participants.²⁵⁷ Consequently there was insufficient funding available to support the reintegration of all people involved in the official DDR Programme. As the programme progressed and funding became short, this led to an abandonment of the use of the definition of CAAFs and to a restriction of access to the programme to only those children who could prove the ability to handle a weapon, thus exacerbating the aforementioned discrimination of girls by the programme.²⁵⁸ Lack of funding also had its effect on the distribution of reintegration packages as part of the official DDR programme. While demobilised CAAFs were initially eligible to receive a reintegration package if they had been in the fighting forces for at least one year, as funding decreased this changed to two years and eventually resources became so scarce that only CAAFs that were able to use a gun qualified for obtaining a DDR package.²⁵⁹ This led to further discrimination of the few girls that actually went through the official DDR Programme since many of them were not able to handle a gun and/or did not possess a weapon of their own.

²⁵⁶ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration and Gender-based Violence in Sierra Leone, September 2002, p. 5, http://www.womencommission.org/pdf/sl_ddr03.pdf (consulted on 6 March 2007).

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Save the Children UK, *Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict*, 2005, p. 8, http://www.harare.unesco.org/women/2698_GAAF%20report.pdf (consulted on 13 March 2007).

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

One of the factors that has led to funding problems for ‘unofficial’ reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone, which are donor driven, is the fact that, due to an overemphasis on the demobilisation aspect of DDR, donor agencies tend to regard reintegration complete relatively soon, judging the country to be exiting the emergency phase and entering one of development and reconstruction, thus further complicating the acquisition of long term funding for programmes on the ground.²⁶⁰ Moreover, the need to restore infrastructure in Sierra Leone appears to have been more appealing to donors than the reintegration of boys and girls CAAFs,²⁶¹ leading to additional funding problems for many reintegration programmes.

Lack of funding has led to a phasing out of certain reintegration programmes by donor dependent organisations such as FAWE and Caritas Makeni.²⁶² Another programme that suffered from funding problems was the earlier-on described Sefafu. Due to the fact that this programme that specifically targeted GAAFs was strictly donor-driven and therefore had to rely on securing funds for the short term, the lack of long term funding created problems in ensuring systematic reintegration efforts.²⁶³ Save the Children UK also suffered from funding problems as indicated by a hearing of a girl in front of the TRC who was unable to afford school fees and did not receive assistance from SCUK “due to a lack of funds”.²⁶⁴

Once funding provided by the international community dries out, the natural reaction of organisations in charge of reintegration programmes is to request the national government to provide the necessary funds for the completion of the programme or to take over the programme in its entirety. However, in Sierra Leone this has not been possible due to a variety of reasons. Firstly since the country is still one of the poorest countries in the world and therefore simply does not have the resources to sustain the many reintegration programmes organised within its borders.²⁶⁵ Secondly because the department of the government that is responsible for matters of reintegration of CAAFs, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA), receives the smallest part of all the

²⁶⁰ Heykoop, 2006, p. 13; [Unknown author], Sierra Leone: Liberian child soldiers still make trouble without guns, <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=24&ReportId=66997&Country=Yes> (consulted on 31 May 2007).

²⁶¹ McIntyre & Thusi, 2003, p. 74.

²⁶² T. Pihl & D. Lamin, Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone, 2006, p. 60.

²⁶³ Shereef, C.A., Jonah, D., Hayes, M., Kostelny, K. & Wessells, M., The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future, p. 20.

²⁶⁴ TRC Report, Appendix 3, p. 251.

²⁶⁵ Sierra Leone is one of the ten poorest countries in the world, both when defining poverty in terms of Purchasing Power Parity and when using the World Bank’s Atlas methodology. See <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GNIPC.pdf> (consulted on 24 June 2007).

Ministries of the limited budget of the Sierra Leonean government.²⁶⁶ The budget they are currently allocated is merely enough to pay the government employees working within the Ministry, leaving no financial means to fund, let alone take over, reintegration programmes.²⁶⁷ This is for instance evidenced by the fact that the MSWGCA was unable to completely take over the implementation of UNICEF's Community Based Reintegration Programme from NGOs in 2003 because it simply did not have enough resources to be able to handle the remaining caseload.²⁶⁸

To conclude, both official and 'unofficial' reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone have suffered from a lack of funding, mainly caused by an underestimation of the costs involved in the demobilisation and reintegration of adult combatants and CAAFs and the absence of long term funding by donors. In theory, this lack of funding could be corrected by the government. However, in Sierra Leone this has proven to be impossible due to the financial restraints the Ministry most relevant to the reintegration of GAAFs has encountered. Therefore, in my opinion, other solutions, such as convincing donor agencies to extend their periods of funding or relying on part of the funding budget available for development, need to be found in order not to jeopardise the valuable efforts many organisations are making towards the reintegration of GAAFs.

²⁶⁶ T. Pihl & D. Lamin, *Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone*, 2006, p. 40.

²⁶⁷ UNICEF, *Child Protection Programme*, Freetown, June 2006, p. 2.

²⁶⁸ T. Pihl & D. Lamin, *Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone*, 2006, p. 41.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the following sections I will firstly examine on a preliminary²⁶⁹ basis whether a window of opportunity has opened up in the aftermath of Sierra Leone's armed conflict to address the discrimination of girls and women and thus improve gender relations in the post-conflict Sierra Leonean society and whether this window has been taken up by the international community to create more gender equality. Afterwards I will formulate recommendations based on the findings I have made throughout the thesis.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY? IMPROVING GENDER RELATIONS IN THE AFTERMATH OF SIERRA LEONE'S ARMED CONFLICT

I have identified three factors that have contributed to the opening of a window of opportunity for the improvement of gender relations in Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the armed conflict.

A first factor is the destructive nature of war itself. A decade of armed conflict has not only destroyed infrastructure, schools and hospitals and left the country's economy in ruins. It has also broken community ties and has weakened the traditional community structures that enforced the discriminatory customs existing prior to the armed conflict. Therefore, in the aftermath of the armed conflict, these traditional conceptions of gender relations are vulnerable to attack and, under the right circumstances, might be changed.

A second factor is connected to the competences GAAF's have gained during the armed conflict, which can be used to support their strive for gender equality and independence during the reintegration phase.

Despite their horrific experiences, GAAF's have shown tremendous agency and initiative during the war.²⁷⁰ Even after having been abducted, many of them have regained

²⁶⁹ Preliminary because the armed conflict has only been over for five years and it is therefore too soon to formulate definite conclusions.

²⁷⁰ D. Mazurana & K. Carlson, From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone, January 2004, p. 4, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/spotlight/disarmament/disarm_pdf/2004_Mazurana_Carlson.pdf (consulted on 10 April 2007).

some control of their lives by developing skills to ensure their survival and strategies to protect others.²⁷¹ Moreover, a limited number of girls achieved positions of power they had previously been unable to attain due to traditional conceptions of their roles in society demanding their subordination and domestication.²⁷² Prime examples of these girls are GAAFs that were the ‘wives’ of commanders within the RUF or that made it to commander themselves, leading them to gain management and strategic skills. Finally, GAAFs have been forced to mature a lot faster during their time with the fighting forces than in normal circumstances. They have been exposed to ruthless situations in which being strong and fending for themselves was the only way to survive in contrast to their lives in traditional societies that are characterised by male dominance and female subordination, with a heavy emphasis on the need to protect and provide for girls because they are perceived as being incapable of self-agency.

To conclude, the Sierra Leonean armed conflict was not only synonymous with brutal oppression and abuse of girls, leading them to be psychologically disturbed and exhibit violent, disobedient and unruly behaviour during their reintegration, but paradoxically also opened some of their possibilities and introduced a limited number of them to positions of power where they could – relatively speaking – enjoy more egalitarian standards than before the armed conflict. The question that needs to be answered is whether these competences have been used to GAAFs’ advantage by the many actors involved in their reintegration into society.

Moreover, not only GAAFs but also women and girls that were never involved with the fighting forces have experienced improved gender equality and have gained competences during the armed conflict since, in the absence of men who were away fighting the war, they were left as the main income-providers responsible for the survival of their family and communities at large.

A third important factor contributing to the opening of the window of opportunity is the international presence in the aftermath of the armed conflict. International organisations, donor agencies and international NGOs were called upon to assist Sierra Leone in building a sustainable peace. A large step towards this lasting peace was the establishment of a DDR programme. The majority of the actors involved in this programme and the ‘unofficial’

²⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²⁷² McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 17.

reintegration programmes described earlier-on are Western or global actors. They therefore operate from a perspective that is based on gender equality and attempt to address the discrimination of girls and women they witness in the Sierra Leonean society. International organisations stress the importance of participation of women in the rebuilding of society, NGOs provide benefits such as education and vocational training specifically to girls and donor agencies make funding conditional to the objective of creating more gender equality. The question remains whether they have really succeeded in changing gender relations in the aftermath of Sierra Leone's armed conflict.

When analysing gender relations and the situation of girls in the aftermath of the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, I identified several improvements, at least on paper. The Sierra Leonean government has enacted or is preparing several laws and policies that are aimed at the elimination of discrimination of girls. The most important of these laws is the Child Rights Bill that is currently under discussion at the Parliament. Apart from defining a child as any person below the age of 18, thus contradicting traditional conceptions that define a girl as a woman as soon as she has given birth or gets married, the draft of this Bill specifically provides for the elimination of early marriages and FGM.²⁷³ The draft specifies 18 as the minimum age of marriage and dictates that “[n]o person or association shall subject a child to [...] an initiation ceremony”, thus clearly opposing the harmful practices, such as FGM, that are associated with these ceremonies.²⁷⁴ However, as of yet the draft Child Rights Bill has not made it through the Parliament, where it is reportedly being blocked since the abolishment of traditional practices such as FGM and early marriage is not to the liking of all parliamentarians.²⁷⁵ A second important law is the Education Act of 2003, which provides for compulsory and free primary education and specifically incorporates a provision into its text prohibiting discrimination in the access to education based on a variety of factors, including sex.²⁷⁶ However, since school uniforms and supplies do not fall under the law, parents still need to buy these for their children.²⁷⁷ Moreover, serious problems exist in the payment of

²⁷³ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, pp. 57-58.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁷⁵ The New Citizen, Child Rights Bill for Parliament, http://www.christiantrede.com/webdesign/clients/newcitizen/localnews.php?start_from=&ucat=1&subaction=showfull&id=1178190921&archive=1180648821& (consulted on 5 June 2007); Meeting with the Head of the Inter Religious Council, Freetown, 31 March 2007.

²⁷⁶ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 54.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

school teachers, leading many of them to demand tuition fees from the pupils directly.²⁷⁸ Therefore, primary education in practice continues to bring economical burdens with it, leading many families to still prefer the education of their sons over that of their daughters. A third initiative taken by the government to improve gender relations is the establishment of a Constitutional Review Mechanism which task is to revise the 1991 Constitution including the removal of provisions relating to gender discrimination mentioned earlier-on.²⁷⁹ Finally, the government has also enacted a National Policy on the Advancement of Women and a National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming. While the former policy document is aimed at improving the status of women and removing discrimination caused by, *inter alia*, legislation and customary practices, the latter's objective is to improve opportunities for women and their access to productive resources, based on the acknowledgement that the lower status of women compared to men is due to gender imbalances.²⁸⁰

To conclude, the situation on paper for Sierra Leonean girls has improved to a great extent, with most of the discriminating factors removed in theory. However, in my opinion the Sierra Leonean government has yet to definitively address the two major problems in its legal system. First of all, its Constitution still contains a provision against discrimination that is not applicable to all fields of society. Secondly, there still exists no established hierarchy between written and customary law, with both essentially being equal. As a consequence of these structural problems in Sierra Leone's legal system, the aforementioned laws, including the Child Rights Bill, cannot change customary laws that for instance allow early marriage.

To obtain a comprehensive view of girls' situation, not only their situation on paper but also the practical conditions affecting their everyday lives need to be analysed.

On the one hand, it is clear to me that current-day Sierra Leone is characterised by some improvements in gender relations compared to the situation before the armed conflict.

Firstly, improvements are noticeable in the education of girls with an increased numbers of girls being enrolled in schools. This improvement appears to have only taken place in primary education. Statistics indicate that 39 % of girls aged seven to eleven are attending primary school compared to 43 % of boys, while only 17 % of girls and 21 % of

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ United Nations, Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone, 7 May 2007, S/2007/257, para. 32.

²⁸⁰ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, paras. 571-572.

boys aged twelve to seventeen are attending secondary school.²⁸¹ However, it must be noted that, due to the armed conflict, an estimated 43 % of all secondary school age girls and 50 % of all secondary school age boys are also attending primary school,²⁸² a factor that has a distorting impact on the figures given for secondary school enrolment.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from these statistics is the marked improvement in the number of girls attending primary school.²⁸³ In my opinion this can be attributed both to the improvements in the education laws and to the presence of a wide variety of organisations, including UNICEF and FAWE, that promote the right to education for all children on a non-discriminatory basis or even focus specifically on providing education for girls. However, due to a variety of reasons, including the fact that primary education is still not completely free in practice, girls remain slightly underrepresented in schools.

Secondly, improvements are noticeable in the treatment of sexual abuse crimes. While the pre-war society in Sierra Leone was characterised by a culture of taboo and impunity, this appears to be no longer the case. Due to a marked increase in the number of awareness raising campaigns and workshops organised by NGOs, civil society groups and the government, addressing the issue of sexual abuse, this topic is slowly leaving the taboo-corner.²⁸⁴ Consequently, the culture of silence and impunity is starting to crumble, as evidenced by the increase in the reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual abuse crimes.²⁸⁵ However, it must at the same time be noted that traditional ways of settling sexual abuse crimes, including marriage between the (underage) victim and the perpetrator, remain highly prevalent in Sierra Leonean society.²⁸⁶

On the other hand I identified several fields of society in which no improvement in gender relations is noticeable and in which gender equality thus remains an idle hope.

²⁸¹ UNICEF, At a Glance: Sierra Leone. Statistics, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_statistics.html#26 (consulted on 11 April 2007); UNICEF, Revised Final MICS3 Tables, Freetown, 2005, pp. 53-54.

²⁸² UNICEF, Revised Final MICS3 Tables, Freetown, 2005, p. 55.

²⁸³ Due to different divisions in age categories between the figures given here and those given above, the drawing of definite conclusions is impossible. However, the difference in the attendance of primary school is big enough to draw the said conclusion.

²⁸⁴ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 560.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 23.

First of all, FGM remains a widespread tradition in Sierra Leone, with nearly all women undergoing some form of FGC,²⁸⁷ usually as part of their initiation into the secret Bundu society. While FGM was traditionally part of an entire initiation ritual for girls that indicated their transgression into womanhood and thus included various ‘educational’ elements, such as training them in women’s roles like cooking and taking care of children, this training is now disappearing and FGC is increasingly becoming the sole focus of initiation.²⁸⁸ Initiation of girls into the Bundu society is moreover taking place at younger ages, *inter alia* since younger girls are less likely of knowing what takes place at the secret initiation rituals, while it is feared that older girls will refuse to join the society if they knew that FGC is a prerequisite for entering.²⁸⁹ In my opinion, this casts a dark shadow over a society that is otherwise viewed as a form of empowerment for Sierra Leonean women, since it offers them social power and a place to come together to discuss issues affecting their lives without influence by the traditional male dominance.²⁹⁰

Early marriage is another issue that has remained as prevalent after the armed conflict as before, with an estimated 62 % of girls marrying before the age of 18 and 26 % even before the age of 15.²⁹¹ Traditional ways of thinking still dominate this aspect of girls’ lives. When an underage girl gets pregnant, forcing her to marry the father of the child is a measure commonly used by her family to receive a dowry payment and to transfer the economic burden of taking care of the child to the father, while at the same time avoiding the stigma attached to having a single teenage mother in the family.²⁹² As described earlier-on, this has lead some families to convince GAAs to marry their ‘bush husbands’, thus making it more difficult for them to leave these often abusive relationships. Especially girls that are being cared for by extended family members or alternative carers, a situation in which many

²⁸⁷ 94 % according to UNICEF, Revised Final MICS3 Tables, Freetown, 2005, p. 68.

²⁸⁸ UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Rights, Child Protection Situation in Sierra Leone, March 2006, p. 25.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁹¹ UNICEF, Revised Final MICS3 Tables, Freetown, 2005, p. 65. However, it must be noted that there are also some counter-indications that early and arranged marriages are no longer common in current-day Sierra Leone as “girls have become more aware of their options and Islam, the dominant religion amongst the majority of the illiterate population, preaches against forced marriages.” Consequently, “[i]ncreasingly young men and women marry a person of their choice, particularly in urban areas”. See partly dissenting opinion of Justice Doherty, para. 24, in Special Court for Sierra Leone, Judgement of 20 June 2007 in the case of Prosecutor v. Brima, Kamara and Kanu, <http://www.sc-sl.org/documents/SCSL-04-16-T-613.pdf> (consulted on 8 July 2007), where she refers to a report submitted by expert witness Mrs. Bangoura.

²⁹² T. Pihl & D. Lamin, Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone, 2006, p. 34.

GAAFs find themselves, are vulnerable to being forced into early marriage for the aforementioned benefits.²⁹³

Especially worth noting in the context of continued discrimination of girls in Sierra Leonean society, is the fact that the reintegration programmes for CAAFs established in the aftermath of the armed conflict, both those part of the official DDR Programme and the ‘unofficial’ ones, did not recognise the competences GAAFs had gained during their time with the fighting forces. On the contrary, the approach most reintegration programmes have taken, for instance by almost exclusively training girls in traditional trades as part of the vocational training programmes, appears to condone and possibly even reinforce traditional conceptions on gender relations. This approach is in clear contravention with the principles put forward by the IDDRS, which emphasise that “[e]mpowerment of recipients, regardless of their gender, should be a central goal of any DDR interventions”.²⁹⁴

Moreover, when funding ran short girls were usually the first victims of the cutting of benefits to alleviate stressed budgets. This is for instance evidenced by the fact that in the official DDR programme the weapons-test was increasingly administered to CAAFs before they would receive their reintegration package, once funding wore thin, disproportionately affecting GAAFs since they more often than boys did not own a weapon of their own. Or by the fact that several NGOs had to cut benefits particularly valuable to girls, for instance the meals provided by Caritas Makeni.

Five years after the end of the armed conflict and the start of ambitious reintegration programmes, I have attempted to make a preliminary assessment of the situation of girls in Sierra Leone today.

Although the analysis of the current situation for girls in Sierra Leone offers a mixed view, marked by improved gender relations in some fields and a status quo in others, I noticed indications that suggest a change in the mind-set of Sierra Leonean people. One such indication is the (proposed) promulgation of laws and policies that promote gender equality and the abolishment of discriminatory laws and practices. Another is the fact that, due to awareness raising, communities are accepting that girls’ education and skills training offers benefits since it leads them to be able to support themselves and their community.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁹⁴ See IDDRS.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.

However, in my opinion one must be careful in concluding that these improvements will lead to sustained gender equality in the future. There exists a realistic possibility that the improvements in gender relations are only temporary, since they are to a large extent caused by the international presence in Sierra Leone, both from international organisations and international NGOs that are Western tinted and therefore highly emphasise gender equality, hoping to change gender relations in the post-conflict situation.

According to me, one can ask himself the valid question as to whether the window of opportunity that has opened up in post-conflict Sierra Leone will not be shut by traditional conceptions of gender relations once the influence from Western actors completely disappears and when reintegration programmes come to an end as soon as funding runs out. Previous research on the impact of armed conflict on gender relations indicates that gender relations may appear to shift at the micro-level in the aftermath of armed conflicts, while in reality the ideological basis underpinning these gender relations remains unchanged, causing the improved gender equality to be merely superficial and temporary.²⁹⁶ Transforming gender relations through rapid changes in the aftermath of armed conflicts, a hope and objective of many (international) actors active in the aftermath of armed conflicts, thus appears to me to be an unrealistic goal. The traditions and cultural ideologies that have created the inequality in gender relations do not die out swiftly, not even in a situation where communities have been devastated by a decennium of armed conflict and where the international presence in its aftermath may be conducive to showing ‘another way’. Sustained efforts will be required to enable Sierra Leonean women and girls to reach gender equality. In this respect the improvements at the national legislative level and the future promulgation of the Child Rights Bill are to be welcomed, as is the continued presence of local NGOs such as FAWE that are specifically promoting girls’ education and vocational training.

In my opinion, the five year period of reintegration efforts we have witnessed is simply too short to have any lasting impact. Cultural traditions such as early marriage and FGM have existed for many centuries in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is an idle and somewhat arrogant hope of international actors to come to a country such as Sierra Leone to eradicate all discriminatory practices against girls and women within the short time span offered by the demobilisation

²⁹⁶ See e.g. Barth, E.F., Peace as Disappointment : The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa, August 2002, <http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/DDR/AfricaBarth.html> (consulted on 5 June 2007); El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Iyob, 1997; Veale, 2003; Pankhurst, H., Gender and Conflict Paper: Case Study on Eritrean Ex-Fighters, http://www.acordinternational.org/index.php/downloads/Gender_and_Conflict_Paper%3A_Case_Study_On_Eritrean_Ex%E2%80%91Fighters (consulted on 23 May 2007).

and reintegration process. According to me, the objective of improving gender relations needs to be a joint objective from not only the actors involved in the demobilisation and reintegration of combatants and CAAFs, but also the actors and donor agencies taking over the long-term goal of developing the country's economy and infrastructure and the government of Sierra Leone itself. In order to have a realistic chance of success, in my opinion, a long-term joint project needs to be set up by all three groups of actors aimed at the sustained improvement of gender relations. The different actors would have different roles to play in this project. Since the actors involved in the reintegration of CAAFs only operate over a relatively short time-span their main focus should be the provision of practical benefits to both boys and girls on an equal footing, mainly ensuring that all GAAFs have access to education and/or vocational training. The government should first of all take up its responsibilities under CEDAW to eradicate all discriminatory laws and practices. In Sierra Leone this would *inter alia* entail changes in the Constitution, namely deleting the sentence that makes discrimination of girls and women in the fields that affect their lives most, such as marriage and inheritance, possible and establishing a clear hierarchy between written and customary law that ensures that the changes made by the Child Rights Bill can actually have an influence on customary practices such as early marriage and FGM. The government should moreover guarantee an equal right to education for girls and boys, for instance by paying school teachers their salaries so that they do not turn demand tuition fees directly from their pupils. The actors active in the development field should from the start, *i.e.* immediately after the end of the armed conflict, work towards the eradication of some of the underlying reasons that cause the discriminatory practices. For instance, by assisting the country in its development – a task a war-torn society can not achieve on its own – so that it can actually guarantee a more or less sustainable income to each head of family, the underlying source of early marriages and taking girls out of school, poverty within the family, would be taken away, paving the way for an actual change in gender ideologies.

Because it is my assessment that in the end the current superficial changes in gender relations in Sierra Leone are not sure to last and are merely that, changes at micro-level, on the surface of society. The discriminatory practices in society run a lot deeper and are not so easy to uproot. Only when one takes away the primary source of these discriminatory practices, a sustainable gender equality becomes possible. Therefore, all the aforementioned actors should work together to improve the general situation for all people and communities in the country while at the same time raising the awareness that gender equality is one of the main objectives to be achieved in the aftermath of the armed conflict both towards the

communities and its members to change their patriarchal views and towards the international donor agencies to guarantee long-term funding to overarching projects aimed at improving gender relations.

ENSURING GIRLS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Based upon the aforementioned roles to be played in the promotion of gender equality, both the actors responsible for the reintegration of GAAFs and the Sierra Leonean government should ensure the right to education and vocational training for girls.

It has clearly been established throughout this thesis that the right to education is a very important aspect of GAAFs' reintegration. However, in current-day Sierra Leone there are still several factors that complicate or block girls' access to education. One such factor is the increasing costs of education.²⁹⁷ While the government of Sierra Leone had promised free primary education for girls in the aftermath of the war, they failed to keep this promise. In practice teachers' salaries have been delayed, leading them to demand money directly from their pupils.²⁹⁸ This funding problem further exacerbates the fact that, due to custom and economic constraints, families prioritise the schooling of boys, putting emphasis on girls' domestication and (early) marriage and keeping them out of school if they are not able to afford the costs associated with their education.²⁹⁹ Pregnancy and/or childcare are further factors that have impacted negatively on girls' access, or at least attendance, to schooling, with FAWE being the only organisation to allow pregnant girls in the classrooms.

GAAFs suffer particularly from the aforementioned problems in accessing education, while they are often in desperate need of schooling. Due to their time with the fighting forces, during which they did not have access to any kind of schooling, all GAAFs lack education, which complicates their economic reintegration. It is therefore no surprise that most girls view education as one of the most important aspects of their reintegration, hoping this will eventually offer them job opportunities that are able to create a sustainable income.³⁰⁰ Education and skills training furthermore facilitate GAAFs' social reintegration since it

²⁹⁷ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 519.

²⁹⁸ Save the Children, Girls formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through formal demobilisation: Save the Children UK's experience in West Africa, March 2005, unpublished, p. 20.

²⁹⁹ Ibid; Heykoop, 2006, p. 29; TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 519.

³⁰⁰ Mazurana & McKay, 2003, p. 18.

causes families and communities to perceive them as potential contributors to society instead of as unwanted economic burdens.³⁰¹

The second important aspect of economic reintegration for GAAFs is their capacity to create a sustainable income. Many GAAFs returning from the bush are too old to go through a full education, comprising of primary and secondary schooling. They often express the desire to create job opportunities so that they would be able to provide for themselves. Girl mothers especially stress the importance of gaining some form of income as soon as possible in order to be able to provide for their children. Moreover, in rural areas, where poverty is extremely high, girls are often valued by their family and community in proportion to their earning capability and capacity to contribute to their family and society at large, thus indicating a possible link between their economic and social reintegration.³⁰²

Vocational or skills training is organised as part of reintegration programmes to assist GAAFs in attaining their goal of finding a job that offers themselves and their dependants a sustainable income, by offering them a viable alternative to the petty-trading, or worse, prostitution, they were forced to engage in to help themselves, their children and/or their families to survive economically. As understood by all actors providing vocational training, an important aspect of this training is the necessity to combine it with business skills training and basic literacy and numeracy education, so that trained girls would be able to manage accounting and savings.³⁰³

However, some problematic issues still exist in connection with vocational training programmes in Sierra Leone. A first issue is related to the fact that nearly all reintegration programmes in Sierra Leone, both those part of the official DDR Programme and the ‘unofficial’ ones,³⁰⁴ exclusively taught GAAFs traditional trades such as soap making, hairdressing and gara tie-dying, while boys were mainly taught trades such as masonry, welding and carpentry. This provision of earmarked programmes for boys and girls runs the risk of acknowledging and reinforcing gender discrimination by segregating girls into “appropriate for gender” trades with limited economic possibilities, such as soap making.³⁰⁵ However, one must on the one hand take account of the fact that girls often express the explicit will to learn trades that offer immediate income, while on the other hand assuring

³⁰¹ TRC Report, Volume 3 B, para. 406.

³⁰² C.A. Shereef, D. Jonah, M. Hayes, K. Kostelny & M. Wessells, *The Reintegration of Formerly Abducted Girls and Girl Mothers in Sierra Leone: Sealing the Past, Facing the Future*, p. 11.

³⁰³ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 105.

³⁰⁴ FAWE is a notable exception to this rule.

³⁰⁵ McKay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 53.

that, if girls are taught non-traditional skills such as welding and masonry, there actually exists a possibility for them to find employment in these fields. Anecdotal evidence suggests that such possibilities exist to a certain extent in Sierra Leone. A girl that had been trained in welding by FAWE in Freetown was offered an apprenticeship after finishing her training and was consequently recommended to the US Embassy in assisting with the construction of their building.³⁰⁶ Five other girls who had been taught in masonry in Koidu by the same organisation have helped in the construction of a FAWE school and are now being contracted to other NGOs for whom they have been working in construction against remuneration.³⁰⁷

Another issue is related to the effectiveness of vocational training. The World Bank has expressed the view that apprenticeship training and micro-enterprise support will more likely lead to employment for demobilised combatants than centre-based vocational training.³⁰⁸ Thus, in my opinion the exclusive use of this form of vocational training in the reintegration of CAAFs in Sierra Leone, with little support being offered after training ended in finding employment or initiating micro-enterprise activities, other than the provision of a start-up kit, was a significant shortcoming of all skills training programmes, leaving CAAFs, including girls, almost literally up a creek without a paddle. The ‘Quick Impact Project Funds’ offered to families of demobilised CAAFs in Angola to assist in the rehabilitation of small businesses such as bakeries,³⁰⁹ provide an example of what could, according to me, be a meaningful addition to the purely centre-based vocational training provided in Sierra Leone, with the important qualification that these funds should also be available to the families of boys and girls who did not go through the official DDR Programme.

A final question related to the vocational training for CAAFs is connected to the ability of the government to improve the overall economic situation of the country to provide girls (and boys) with realistic job opportunities, especially in light of the fact that nearly half of the Sierra Leonean population is aged under 18.³¹⁰ In this respect, it becomes once again apparent that a joint and sustained project organised by the actors involved in CAAFs reintegration, the government and actors involved in the development of Sierra Leone is necessary to achieve these ambitious goals and to achieve a real improvement in gender relations.

³⁰⁶ Interview with Margaret Musa, Human Rights Officer, FAWE, Freetown, 30 March 2007.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.

³⁰⁸ Williamson, 2006, p. 16.

³⁰⁹ Verhey, 2001, p. 20.

³¹⁰ UNICEF, At a Glance: Sierra Leone. Statistics, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sierraleone_statistics.html#26 (consulted on 11 April 2007).

DISCRIMINATION OF GIRLS IN REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES

In light of the foregoing objective of the improvement of gender relations in the aftermath of Sierra Leone's armed conflict, I find it particularly regrettable that the actors responsible for the reintegration of CAAFs themselves have developed, implemented and/or condoned practices that directly or indirectly discriminate against girls, both within the official DDR Programme and the 'unofficial' reintegration programmes.

The official DDR Programmes has discriminated against GAAFs in a variety of manners. Firstly, several flaws in the design and implementation of the DDR Programme have resulted in gross underrepresentation of girls among the demobilised CAAFs, with a mere 8, 5 % of all demobilised CAAFs being girls, while they represented 25 % of all children associated with fighting forces. This underrepresentation was largely caused by the fact that the DDR Programme followed a too narrow definition of CAAFs, leading to the classification of abducted girls into the category of 'camp followers' who were not eligible for entry into the Programme and by the fact that, contrary to what was stated in the DDR guidelines, the weapons test was repeatedly administered to CAAFs as an eligibility criterion for entry into the Programme, which disproportionately affected girls since they more often than boys did not own a weapon of their own. Secondly, when funding ran short for the official DDR Programme, the entitlement to reintegration packages was also connected to the proof of being able to handle a weapon, thus once again disproportionately affecting girls because of the aforementioned reason. Thirdly, the DDR Programme did not take the different situation of boys and girls sufficiently into account and consequently failed to address the specific needs of GAAFs in the demobilisation phase, indicating once more that both the design and the implementation of the DDR Programme was not gender-appropriate. Finally, the DDR Programme and its implementation by DDR officials also exhibited some signs of a patriarchal view of society that further exacerbated some of the problems GAAFs were facing. This is for instance evidenced by the fact that 'wives' of former combatants would be able to apply for micro-credit but only when accompanied by their husband, causing problems for GAAFs to end their relationship with their 'bush husband'.

The major result of the discrimination against girls by the official DDR Programme, the fact that the vast majority of GAAFs self-demobilised, had to be redressed by the establishment of 'unofficial' reintegration programmes. These programmes, while they can generally be

described as successful in achieving the reintegration of GAAFs, have known some discriminatory practices and gender bias themselves, albeit to a lesser extent than the official DDR Programme. Firstly, educational programmes discriminated against pregnant girls by not allowing them in the classroom, with FAWE being the notable exception. Secondly, funding shortages led to the cutting of benefits that were particularly valuable for GAAFs, such as the cutting down of the provision of meals at the training classes organised by Caritas Makeni, which were particularly important for girl mothers. However, it must on the other hand be noted that many efforts were made to ensure the right to education of these girl mothers, such as the provision of child care by FAWE so that the mothers could continue to attend classes. Finally, ‘unofficial’ reintegration programmes made extensive use of cleansing ceremonies in order to further GAAFs’ social reintegration. While these ceremonies led to a greater acceptance of girls and indeed assisted in their social reintegration, they may also have contributed to a further spreading of the harmful practice of FGM or at least, through their support of the Bundu society, appear to condone the practice.

A last factor that indicates gender-bias by most of the actors responsible for the reintegration of GAAFs, both those active in the official DDR Programme and those responsible for ‘unofficial’ reintegration programmes, was the near exclusive provision of vocational training in trades and skills that are viewed as the traditional terrain of women and girls, while only a small minority of girls were trained in non-traditional skills. This forms an acknowledgement of traditional gender roles in society and perpetuates gender-stereotypes that describe girls as inferior to boys by indicating that girls and women are unable to do a man’s job.

To conclude, while the many actors active in the field of reintegration of GAAFs had the opportunity to address some of the discriminatory practices that exist in the Sierra Leonean society in order to create improved gender relations and promote gender equality, they themselves were to a greater or lesser extent responsible for discrimination or gender-bias against girls, thus contributing to the closing of the aforementioned window of opportunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations to the international community

- Amend the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts in order to fit the definition of CAAFs in the Paris Principles. This entails the imposition of an absolute minimum age for recruitment of 18 years or at least a reformulation of the sentence “taking a *direct* part in hostilities [own emphasis]” in the relevant articles of the Optional Protocol to prohibit the use of CAAFs in any role or function that is somehow connected to the hostilities, thus acknowledging the wide variety of roles CAAFs and GAAFs perform within fighting forces.
- Raise awareness on the multitude of roles performed by GAAFs within the fighting forces in order to change the stereotyped view that they are only and always used as sex slaves and/or ‘wives’ of male combatants.

Specific recommendations to the Sierra Leonean government

- Eliminate the discriminatory provision against discrimination in the Constitution.
- Establish a clear hierarchy between written law and customary law, in which customary law should always be in accordance with written law. This would create a real opening towards the abolishment of early marriage and FGM through the Child Rights Bill. Alternatively, the Child Rights Bill should become a part of the Constitution, thus assuring its prevalence over customary laws.
- Raise the budget of the MSWGCA in order to ensure a successful reintegration of GAAFs and a detailed follow-up to this reintegration as well as the realisation of the right to education for all girls.
- Ensure that the promised free primary education for all children becomes a reality, *inter alia* by paying teachers’ salaries on time, in order to address the remaining underrepresentation of girls in primary schools.

Recommendations for future DDR Programmes and ‘unofficial’ reintegration programmes for GAAFs based on the Sierra Leonean experience

- Incorporate a gender perspective in the design of DDR Programmes in order to redress the fact that most GAAFs are left behind by these Programmes. This entails *inter alia* the incorporation of a provision specifically related to GAAFs in the peace accord that lays the foundation for the DDR Programme, similar to the one related to CAAFs that can be found in the Lomé Peace Accord.
- In accordance with the IDDRS, ensure the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of DDR Programmes in a gender-responsive manner, *inter alia* by removing discriminatory practices that block GAAFs’ entry into the Programmes. This requires for instance the discarding of weapon possession as an eligibility criterion for entry into DDR Programmes for CAAFs both in the design and the implementation of Programmes. It moreover requires the use of the definition of CAAFs established by the Paris Principle that recognises the full range of roles played by GAAFs in order to avoid their classification in the near-exclusive category of ‘camp followers’ who are not eligible for entry into DDR Programmes.
- Remove all remaining obstacles that might prevent GAAFs from entering DDR Programmes, *inter alia* by ensuring sufficient distance between demobilisation sites for children and those for adults to take away girls’ fear of reprisals by their former commanders.
- Provide sufficient dissemination of information on DDR Programmes in a manner that is sure to reach all possible beneficiaries. This could entail the spreading of folders and articles in newspapers as well as the use of video and radio messages in all the local languages and at times when all people, including those living in rural areas, are most likely to be able to hear the message.
- Take the different situation of boys and girls CAAFs sufficiently into account in order to ensure that demobilisation sites in DDR Programmes are adequately equipped with the facilities necessary to address GAAFs specific needs. This entails *inter alia* the provision of hygiene materials, such as menstrual supplies, and separate and secure shower and toilet facilities to all GAAFs. It moreover requires the provision of sufficient medical services to pregnant girls or girl mothers and their babies.

- Remove all gender-biased attitudes in the design and implementation of DDR Programmes, *inter alia* by allowing ‘wives’ of former combatants to apply for micro-credit without a requirement of accompaniment by their ‘husband’, since this complicates the ending of relationships with their ‘bush husbands’ for GAAFs.
- Ensure that the preliminary assessment of the number of members of the fighting forces that will enter the DDR Programme are correct in order to prevent a lack of funding that might negatively impact the involvement of and/or provision of benefits to GAAFs in the Programme.
- Design and implement ‘unofficial’ reintegration programmes in order to assure a successful reintegration to those GAAFs that do not take part in the official DDR Programme and, for whichever reason, self-demobilise instead. Make use of UNICEF’s Girls Left Behind Project as a best practice example in this matter.
- Encourage local communities to set up their own protection networks for girls in general and GAAFs in particular, such as community mobilisers and Girls’ Welfare Committees, in accordance with the shifting emphasis away from community sensitisation and towards community mediation.
- Ensure inclusiveness of GAAFs in Children Clubs by reconfiguring them in such a manner that they are open to all children in the community instead of being mainly directed to school going children, since the latter disproportionately affects girls who are generally underrepresented in schools.
- Prevent the use of gender-stereotypes in the provision of reintegration services to GAAFs, *inter alia* by providing them not only with training in traditional, ‘appropriate for gender’ skills, but also in non-traditional skills if there exists a realistic possibility that they will find employment in the skill they are taught.
- Consider combining vocational training programmes with follow-up support in the finding of employment or by initiating micro-enterprise activities, with the ‘Quick Impact Project Funds’ offered in Angola as a best practice example.
- Prevent confusion about the provision of start-up kits to be handed out at the end of GAAFs’ vocational training programme by offering them from the outset detailed information on the exact content of these kits.
- In the design of vocational training programmes, differentiate from the start between the different skills taught and assign a period of training that correlates to the complexity of the skill and thus the amount of time it takes to teach it to the girls. This

would for instance enable girl mothers who are in desperate need of some form of income to make an informed decision on which skill they want to learn.

- Ensure that pregnant girls and girls who have children of their own can continue their education by following FAWE's example of allowing pregnant girls in their classrooms and providing child care facilities to girl mothers.
- Ensure standardisation in projects aimed at reintegration of GAAFs, *inter alia* by requesting implementing partners to provide literacy and business skills training of the same standards and to keep up-to-date and correct project files. Implementing partners should moreover be obliged to send more detailed and comprehensive project reports to UNICEF in order to ensure a systematic follow-up.
- Ensure specific monitoring, including the provision of free medical screening, of GAAFs in order to prevent a possible spread of HIV/AIDS within the population.
- Exercise precaution in the use of reintegration rituals, such as cleansing ceremonies, since one might collaborate in spreading FGM or at least appear to endorse FGM by promoting the use of these rituals. Strict monitoring of the entire ritual and regular follow-up of the girls that took part in the ceremony must be a precondition in order for the ritual to be allowed to take place.
- Recognise and make use of the positive competences GAAFs have gained during the armed conflict as a stepping stone towards their successful reintegration, instead of treating girls once again as passive victims who need protection, thus perpetuating gender-stereotypes. This strengthens the argument for the provision of non-traditional skills to GAAFs.
- In order to address the lack of funding for the 'unofficial' reintegration programmes, convince donor agencies to extend the period of funding or rely on part of the budget available for the long-term development of the country since the successful reintegration of GAAFs will contribute to this development.
- Exercise caution in assuming that superficial changes in gender relations in the post-conflict society will lead to sustained gender equality in the future.
- Promote the use of local NGO's, such as FAWE, in the reintegration of GAAFs since these NGO's, by their emphasis on the need to achieve gender equality, are ideally placed to support the development of sustained changes in gender relations because they stay when the international presence has to a great extent disappeared after the relatively short reintegration phase.

- Support the creation immediately after the end of the armed conflict, *inter alia* by the establishment of an overarching donor trust fund, of a joint project with the specific objective of improving gender relations and promoting gender equality in the post-conflict society, organised and implemented by the actors involved in the reintegration of CAAFs and GAAFs, the actors involved in development assistance and the government itself, in which each actor has its own role to play dependant on the extent to which it can have an impact on the change of gender-ideology in the population.

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- Interview with Princess Didy Pratt, Branch President of FAWE for the Kono District, Koidu, 4 April 2007.
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