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CHILD SOLDIERS

Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration in Liberia

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Foreword

Wars of recent years, which are characterised as identity-driven and intrastate, their boundaries drawn near neighbourhoods and homesteads, are unparalleled in their targeting of the civilian population. In particular, women and children who often are among the most vulnerable in wars, continue to suffer immensely.

Paradoxically, children do not appear to be only innocent victims. They are inducted, abducted or lured to work at 13, 12 or even 9, not at the 'sweat shop', but with the gun and grenades in their hands committing atrocities in the jungles or in devastated city neighbourhoods. They are the child soldiers, fighting in brutal wars, where often 'clan' and 'religious loyalties' are said to justify the horrors they perpetrate.

Towards the close of the last century, it was estimated that more than 300,000 children were fighting in the 30 conflicts that raged in the world. During that very decade nearly 2 million children are reported to have died in armed conflicts, while some 6 million were seriously wounded.

There is now a wide-ranging effort to raise awareness against and campaign to stop the use of children in wars. However, knowledge in the area of reintegration and rehabilitation of former child soldiers still remains rudimentary, and calls for serious research work as part of post-conflict peace building and reconstruction. This research report is among few small steps in this direction.

The study on Liberia, done by Dr Teferi Sendabo, is part of LPI's commitment to investigate the state of rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers in different war-torn societies. Although one has singled out Liberia for deeper investigation, this research in its introductory part has made a valuable review of the general situation of child soldiers, particularly highlighting the work of UNICEF and some examples from civil wars in Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Colombia.

Through literature review, this study has also made a useful account of various motives that compel children to take up arms and join the war front as child soldiers. The author has managed to verify some of the commonly acknowledged suggestions and findings during his fieldwork, as well as shedding light on some new elements.

The fieldwork has used various methods including questionnaire, interviews and participant-observation with selected exposure. Questionnaire has been conducted among selected former child soldiers. Through interviews with former child soldiers, family members, social workers and educators, community and religious leaders, and representatives of organisations, the author has managed to collect moving statements and testimonies that reveal the horrors of civil war and the human tragedy and trauma it entails.

The researcher presents in brief how Liberians define rehabilitation and reintegration. He has observed the trauma healing work being done by the Lutheran Church of Liberia (LCL) in collaboration with The Lutheran World Federation/World Service (LWF/WS). The techniques and methods they use in the trauma healing are presented and their experience is summarised. Both achievements and obstacles are recorded. Gauging experiences and views in these variegated exposures, the study has made concrete suggestions for rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers.

This work is a small step in the effort to accumulate pertinent knowledge in this rather newly emerging problem area in peace and conflict research, and its findings are of value for both further theoretical investigation and practical use. Its value definitely goes beyond Liberia and to all similar cases where present day fratricidal wars have deprived children and youths of their human rights and normal peaceable life, drawing them into horrendous violence both as victims and perpetrators.

This research has been possible because of the generous financial support LPI has received from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, and The United Methodist Church, Global Ministries, New York. We thank the two donors for their dedication and support. Our thanks also go to Dr Lucia Ann McSpadden, former LPI Research Director, Rev. Hans Lindqvist and Dr Mats Utas, anthropologist, Uppsala University, for reviewing the manuscript and giving valuable suggestions. We also thank Shane Quinn and Jenny Svensson of LPI for final proofreading of the manuscript.

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I want to acknowledge the contributions of Rev. Hans Lindqvist, former Church of Sweden Missionary to Liberia and consultant to the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Programme (THRP), who encouraged me to take this assignment and go to Liberia with him. I thank him for introducing me to the people of Liberia, its culture and history. His knowledge about Liberia, which he kindly shared with me, was a source of inspiration. His home in Monrovia served me as my own. Without his full assistance and introduction to the problem, I would have had difficulty in accomplishing this study. Lindqvist has read the draft of the manuscript and given me many valuable comments.

I am also grateful to the Lutheran Church in Liberia (LCL) and Lutheran World Federation/World Service (LWF/WS). I want to give my appreciation to the Rt. Rev. Dr Sumoward E. Harris, LCL Bishop, Mr Charles E. Pitchford, the LWF/WS Resident Representative, and to the staff of both organisations for their close collaboration and interest shown in this study. I want to give my heartfelt thanks to Rev. Bartholomew B. Colley, the Co-ordinator of the LCL-LWF/WS Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Programme and his staff, for their openness and support in this study. I thank them for giving me access to their documents and work with Trauma Healing and Reconciliation.

My sincere thanks go to the former child soldier Mr Morlee G. Zawoo Sr., who facilitated my meetings with former child soldiers and who fully co-operated with me in generating useful information about child soldiers in Liberia. His willingness to talk openly about his painful experiences helped me to understand what it means to be a child soldier. Without Zawoos' help, meeting the ex-combatants and collecting information about the rehabilitation and social reintegration work among them would have been very difficult.

Many thanks to Hon. Victoria Reffell, Chairman of the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission of Liberia, for taking time to give an interview and for discussing openly the government's official view about the rehabilitation and reintegration of the ex-combatants, and for the information material provided for me from the Commission.

I would like to thank Mr David Kiazolu, General Secretary of the Interfaith Council of Liberia, Leaders of the Salesians of Don Bosco Homes, Young Men Christian Association leadership, the UNICEF office in Monrovia and others for their co-operation and for sharing their experiences about the civil war and the work they are doing to improve the life of children and youth in Liberia.

In addition, I am thankful to LPI for giving me this opportunity to do this research. Many have assisted me in this work including manuscript reviewers who offered very constructive suggestions; however, I alone take the responsibility for possible shortcomings in the reporting of my findings and for the conclusions I make.

Teferi Sendabo
Uppsala, October 2003

Note to the readers

There are many children in many countries, which are used as soldiers. The case of the Liberian civil war should not be seen as a unique one. At this juncture, it may be appropriate to quote Rev. Bartholomew B. Colley, LCL-LWF/WS Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Programme Co-ordinator. In his words, "We joke in the office and say that savage Africa is always brutal. I am a theologian and every word has its consequences. Everyone in the world has the capacity to be brutal. The World Wars and many other wars have shown this."

Stories told by respondents during interviews and testimonies about the civil war in Liberia have to be seen in relationship to other countries. Readers of this study are advised not to make hasty conclusions about Liberian people and child soldiers' actions during the war, but, to look closely into the causes of this war and address the problem constructively so that it does not happen again.

Most of the former child soldiers and some of the adults who participated in my interviews have asked me not to mention their names for fear of being stigmatised and intimidated. In accordance to their wishes, I have left out their real names and used made-up names to protect their real identity. However, Mr Zawoo, a former child soldier, had given me permission to use his real name, because he wanted to advocate openly for the rights of ex-combatants.

Lastly, I would like to stress that the information in this study is to be taken as a challenge to all who would like to advocate for the rights of all children irrespective of their geographic locations. All of us have a responsibility to protect them from being dragged into fighting, and to support those who are already suffering due to war in Liberia and elsewhere.

Abbreviations

ACS	American Colonisation Society
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECOMOG	ECOWAS's Cease-fire Monitoring Group
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IFCL	Interfaith Council of Liberia
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (Prince Johnson's armed opposition group created in 1990 by breaking away from NPFL. It dissolved in 1993)
LCL	Lutheran Church of Liberia
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
LWS	Lutheran World Service
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (established by Charles Taylor)
NRRC	National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission
THRP	Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Program
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia, (an armed group formed in Sierra Leone in 1991. It split into two factions in March 1994)
ULIMO-J	The Krahn faction headed by Gen. Roosevelt Johnson
ULIMO-K	The Mandingo faction headed by Alhadji Kromah
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. Introduction

Today the use of children as soldiers is a widespread phenomenon. Pictures of small boys and girls fighting in many war fronts have come to our attention through television, newspapers and other mass media. Individuals and organisations working with child rights have worked to make the problem known. People today know more about child exploitation than ever before.

Today more than 50 countries recruit children into their armed forces and more than 30 countries around the world use them as combatants.[1] In this connection, countries like Angola, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda used to be often mentioned among others. International human rights and child rights related organisations estimate the number of children under the age of 18 taking part in armed conflicts around the world to be about 300,000. This figure illustrates the extent of the problem. The human dignity and human rights of these children are violated in the process of recruitment and/or abduction. Child soldiers are exposed to permanent physical and mental disabilities or risk for their lives in fighting.

Child exploitation in general and use of child soldiers in particular is widely discussed on national and international levels. International organisations like UNICEF make many investigations and produce reports about their findings. In such reports, recommendations are made to individual countries and the international community to solve the problems related to children and their parents. However, countries that use children in conflicts do not take the problem seriously. Less concrete steps are taken by the international community to stop the use of children in conflicts. In most of the countries in the post-conflict period, the rehabilitation and social reintegration of the former child soldiers are insufficient.

Countries which have gone through this problem must analyse the problem and design their work well. This study suggests that understanding why and how children are exploited and being marginalised in many societies today, requires explanations before one starts to take measures.

Liberia had used a large number of child soldiers in the 1989-1997 civil war and since then. This study attempts to explain why and how children in Liberia were drawn into this war. The study focuses on the limited types of interventions taking place in rehabilitation and social reintegration into the society in general and with former child soldiers in particular.

1.1 Background and problem description

It is difficult to single out a particular reason why and how children in many countries take and have taken part in conflicts. But we know for sure the problem is a serious one. It appears that many countries continue to recruit and take in children by force into their armed forces, in spite of international conventions and existing agreements. To illustrate the extent of the problem related to child soldiers, we have chosen the following few countries among those who had used and in some cases are still using child soldiers in armed conflicts.

The number of children used as soldiers differs from country to country. For example, in Mozambique during the mid-1980s, between 8,000 and 10,000 children were kidnapped by the Mozambique National Resistance and were forced to become child soldiers. The same group forced children to kill the people they knew so that the community would know who the killer was. The main purpose in doing so was to isolate the children from their society and make them loyal to their abductors. This greatly reduced the possibility for children to return to their communities.[2]

[1] Stohl, R. J., "Under the Gun: Children and small arms", in African Security Review. 11(3), 2002, p. 21.

[2] Dodge, C. P. and Raundalen, M., "Fleeing the War: Street Boys in Khartoum and Maputo", in Dodge, C. P. and Raundalen, M., Reaching Children in War, Sudan, Uganda, and Mozambique. Sigma Forlag, Norway, 1991, p. 57.

In Sierra Leone, both the government and the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), have used child soldiers. Between 1992 and 1996 an estimated 4,500 children fought on both sides. Sierra Leone was regarded as: "amongst one of the countries that has the world's worst records for recruiting child soldiers."[3]

Children from Sierra Leone took active part in Charles Taylor's "Small Boys Unit" before moving into Sierra Leone. Some others had fought on the sides of other Liberian warring groups. Most of the rebel children were not older than 14 years and lived under the effects of drugs and alcohol.[4] These children were not only brave fighters but also remorseless killers. Based on their action and character, some were nicknamed "Young Killer", "Junior Blood", and "Destroyer".[5]

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) used child soldiers in their war against the Sri Lankan Government. It recruited thousands of girls and boys, some as young as 10 years old. Two army units known as the "Baby Brigade" and the "Leopard Brigade" were established with these child soldiers. The recruitment of children grew higher during 1999 and 2000.[6]

In Colombia in 2002 some 6,000 to 14,000 boys and girls were used by armed groups, paramilitaries, and urban and rural militias. Some of these children were as young as eight years. These children were "used as combatants, spies, human shields, messengers, porters, kidnappers, guards, cooks, sexual companions or slaves, or for placing bombs."[7]

A report from the African Conference on the use of Children as Soldiers, April 1999, named many factors influencing children to become soldiers. In this report it was declared that some children themselves wanted to become soldiers. Others were forced or influenced by government, military groups, warring factions, parents, sometimes even chiefs, clan leaders and religious leaders to join the war. The same report touched on environments, which have impacted on children's choice to be a child soldier or not. The following environmental impacts were listed in this report, "the presence of war, and conflict; the breakdown of civil society, traditional values and family structures; a lack of educational facilities and basic social services; extreme poverty; attractive military images in the media; and inadequate or unimplemented legal standards."[8]

The International Declaration of 1924 by the League of Nations, the Geneva Convention of 1947 and the Additional Protocol II of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Convention all forbid the use of children under 15 as soldiers in internal armed conflicts.

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1 defines a child as: "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Article 38 No. 3 of this Convention prohibits recruitment of children below the age of 15 into an armed force. In the article it is stated: "States and Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen into their armed forces." Some countries, including the USA, strongly oppose raising the recruitment age to 18.[9] However, a majority of countries in the world set 18 years in their national laws for military recruitment and participation in armed conflicts as a standard.

Former child soldiers, if they were forced or not, were used to promote the ambitions of those who sought power. Children who were victims of war have the right to rehabilitation and social reintegration, not only because they are human beings, but also because they are a potential

[3] Benson Greene Jr, A., Co-ordinator, I*EARN Sierra Leone Introducing the Project "Child Soldiers". Published on Internet at www.childsoldiers.org/andrew.html, 2000
[4] McIntyre, A., Aning, E. K. and Addo, P. N.N."Politics, War and Youth Culture in Sierra Leone: An alternative interpretation", African Security Review, 11(3) 2002, p. 10-11.
[5] Fofana, L., "Sierra Leone: Captured Child Soldiers Handed Over To UNICEF", at www.oneworld.org/ips2/feb99, IPS news reports.
[6] Machel, G., The Impact of War on Children. C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., London, 2001, p. 10.
[7] "Action Appeal: Colombia", Child Soldiers newsletter, Issue 5, September 2002, p. 4.
[8] Report of the African Conference on the Use of Children as Soldiers, 19-22 April 1999, Maputo, Mozambique, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, p. 10.
[9] "Stop Using Child Soldiers", Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Published by Rädda Barnen on behalf of the International Save the Children Alliance, London, 1998, p. 13.

danger to society if they are not rehabilitated and socially reintegrated properly. Therefore, it is important to put something substantial in their hands to replace the weapons they have used.

How should a rehabilitation and social reintegration program be conducted? The Convention on the Rights of Children, Article 39 "Rehabilitative care" exhorts:

> *States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.*

The above provision is a serious challenge to states, which are parties to this convention. The rehabilitation and social reintegration process requires willingness and commitment (on the part of both ex-child soldiers, their families and their society), time and resources.

Even if there are problems, there are limited attempts being made to rehabilitate and socially reintegrate former child soldiers. Yet, the work being done in relation to the problem is insufficient. In Colombia, young fighters, when they become free from war, face another problem. Colombia's judicial system that criminalizes these children is said to be a major obstacle for demobilisation of young ex-combatants.[10] According to Juan Pablo Urrutia, the Director of the Family Welfare Institute in Colombia, millions of children have experienced violence over the last 40 years and they live the rest of their lives with their war experiences. Those who desert rebel groups cannot live a relaxed life as long as the conflict in Colombia continues.[11] Former child soldiers who deserted rebel groups or were captured by the government's army were rehabilitated. In 2001, the Colombian government through the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare started seven programmes for 140 children in a community based development project.[12]

Former child soldiers in Sierra Leone had gone through a difficult and horrific life at the war front. After war they needed to be rehabilitated and supported to start a new civilian life. In June 2002 it was reported that 72,490 adults and 6,845 children (some as young as six years old) were disarmed. In co-operation with NGOs, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration had carried out a reintegration programme for 7,452 ex-combatants including 153 children. At the same time 20,443 ex-combatants and 566 children were undergoing reintegration.[13] This internationally supported reintegration process includes academic and vocational training.[14]

In Sri Lanka some of the former child soldiers were forcibly recruited and others joined the war willingly. As stated by Frances Harrison, children who joined the war unwillingly were perhaps the most affected of all. A 13-year-old boy, Haran, told that he was abducted by rebels, and 16-year-old Ganesh joined the rebels to avenge his dead father and to escape poverty. In this country's rehabilitation and social reintegration programme, counselling and skills training were taken as the most important part of the process to normalise the situation. However, more concentration is being focused on prevention of further recruitment. According to Harrison: "Children in war zones suffer from psychological trauma, malnutrition, poverty, lack of education and a whole host of crippling problems."[15]

[10] Machel, G., 2001, p. 15.
[11] "Colombia's Child Warriors",
at www.news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/americas/default.stm, September 18, 2000.

[12] "Action Appeal: Colombia", Child Soldiers newsletter, Issue 5, September 2002, p. 5.
[13] "Demobilisation & Rehabilitation Updates", Child Soldiers newsletter, Issue 5, September 2002, p. 3.
[14] McIntyre, A. et al. 2002, pp. 7- 8.
[15] Harrison, F., BBC Correspondent in Colombo, at www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2713035.stm

1.2 The problem of child soldiers

Many countries use children under the age of 18 to fight, thus neglecting international agreements that aim at protecting the rights of children.

During the war they were exposed to mental and physical damage due to their involvement in direct combat or by living in the war zone. Both the human and material damages caused by war need to be repaired. Governments and NGOs are trying to rehabilitate and facilitate social reintegration.

Even if there is extensive empirical material on the consequences of war on children, research on the process of rehabilitation and social reintegration into civilian society is lacking. To understand the problem and share experiences we need more empirical research based on experiences and information from different countries. The following statement by Human Rights Watch/Africa gives a clear picture of the problem with being a child soldier.

> *The use of children as soldiers presents grave human rights problems. Many of these children have been killed during the conflict -denied the most basic right, the right to life. Others have been deprived of their liberty- forcibly conscripted by warring factions, separated from their families against their wills. Many have been tortured and otherwise treated inhumanely by the warring factions with which they have served. Some have been forced to kill or torture others with consequent severe psychological effects to these children. All have been denied a normal childhood.* [16]

Children have turned their weapons against their own people. They looted their property, dehumanised them, deprived them of their dignity and killed members of their own community under the influence of alcohol and drugs. In the view of Greene: "The destruction of a child's innocence, sense of love, tolerance and the immersion of such children in violence must be stopped!"[17] This could be possible only when positive development for those who have been victims of war is in place.

[16] Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia, by Human Rights Watch/Africa, Human Rights Watch Children's Right Project. New York, September 1994, p. 2.
[17] Benson Greene Jr, A.

Child soldiers' problems have many dimensions. They had involved themselves in war that had destroyed the society they want to live in. They were not only passive victims but they had victimised their society and had taken part in its destruction. By their action their society had developed a deep resentment over the way these children had treated them. How could the child soldier stigma affect their social reintegration? Should their society reward them by giving them better educational or training opportunity than those who did not fight? It is a delicate issue.

When one says victims it could mean both ex-combatants and those who did not take active part in fighting but were affected by it. If this process favours ex-combatants more than other children in the name of social reintegration, it could have a negative impact on those who stayed back home. Therefore, everybody with rehabilitation, education, training or work needs has to be part of this process. Hence, proper rehabilitation and social reintegration is in the interest of all victims of war. In rehabilitation work, therefore, one should not forget to include those who had changed small children into brutal killers and used them to achieve their own ambitions.

1.3 Meaning of concepts

Some concepts used repeatedly are defined to explain what they mean in the context of this study.

CHILD SOLDIER: For the purpose of this study "child soldier" means a person below the age of 18 years who takes part in an armed conflict.

DISARMAMENT: Two aspects are incorporated in this concept. First, it means fighters submitting their guns, ammunition and uniforms. Secondly, disarmament of child soldiers includes psychological detachment from war and conflict thinking.

DEMOBILISATION: This concept also contains two aspects. First, demobilisation is a physical separation from military life. Secondly, it is a process of psychological rupture with the military command structure. Disarmament and demobilisation must go hand in hand to move away from war to peaceful life. Only to disarm and demobilise former child

soldiers is not enough. The next and most important steps in this process are rehabilitation and social reintegration work.

REHABILITATION: This process is one of promoting the mental and physical health of a child soldier and his/her society. In other words it is preparing former child soldiers to become productive members of the community. Another content of rehabilitation here is material rehabilitation in the form of repairing the infrastructure, as well as the social, political and economic systems.

SOCIAL REINTEGRATION: is a process of restoration of former child soldiers to a given society as its "accepted" members. Social reintegration is a process whereby forgiveness and reconciliation takes place. The war situation had isolated child soldiers from their communities socially. Therefore this isolation needs to be broken.

SECRET SOCIETIES: When talking about Liberia, its history, its culture and tradition, it is relevant to say something about two secret societies that are found mostly in north-western Liberia, and whose influence extends beyond this area. These societies have a religious background, which also plays a social and political role among societies that practice them. The two well-known secret societies are the Poro for men and Sande for women. These societies are bearers of "culture and traditions from generation to generation".[18] Although their major role is religious in the initiation ceremonies at puberty for both men and women, at times they exercise both political and judicial influence beyond their village.[19] To be a member of these societies or not has serious consequences. According to Bishop Payne: "Not to be a member of the Poro and Sande societies in tribal Liberia is to be a man or woman without an identity. Such a person is not even considered to exist."[20] These societies play an important role in peace and wartime. By becoming part of these societies a boy or a girl assumes adulthood.

[18] Bowen Jones, A., "The Republic of Liberia", pp. 308-343, eds. Ajayi, J.F.A. and Crowder, M., History of West Africa Vol. Two. 1974, p. 309.
[19] Mabogunje, A., "The land and peoples of West Africa" pp 1-32, eds. Ajayi, J.F.A. and Crowder, M., History of West Africa, Vol. One. 1971, p. 25.

PALAVER HUT: a place where a lot of talking and discussion takes place to solve problems and settle conflicts among community members. It is both an investigation and discussion forum where the community uses well-established traditional methods of solving problems and exercising collective power. When a process starts, everybody remains there until the conflict issue is resolved. During a palaver hut session, people are expected to "empty themselves", to explain the problem in detail, to resolve problems and to reach reconciliation.

PURIFICATION RITE: This has two main functions; protection and rehabilitation. A traditional protection (juju/sakay) is administered by zoes (female and male priests) who makes cuttings on the soldier's body and put in some traditional medicine before he/she goes to a war front. Such treatment is believed to function as a shield against several dangers. When a former child soldier returns to the society he/she is expected to be freed from war experiences and evil that may have affected him/her at the war front.

1.4 Limitations

The interview method is utilised to gather primary information about the child soldiers. The number of those interviewed, however, is limited and their selection is made on the basis of availability. Most of those who answered the questionnaire and participated in the interviews were from Monrovia. However, former child soldiers, their parents and community leaders were interviewed in other places such as Totota, Phebe, Palala, Tassah and Green Hill Quarry in Panta Kpaai District. Due to transportation, security and other difficulties, it was not possible to go to many more places to hold interviews and collect the necessary empirical material to make the result more comprehensive. However, the information collected could be regarded as representative for the Liberian case.

[20] J. Payne, R. J., (Rt. Rev. Dr, First Bishop of the LCL), A Miracle of God's Grace: A History of the Lutheran Church in Liberia. LCL, Monrovia, 2000, p. 5.

The time between the end of the war, demobilisation (1997) and the time (2002) of this study is also a factor to be taken into consideration when judging the validity of the information provided by different respondents. We do not want to question the authenticity of the information individuals have provided us. However, the fact that our memories could be influenced by different factors as time passes by should be considered. In a post-conflict situation, former child soldiers may give information to present themselves as victims in order to get sympathy and/or material benefits. Some may have told false stories about their bravery at the war front to impress the one who talks to them. Others may have been perpetrators and criminals, but presented themselves as passive victims to avoid stigma. However, attempts were made to collect information by interviewing as many as 72 people from different sectors of the society to get a fair picture of the reality.

The ambition of this study is not to test any given hypothesis, but rather to shed some light on the situation in Liberia by examining the root causes of the war, the rehabilitation and social reintegration needs of child soldiers and the limited efforts being done in this regard.

1.5 Structure of the study

This study contains seven chapters with several sections in each. Chapter one deals with the background and the problem of the study; definition of the main concepts used in the study and the limitations of the study. Chapter two specifies the objective of the study and the methods used to collect material. Chapter three deals with the Liberian case and a brief historical presentation is made as a background. In Chapter four collected data are presented and analysed.

Chapter five deals with post-conflict rehabilitation and social reintegration work.

Chapter six highlights some problems hindering successful peace building and reconciliation efforts in one section, and the problem with rehabilitation and social reintegration work in another. The last section of this chapter deals with suggestions from representatives of the Liberian society on how to build sustainable peace in that country and how to repair the wounds caused by the civil crisis. These suggestions are based on interview results.

Chapter seven, which is the last chapter, attempts to summarise the results of the study. Conclusions are made based on the results of the data collected. With an understanding that knowing about the problem should not be the end of such study, I have made some short and long-term recommendations based on the results of the study for future action. The aim is to help all those interested in peace and conflict resolution to look forward and to do something.

2. Objectives and methods

2.1 Objectives

The aim of this study is to promote an understanding of the problem related to children's participation in violent conflicts and of the effort being made to rehabilitate and socially reintegrate former child soldiers into their society. The Liberian case could be seen as a part of wider research related to former child soldiers and their society.

This study specifically aims to:

1. Describe and analyse the empirical realities of the process of rehabilitation and social reintegration of the former child soldiers into their communities after disarmament and demobilisation.
2. Identify local mechanisms which communities use to cope with rehabilitation and social reintegration problems related to former child soldiers.
3. Propose forms and types of interventions for a successful rehabilitation and social reintegration based on experiences from Liberia.

2.2 Methods

Empirical material collected from different sources maximises the quality and validity of data collected. It is assumed that: "There are limits to any research problem to be sure, but accurate references to the nature of the larger context adds to the objectivity of the report."[21] Therefore, both published and unpublished material, questionnaire, interview and observation methods are used to collect the empirical data.

[21] Bruyn, S. T., "The Methodology of Participant Observation" in Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement with the Social World. Ed. Filstead, W. J., Second Printing, Markham Publishing Company, Chicago, 1971, p. 320.

In this study both published and unpublished official material is utilised. The research work started with a general literature review on Liberia and the problem of child soldiers. During the field work in Liberia, official documents from LCL-LWF/WS THRP, some documents from the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission (NRRC), a study report by the UNICEF Office in Monrovia regarding Liberian child soldiers, and relevant newspapers and magazines printed in Liberia were consulted.

Most of the quantitative data on the Liberian case is based on answers to a questionnaire filled out by 65 former child soldiers, which provided us with some useful information.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 former child soldiers, selected as samples from those 65 who filled out the questionnaire. This was to augment the quantitative information with a qualitative input. Some family members and relatives of former child soldiers, members of their community and religious leaders, government officials, NGO personnel and social workers were interviewed.[22] A total of 72 people took part in the interviews. During the interview people were encouraged to freely express their wartime experiences. Michael Patton states, "The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understanding in their own terms".[23] Qualitative material from the interviews is considered as the basic source here.

My presence also meant personal observation, which was important from three aspects. Firstly, to observe the physical features of the surroundings. Secondly, to observe the mental and physical disabilities of former child soldiers, and their behaviour during the interview or conversation. The point was to see if there were any signs of mental disturbances that could be demonstrated during interviews and other interactions and to see if former child soldiers had visible physical disabilities. Finally, to see how practical activities were undertaken to promote the rehabilitation and social reintegration of child soldiers into their society.

[22] List of people interviewed is presented in Appendix "B".
[23] Stenelo, L-G., The International Critic. Studentlitterature, Lund, 1984, p. 29.

3. The Liberian case

3.1 Introduction

In order to understand the present day Liberian situation and the civil war that involved child soldiers, one has to know something about its historical background. It could be assumed that the historical background, culture and tradition of Liberia could provide an understanding of the root causes of the 1980 coup d'état, which later developed into a devastating civil war. According to Reffell, "Our continuous search for solutions would be unsuccessful if we fail to reflect on the impact of history on those things that have contributed to shaping our lives and influencing the image of our country." [24]

Two percent of the population of Liberia, settlers from US, held near total monopoly over resources, power and privileges. People of the hinterland started to react against this situation. According to Sherman, the war in Liberia was caused by a combination of cultural, historical, political as well as economic factors. In his words: "The history of Liberia has been a history of divisiveness. Therefore, Liberia should re-write her history in a way that unites rather than divides her people."[25]

The following short account of Liberia's more than 180-year-old historical background is helpful to understand the nature of the civil war that engaged adults and children.

[24] Reffell, J.S., (PhD. Cand.) Minister of State Without Portfolio, Executive Mansion and Adjunct Professor of Sociology University of Liberia. Paper Delivered at the Liberian Peace and Reconciliation Conference, Unity Conference Centre Virginia, Liberia, September 7, 2002, p. 2.
[25] Interview with Mr S. Tarnue Sherman, Head of Department of Political Science, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Liberia, Monrovia, December 10, 2002.

3.2 Historical background of Liberia

Liberia as a state was created to settle freed black American slaves back in Africa. On the basis of the April 1822 agreement reached between American Colonisation Society's (ACS) agents and local kings, a nucleus of today's Liberia was established at Cape Mesurado (Monrovia) at St. Paul River. ACS ruled Liberia for 25 years as a colony through its board which sent out governors.[26] The colony became independent in July 1847 and named itself the Republic of Liberia.

Americo-Liberians who ruled this land were "proud of their Christian heritage and the American-style institutions of government and culture which marked them out from the despised 'country people' or 'tribal people'", as they called other Liberians.[27]

Women and indigenous people were excluded from political participation. After more than 100 years of declared independence, women and indigenous property owners were for the first time allowed to vote in the presidential elections of May 1951. During president William V. S. Tubman's (1944-1971) rule, equal rights to all citizens were extended. He was succeeded by President William Tolbert Jr. (1971- 1980).

Political and economic instability

African-Liberians to a greater extent started to challenge the Americo-Liberians' hegemony in the country. Tension between the two mounted from time to time. An economic factor sharpened the situation when in 1979 President William R. Tolbert's government decided to increase the price of rice, Liberia's staple food. People protested against the decision but the government defended its decision by saying that the price increase was to discourage costly imports and to stimulate domestic production. However, people's frustration and dissatisfaction culmi-

[26] Fyfe, C., "Reform in West Africa: the abolition of the slave trade", in History of West Africa Vol. Two. 1974, p. 55.
[27] Ellis, S., The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War. Hurst & Company, London, 1999, p. 43.

nated in serious riots in Monrovia. One of these riots known as the "rice riots" took place on April 14, 1979 and resulted in widespread looting.[28]

Pushed by political activists, some soldiers led by Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio, and others launched a coup in April 1980 and killed President Tolbert and 13 other leading members of his government. This coup d'état ended the longstanding Americo-Liberian rule.[29] By virtue of being one of the senior officers of the coup leaders, Master Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe became the leader of the group. The "People's Redemption Council" formed by Doe and the group suspended the constitution and assumed full state powers. In October 1985, Doe was elected President of Liberia.

Initially, this coup d'état was welcomed by the majority of Liberian people as ending a more than 180-year-old colonial rule. However, people's expectations for real change did not materialise, because Doe, who was from the Krahn ethnic group, promoted members of his clan to key posts in the government and the army. Others who had leading posts, did the same with their ethnic groups. Owing to Krahn ethnic group dominance, authoritarian rule, unemployment and militarization, unrest was mounting in the country. On top of this, the new leaders neglected the aspirations of the people that resulted in a split between junta members. The same year, Quiwonkpa made an attempt to overthrow Doe. After the failed coup attempt Quiwonkpa was murdered and his ethnic group Gios and Manos became targets for the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) dominated by Krahn.[30]

Charles Taylor's path to power and Liberian civil war

Charles Taylor (Americo-Liberian), a former civil servant in Doe's government, and some of his supporters who received military training in Libya [31], launched war against the Doe government. A group of about 100 organised militants under Taylor's leadership, which called itself the National Patriotic

[28] Ellis, 1999, p. 50.
[29] Ellis, 1999, p. 53.
[30] David, 1998, p. 10.
[31] Huband, M., The Liberian Civil War. Frank Cass, London, 1998, pp. 54- 55.
See also Ellis, 1999, p. 160.

Front of Liberia (NPFL), invaded Liberia from the Ivory Coast in December 1989. It initially received popular support in Nimba County.[32]

Backed by many Gios and Manos (many of them orphaned by AFL actions earlier), the NPFL carried out a reign of terror targeting primarily members of the Doe ethnic group and Mandingo's who had associated with Doe. By 1990 the NPFL was occupying the whole of Liberia apart from Monrovia. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that held back NPFL's attempt to capture Monrovia. In September, Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a break away group from NPFL led by Prince Johnson, captured Samuel Doe and tortured and killed him. Thus started the seven year long atrocious civil war that killed thousands of people and ravaged this West African State.

In 1991 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone formed a new armed group known as the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). In 1994 ULIMO split up into two groups. ULIMO-K, commanded by Alhaji Kromah from the Mandingo ethnic group, and ULIMO-J, led by Roosevelt Johnson from the Krahn ethnic group. In October 1992, the NPFL launched a battle known as "Operation Octopus" to capture Monrovia, which was stopped by ECOMOG. At this time NPFL was pushed further back into the countryside from Monrovia.[33]

Even though attempts were made in 1993 to reach a cease-fire and plan for a national transitional government, fighting continued. Between 1994 and 1997 serious attempts were made to disarm and demobilise soldiers who fought on the side of different factions.

National elections, which were monitored by ECOMOG and international observers, were held in July 1997. From 13 presidential candidates the National Patriotic Party (former NPFL) leader, Charles Taylor was elected. His party also won a majority of seats in the National Assembly.

[32] Lindqvist, H., Building Peace Where Peace Is Always Threatened, Trauma-healing and Reconciliation: Experiences from Post-war Liberia. Development Education Forum. No. 8 October 2002, p. 8.
[33] Ellis, 1999, p. 98.

After about two years of relative calm, Liberia started to experience a renewed political and economic instability. In April 1999, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a rebel movement consisting mainly of former ULIMO-K and AFL, attacked Voinjama town in the north of the country. As a result of renewed fighting, many people from that area were displaced. Generally it was alleged that LURD was supported by Guinea and its main objective was said to be to topple Taylor's Government.

In 2001 the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Taylor's government for an alleged involvement in the Sierra Leone civil war. Senior Cabinet Ministers including the president had travel bans. A similar sanction was also imposed on the LURD rebel movement.

A Preparatory Meeting for the Liberian National Reconciliation Conference was held in March 2002 under the Auspices of the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS in Abuja, Nigeria. The Liberia Peace and Reconciliation Conference that followed was held in Monrovia, Liberia in September 2002. Taylor, in a message he sent to participants in the Abuja meeting, wrote the following: "Today, more than ever before, **the Liberian people feel a compelling need for national healing of deep wounds and for closing the cleavages created by many socio-political vices** (my own emphasis) among which are lies, deceits, denial of opportunities, corruption, cruelty, injustice, disunity, ethnicity, tribalism, poverty and ignorance and many others."[34] Taylor's statement touches the basic issue of Liberian civil crises. After five years in power, he seems to acknowledge his government's failure to deal with these problems and to solve some of them to bring about a sustainable peace.

The renewed fighting in the border areas was spilling over into conflicts in Guinea, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast, thus affecting the regional peace.[35] The Interfaith Council of Liberia (IFCL) that includes

[34] President Charles Ghankay Taylor Message to Participants: Preparatory Meeting for the Liberian National Reconciliation Conference Held under the Auspices of the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS, Abuja, Nigeria 14th -16th March 2002, p. 2.
[35] UN Panel Report on Liberia, The Inquirer, Vol. 12, No. 204, Wednesday, November 6, 2002, p. 4.

both the Liberia Council of Churches and the Muslim Council of Liberia worked to mediate between the Government and the LURD. On the other hand the Liberian Council of Churches' meeting held on November 2 and 3 2002, highlighted the crisis in the country. It was stated that the poor economic situation, abuse of power by the security people and the ongoing war made life difficult for the people of Liberia. The Council demanded that the Government entered into dialogue with LURD without pre-conditions.[36]

It is supposed that a general election would take place in July 2003. But the present security situation in the country may not allow wide participation or a free and fair election. Some speculate that the President in power may not be interested in a new election and may give the continued fighting as an excuse to do so. According to Paasewe, "In the minds of many, the war in northern Liberia has a huge potential of disrupting the electoral process in which most politicians are investing their future."[37] No one knows for sure if an election will take place in July 2003 or not. Time has to show which way Liberia moves.

3.3 Child soldiers in Liberia

The children's situation in Liberia needs to be related to that country's history, tradition and culture. Generally, transition from childhood to adulthood takes place in a traditional and cultural setting. But war and instability had destabilised the traditional way of becoming an adult through ritual initiations.

It appears that traditionally Poro and Sande initiation rites promote children to adulthood by taking them away from the bosom of their families and the lineage at the age of puberty. During this time children are taught the prime allegiance to the community and to the guardian

[36] Interview with Rt. Rev. Bishop Dr Sumoward E. Harris, Bishop of Lutheran Church in Liberia, Monrovia, The Bishop is Vice Chairman of the Liberian Council of Churches (LCC) November 15, 2002.
[37] S. Vaani Paasewe II, "The War Nobody Wants", The Nationalist, Vol. 1, No.3, April 2002, p. 4.

spirit of the society. The goal is "to wean him away from deep emotional ties with parents and lineage members."[38] In this way the community establishes control over these young boys and girls. Rules of the secret societies put children under full control of their seniors. It shapes the minds of children to obey orders given by their seniors without questioning. As the name indicates, these societies are closed to "outsiders" and much is not known about its way of educating these young ones. In conflict situations, warlords played a similar role and put children under their full control.

There are other secret societies in other parts of Liberia with similar rituals. Here the two secret societies are taken as an illustration about how children are transformed to adulthood by isolating them from their parents and giving them training in different arts of a given Liberian society. More studies have to be done if children's and adults' action during the war was influenced by the life and rituals performed in the bush where this transformation takes place.

It seems that people get easily provoked by any acts of those who they consider have done them wrong and want to pay back in kind. In this way a culture of vindictiveness easily develops. Vengeance was sought in most cases by joining fighting factions and taking up arms. It was common to hear such statements as: "For me it is not possible to sit and see a man who killed my father". Attitudes of revenge do not seem to be limited only to former child soldiers.

For example, after killing Quiwonkpa, the 1985 revolt leader, Doe's soldiers displayed his mutilated body around the city.[39] When Doe himself was killed in 1989, his "body was put in a wheelbarrow and paraded by Johnson's jubilant soldiers."[40] Revenge instigates more revenge and creates preconditions for its continuation.

It appears that the way that different factions waged the war and their system of reward to their followers has made war a means of amassing

[38] Horton, R., "Stateless societies in the history of West Africa" pp. 78-119, eds. Ajayi, J.F.A. and Crowder, M., History of West Africa, Vol. One. 1971, p. 102.
[39] Ellis, 1999, p. 59.
[40] Ellis, 1999, p. 11.

fortune in short time. In part, this worsened the methods of atrocities against victims.

The National Peace and Reconciliation Conference Concept Paper of February 2002 links illiteracy to violence in Liberia as it asserts: "Like poverty, illiteracy is a breeding ground for cynics and violence. Troublemakers are at peace in a pool of illiteracy."[41] In agreement with this statement, Yarkpazuo stated that people in Liberia carried out mass killings and many atrocities, all of it made possible because of a low level of awareness and illiteracy. As he understood it, right from the inception of this nation one of the problems had been illiteracy and ignorance among people who were not able to decide on their own rights. Therefore, he thinks it to be very crucial to intensify and increase the level of literacy and education among the people to stop mass killings and atrocities.[42]

As we shall see later in some detail, in Liberia, children who took part in armed conflicts have abused others while they themselves were abused and dehumanised. They were uprooted by war and lost the natural contact with their family and society. In spite of their young age, they were taught and ordered to carry out atrocities against their own people, acts that one normally does not expect from children. During the war many horrible stories were told about the remorseless cruelty of child soldiers. One such story was told by Dunn. According to him, two young soldiers saw a pregnant woman, and one of them said that the foetus was a boy and the other one disagreed by saying it was a girl. To see who was right and who was wrong, they killed the woman. He stated that most of these kids he had met seemed to be without compassion for their fellow-beings.[43]

[41] National Peace and Reconciliation Conference Concept Paper, Prepared by Organising Bureau, National Peace and Reconciliation Program Unity Conference Centre, Virginia, Liberia, 7/2/02, p. 5.
[42] Interview with Mr Edward T. Yarkpazuo LWF/WS Programme Co-ordinator, Liberia, Monrovia, October 31, 2002. As development programmes Co-ordinator, Yarkpazuo is well informed about the situation of Liberian society in rural areas.
[43] Interview with Mannah Dunn, THRP Trainer, Monrovia, November 19, 2002 The same story was told by some others.

It appears that children were forced or attracted by promises to join war. Once they joined the war they were taught and forced to be loyal to their leaders. To prove their bravery, occasionally they were told to kill their own family members and relatives before joining the fighting group. Such an act is designed to make such children ruthless. This directly or indirectly makes them dependant on their commanders. In addition, through these methods the perpetrators make them fatherless and present themselves as their "protectors and fathers". These former child soldiers, "looked to their commanders as surrogate parents."[44] When the war ended, most of these so-called fathers and protectors were no longer there to help these young ones to go back to their society or to start a new life. In this way children's connection to their family was cut making their return home very difficult.

To rehabilitate the child soldiers properly, it is important to understand why warlords, faction leaders and governments are interested in children and how they manipulate them. In other words, one has to be able to analyse the mentality of those who totally change children to become ruthless fighters; their methods of attracting children must also be considered in order to protect children from joining them. If one knows why they are interested in children, it can help to take necessary precautions.

Different explanations are given why warring factions and some governments are interested in using child soldiers. First, child soldiers obey their leaders' orders without questioning. Secondly, they are easy to control. Leaders give child soldiers alcohol and drugs and keep them intoxicated and "shooting."[45] Thirdly, if kids get weapons, uniforms and food they follow their masters. Fourthly, child soldiers feel empowered with their uniforms and weapons. By joining the war they get a weapon and start looting. Those who try to protect their property will be dealt with seriously, to the point of being shot dead.[46]

[44] David, 1998, p. 14.
[45] Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia, by Human Rights Watch/Africa, Human Rights Watch Children's Right Project. New York, September 1994, p. 37.
[46] Interview with Rev. Peter C. Weedor, Special Assistant to Bishop of Lutheran Church of Liberia, Monrovia, December 9, 2002.

4. Presentation and analysis of data

4.1 A general overview

The data collected for the study is largely qualitative augmented with some quantitative input. An attempt will be made below to give as much information as possible from what is collected from informants in the form of direct quotes and testimonies. This will be supplemented by information from existing written material produced by individuals and organisations.

It seems clear that many warlords and states have used children in their fighting forces. But the question is whether these perpetrators respect the rights of children. If not, what are their arguments to use child soldiers in internal armed conflicts? According to Human Rights Watch/Africa: "Officials of both the NPFL and ULIMO acknowledge using children under fifteen as soldiers."[47] How do they justify this action? NPFL say they never force children, but that children themselves insist on fighting alongside the NPFL. Children were protected, fed, clothed, cared for and only some were armed. However, these officials accept that some mistakes were made.[48] In a similar interview ULIMO officials told Human Rights Watch/Africa that they "used very few child soldiers, and none at the front."[49]

Conflicts in the developing countries with multi-ethnic and multicultural differences are regarded as ethnic conflicts. However, many doubt whether the Liberian war was between different ethnic groups, because different ethnic groups were fighting alongside each other in different factions. In the words of Osaghae: "What emerges from all this is that the war only had the appearance of ethnic warfare; it was really a

[47] Easy Prey, 1994, p. 21.
[48] Easy Prey, 1994, p. 21.
[49] Easy Prey, 1994, p. 22.

personal/factionalised elite struggle which resulted from Taylor's selfish ambition to come into power by all means and, conversely, Doe's unwillingness to leave power."[50] According to Ellis, "ethnic allegiance became really important only when a local grievance, rooted in local history and land disputes, became caught up with national factional activity."[51] In African civil wars, ethnic differences are often mentioned as the main issue. But it is questionable if this is always the real issue.

4.2 Data collected

Published and unpublished material

One of the books used in this study is Stephen Ellis' "The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War" from 1999. Ellis deals with the Liberian civil war taking into consideration the historical development in the country and the role of religion.

Osaghae in his book "Ethnicity, Class and Struggle for Power" from 1996, analysed how the historical background reveals the cause of the Liberian civil war. He points out how the 2% who were settlers monopolised power and privileges from 1847 to 1980. Osaghae also stresses that the Liberian civil war was based on a power struggle and not on ethnic conflicts.

The most recent book on the Liberian civil war was written by Utas. His book "Sweet Battlefields" was published in 2003. This is a doctoral dissertation in Cultural Anthropology, presented at Uppsala University in June 2003. His book deals with youth in Liberia in the context of the Liberian civil war, and how their lives were affected by the seven-year-long civil war. Utas does not make any difference between children and youth fighters in his analysis.

The LCL-LWF/WS THRP has a rich collection of first hand empirical material in the form of reports from workshops and seminars. Personal testimonies, reconciliation acts and discussion forums are well documented in pictures and video films. But the documentation is not well organised and systematised. Therefore, this valuable information could not be utilised effectively by many.

However, a study by Lindqvist with the title "Building Peace Where Peace is Always Threatened, Trauma-healing and Reconciliation: Experiences from Liberia" from 2002, makes use of the results of the THRP work and presents several lessons learned. In this way the inside information about the THRP's work is documented and made accessible to readers.

I was provided with official documents from the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission (NRRC). These documents do not treat the issue of child soldiers as a particular case. The Commission focuses on the rehabilitation of veterans or ex-combatants as a whole. The problem of children is described in general terms, with no references to rehabilitation and social reintegration of former child soldiers.

A Collaborative Report by UNICEF - Liberia and the US National Committee for UNICEF by Kelly David, presents the process and lessons learned from the 1994-1997 experience of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts of child soldiers in Liberia. This report deals with the problems encountered during this process. It mentions that disarmament and demobilisation efforts were abandoned as a result of renewed fighting in April 1996. Agencies working with this programme became reluctant, uncertain and sceptical, which resulted in "little to [or] no reintegration programs in place for children."[52]

Questionnaire and analysis

As part of our survey, 65 (58 male and 7 female) former child soldiers answered 28 questions divided into four sections: I/ Background information (6), II/ Experience of war (9), III/ Questions regarding rehabilitation and social reintegration (7) and IV/ Their general view about war, rehabilitation and social reintegration work (6). (See Appendix A, for the Questionnaire).

[50] Osaghae, E. E., Ethnicity, Class and Struggle for State Power in Liberia. CODESRIA Monograph Series 1/96 Dakar, Senegal, 1996, p. 101-102.
[51] Ellis, 1999, p. 105.
[52] David, 1998, p. 56.

Background information

Former child soldiers came from both rural and urban areas of Liberia. The majority of them (62%) who filled in the questionnaire came from urban centres and the remaining (38%) from rural areas. These children joined seven different warring factions. Their distribution is shown on the diagram below.

DIAGRAM 1

Former child soldiers' affiliation to the warring factions

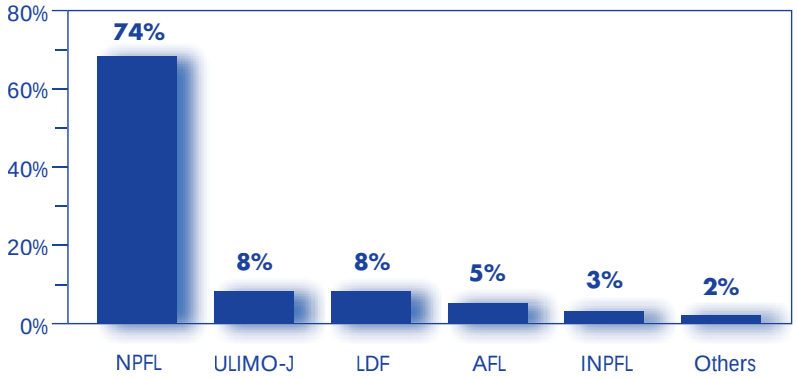


Diagram 1 shows that 74% of the children fought on the side of NPFL. This high number could be related to NPFL's victory over most of the rival groups, and some may have changed sides. The winning faction had many more followers who wanted to continue as soldiers. Other factions, indicated as "Others" on the diagram, are ULIMO-K and LPC each of them represented by 1%.

Ages of the 65 former child soldiers who filled out the questionnaire are shown in the table below.

TABLE 1

Age distribution when joining the war

Ages	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
No	2	1	8	5	7	5	7	11	7	12	65
Percentage	3	1	12	8	11	8	11	17	11	18	100

The table above indicates that the age of children when joining the faction or government force varied from 8 up to 17 years. It also indicates that the majority (54%) were below the age of 15. Nevertheless, recruitment of children as young as 6 and 7 years old was also reported.

One wonders whether the ages given are correct? It is not sure that all of the children know about their age. The problem in determining the actual age of children who participate in conflicts needs to be taken seriously. Different groups have different interests in giving a lower or higher age to these children. How do you decide the age of a person in societies where birth documentation is imperfect or non-existent? Could one tell the age of a young boy or a girl by looking at the body structure? There is an apparent problem in deciding the age of a child taking part in the war by only looking at the body structure. Even if childen look very young depending on their body structure, many could be older or younger than it seems. The body structure of a young boy or a girl depends on access to proper food and health facilities as well as the genetic background.

One needs to be cautious when talking about the low age of a child soldier, because often one does not know if the age given is correct or not. This does not mean that talking about age is irrelevant. The whole issue of children needs to be seriously discussed, more than debating if a certain child soldier is 13 or 15 years old or not. To minimise the uncertainty in deciding the age of a child, it is important to encourage systematic birth registration in countries that lack it.

One of the questions in our questionnaire was: Why did you join the war? Why children are joining war and violence in any conflict situation varies from country to country and from place to place. The following reasons were given by those who filled in this questionnaire.

TABLE 2
Reasons for joining the war

	Total	Percent
A Pressure from anti-government forces, family members or other children	9	14
B Forced	18	28
C For revenge	28	43
D I had no other things to do	2	3
E Food access	4	6
F Willingness to be a soldier	4	6
Total	65	100

Revenge and being forced were given as the two main reasons for joining the war. The results in the table above show that 43% of these children say that they joined the war for revenge. Our deep interviews confirm the same reason. It is important to understand why a sense of revenge dominated their reply. When children are exposed to these types of questions, they may think of an acceptable explanation to give. Giving revenge as the main reason could be one of these. Nevertheless, one could assume that stressing revenge may be a logic that former child soldiers use to justify their actions. They might find this explanation more acceptable than other reasons mentioned above. It could however be other stronger reasons underlying their joining the war rather than revenge per se. Even if 71% said they were forced and joined for the sake of revenge, one could as well assume that poverty might have been the main driving force behind joining the civil war in Liberia.

The former child soldiers were asked how many years they had been soldiers. Some had served for a short time and others for several years. The following table shows the results of their answers.

TABLE 3
Number of years at the war front

	Total	%
A Less than one year	2	3.0
B Between one and two years	1	1.5
C Between two to five years	14	21.5
D More than five years	48	74.0
Total	65	100.0

The table above shows that the majority of the child soldiers (74%) had been involved in war in one way or another for more than five years. Some of them have become adults. They have not attended formal schools. Many of them are illiterate. Can they catch-up with the years they have lost at the war front?

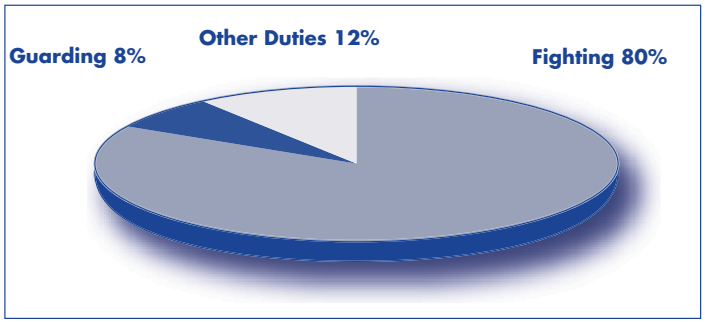
On the other hand, the child soldiers had acquired a certain training in the military art. Could they use that knowledge in post-war times? Those who have survived through the war and managed to demonstrate their ability during the war have remained with the military. Many former child soldiers may be well versed in general education about the world at large. But they lack academic merits, and their military education may not always make them eligible for employment that needs qualified manpower. They could go back to school or to skills training.

Liberian children were involved in their country's civil war in many different ways. Some have been at different war fronts as active combatants. Some have remained in their villages and worked on the farms. Rebel soldiers, who in most cases did not have supplies, depended on products they took from farmers. Some of the children who remained on farms were forced to carry the looted goods from the villages for the fighting army. Many left schools due to a conflict situation even if they did not go to war fronts.

The former child soldiers were asked: What was your main duty within the warring group? The answers given are shown in the diagram below.

DIAGRAM 2

Main duties of former child soldiers within a warring group



As shown in Diagram 2 above, 80% claim that they were engaged in fighting. Are we to consider these alone as soldiers? The remaining 20% are also part of the fighting force. Whether children were regular fighters or not, they belonged to the group and shared the same fate as the fighting force. Some of them fought and others gave support to the fighting force in different ways. For example they served as porters, as couriers and as cooks.[53] Girls were used by ex-combatants not only as sex objects, but also "as unpaid labour on their farms."[54] Not only in Liberia but also in other countries both boys and girls are used as sex slaves.[55] Social stigma and the shame they carry with them could hinder their social reintegration. The rehabilitation process must find ways to free these children so they can continue a new life.

Experience of war

The second section of the questionnaire was intended to get some information about child soldiers war time experience. In the table below only five answers are shown. As one can note from the table, as many as 97% of the former child soldiers have seen fighting taking place in their own villages.

[53] Don Bosco Link, September 2002, p. 6.
[54] Utas, M., Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War. (PhD dissertation in Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University), Lindholm & Co, Stockholm, 2003, p. 177.
[55] Machel, 2001, p. 13.

98% claim that they have seen children of their own age being killed. 32% of them feel proud of their role in the war. It is not sure if they want to take responsibility for the damage they took part in causing. The rest (68%) do not feel proud of what they have done during the war.

TABLE 4

Experience of war

No	What happened during the war	Yes	No
1	Did fighting take place in your village?	97%	3%
2	Did you see children of your age being killed?	98%	2%
3	Were you mistreated by the warring factions?	78%	22%
4	Did someone kill a member of your family?	86%	14%
5	Do you feel proud of your role in the war?	32%	68%

Some sources indicate that children were made to kill members of their own family to make the children more loyal to their commanders and to sever their relationship to their families. However, in our study only one of the 65 said that he had killed a member of his family. This indicates that killing ones' own family member may not have been a usual phenomenon in Liberia.

Questions regarding rehabilitation and social reintegration

One of the questions asked about rehabilitation and social reintegration was: Have you gone through a purification rite? 25% answered yes, the rest answered no. The next question was if they were taken to a purification rite. The result is shown in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5

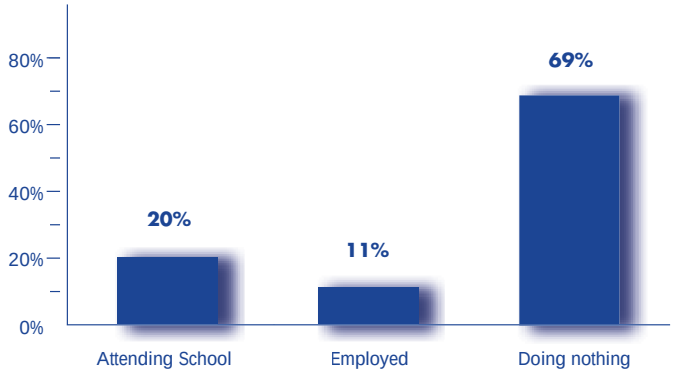
Place where they were taken for a purification rite

Taken to	Number	Percentage
a. Healers	1	2
b. Church	25	38
c. Other place	2	3
d. Nowhere	37	57
Total	65	100

As shown in the table above, 57% of the former child soldiers did not answer this question. One could only speculate why they did not seek help, or did not want to disclose even if they have gone through a purification process. This may indicate that purification rites are not that common in Liberia.

DIAGRAM 3

Present status of former child soldiers



As many as 69% of ex-child soldiers said that they had nothing to do when they filled in the questionnaire. The question was asked: Did you had a problem in getting a job, a place at school or other benefits? 89% said that they had problems in getting jobs, a place at school or other benefits. Most of them who participated in our interview stated that they feel rejected, dehumanised and have become beggars. They had nothing to do to support them. Yet others say that they have no assistance to go to school or to get job, therefore they are simply sitting and doing nothing.[56]

Some of them, who stayed in a military camp because they had nothing to take back home said that they felt rejected. One of them asked me, "Who do you think will receive me, if I return home without one of my legs?" His conclusion was that if no one helps him to get a job or support himself, he might remain the rest of his life on the streets of Monrovia as a beggar. Is the Liberian society prepared to fight against the stigma the former child soldiers experience due to their situation? Even if the number of ex-combatants in similar positions might not be that many, the problem has to be taken seriously. Rehabilitation and social reintegration is the only way to minimise the existing social stigma the former child soldier experiences.

[56] Interview with former child soldiers Maria Sumo and Salah George, Monrovia, 5 November, 2002.

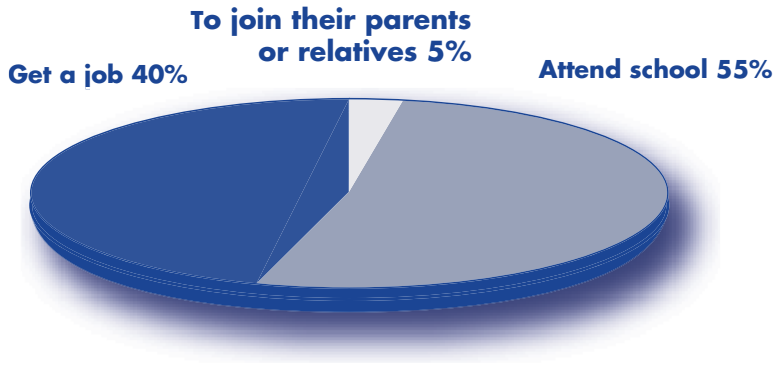
Former child soldiers' views about war, rehabilitation and social reintegration work

The last section of the questionnaire put questions about the future, based on their past experience. 97% of those who responded to the questionnaire said that it is not good that children are used as soldiers. After this answer it would not be surprising to know that 94% of the ex-child soldiers said that they understood the impact of war on children.

As many as 75% of the 65 who filled out the questionnaire, felt that they were not rehabilitated. Their answers confirmed the results of other information, stating that rehabilitation and reintegration work had not been sufficient.

DIAGRAM 4

What former child soldiers wish to do in the future



From the three alternatives the children were given, 55% wanted to attend school. For very few of them returning to their parents or relatives was the first priority. This does not indicate that they did not want to join their relatives and parents, there could be many reasons. Perhaps they were already living with their relatives or parents, or they did not know where their parents or relatives were, or they were afraid of stigma.

Of those who filled out the questionnaire 29% wanted to go back to war. One may assume that if there is no job or no chance to attend school, going back to war may seem a better alternative for them than starving. It could be a sign of desperation.

The last question in this section gave the former child soldiers a chance to write down any other comments. Their answers are listed in the following table.

TABLE 6
Former child soldiers' own comments

No	Type of replies	Percentage
1	I want to be reintegrated	34
2	Help me and my family	25
3	I want to go back to school	12
4	Please help us to stop the war in our country	6
5	Stop use of children in war	5
6	Other	9
7	No comments made	9
	Total	100

Semi-structured interviews

The interview section has two main parts. First, interviews are sometimes put in direct quotations with reference to the one who told the story. Some of the interview results are presented in this section, and others are used in other sections where they fit better. Second, part of the interview is a detailed narrative of individual experiences in the form of a testimony. In this section a summary is given, and a full text of the testimonies is given as an appendix.

The table below shows five categories of people who were interviewed to get more information on the problem. Each group were asked different questions focusing on various sections.

TABLE 7
Summary of interviewed people

No	Category of people interviewed	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
1	Former Child Soldiers	13	3	16	22
2	Families of the Former Child Soldiers	5	4	9	13
3	Social Workers and Educators	14	4	18	25
4	Community and Religious Leaders	13	3	16	22
5	Representatives of Organisations	9	4	13	18
	Total	54	18	72	100
	Percentage	75	25	100	

Putting these people in the above five categories is intended as a means of collecting a variety of information from different sectors of the society. From the 65 former child soldiers who filled in the questionnaire, 16 were randomly selected and took part in the interview. The number of people interviewed from different categories is more or less similar. As it is shown in the table above, of those who were interviewed 75% are male and 25% female.

The respondents were selected partly on the basis of their knowledge about the Liberian civil war and former child soldiers' rehabilitation work. Their willingness to participate in the interview was another important reason for their selection.

Research assistants helped in arranging appointments and preparing places for the interviews. The minimum time spent on each interview was half an hour and the maximum time about two hours. Before answering questions, many respondents, especially the former child soldiers, asked why I wanted to know about this war and what I was going to do with the answers. The usual answer was that I wanted to know more about their experiences in the civil war and about the rehabilitation and social reintegration work in this country, and then

inform others who are interested in these questions. These questions were asked over and over again in spite of repeated explanations.

Many were willing to answer questions. However, some were persistently reluctant. Somehow my being an Ethiopian influenced some of the former child soldiers and others to participate in this interview. It was not always easy to conduct a promised interview. A few refused to answer more questions when they heard the first one or two questions. There is one example I would like to mention here. One of the former child soldiers I approached through Don Bosco Homes first promised to participate in the interview and followed me from his work place. We came to a place where we could sit and talk. I thanked him for his willingness to give an interview, and explained why it is important that others know about children's situation in Liberia. When I started to ask questions he only laughed and was not willing to comment. He changed the topic and started to talk about other things.

I remember it took me 45 minutes to convince one respondent to answer my questions. Many times during our talk he said, "There are many children in this country who do not go to school. If I had money, I could have helped them to go to school." This was not an answer to my question. This was what he felt was very important to talk about. At this point, I became disappointed and decided to stop our talk and leave him. He looked directly into my eyes and started to weep. "I do not understand why you want to hear about the war in this country." Then he indicated his willingness to answer my questions. But, he suggested that the interview would take place outside the room. Then he told me why he joined the war and the problem he and others had faced at the warfront and after the war. He talked at length about the warring factions' atrocities against the civilian population, and how young boys and girls were forced to fight by being provided with drugs. He took time to answer all my questions. At last, I did not want to hear any more about the brutalities he had seen and gone through. It was painful for me to see the suffering of this young man when he was reminded about the war.

This was an extreme case, and I managed to get this young man to answer my questions by giving him time. However, a few others who promised to answer my questions refused to do so in the last minute. The reason could be their reluctance to reveal to others about their involvement in the war, or because they may have feared the consequences of their answers. One reason could be that they did not want to be reminded about their war experiences. I respected their decision and left them alone.

The following case also illustrates how people were afraid of answering questions about the Liberian war. A person who had participated in an interview, and who had explained about his war experiences and the role of Liberian secret societies the night before, came back the next morning. He did not want to be quoted; he feared that in case his name was published with this information he might get into trouble. He stressed some of the points he made the night before by adding some more clarifications and modifications. Some people seem to be insecure about the consequences of expressing their opinions.

Yet others wanted to speak out about the problem and what should be done to solve it. Sherman was one of those who explained the causes of the Liberian civil war and what should be done to change the destructive development. According to him, Americo-Liberians categorised people according to their colour and origin. They considered themselves better than the indigenous people. The thought that guided their behaviour towards the indigenous people was never addressed after independence in July 1847. Sherman further stated that a deep-rooted difference between Americo-Liberians and other Liberians contributed to the violent and destructive political development.[57]

How some children escaped abduction or 'willingly joining' the war while others did not, was one question asked during interviews. From the interviews we got indication that becoming a child soldier or not could be influenced by the social status of one's family. During the interviews many hinted that those who had money or had wealthy relatives

[57] Interview with Sherman, December 10, 2002.

took their families and travelled out of Liberia to the neighbouring countries. Both transport and crossing checkpoints cost a lot of money. In this way many children from well-off families left the country. In contrast, children without proper care and protection were attracted to joining the war to get social status with the help of weapons and to meet their basic needs. As stated by Machel, "Children from wealthier and better educated families are at less risk of recruitment."[58] This point was confirmed by Sherman, who said that his wife being a nurse played a major role in protecting their children. When the war intensified she took their children and fled to the Ivory Coast. He remained in Liberia and after the war they reunited.[59] It had cost the family much money to get the children into safety.

During interviews and in informal talks, the effects of war were expressed by different people at different occasions. During a visit to St Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia, I was told about a brutal act that took place in this church on the night of July 29-30, 1990. On this night, about 2,000 people had taken shelter in this church building. During the night 600 people, most of them women and children, were brutally massacred. Taylor's father was one of those killed that night. The church leaders said this was a result of a deep-seated hatred that developed between warring factions.[60] The civil war that focused on power struggles between warlords, developed into a brutal one involving many who did not know the real issues of the war.

Many former child soldiers declared during the interview that they were forced into becoming soldiers. What do they mean? One could interpret the word "forced" in two ways. First, forced by needs (food and security), second, forced by external factors (military leaders, parents, peers, etc.). Therefore, it is important to give a wider interpretation of the word "forced" and to take their statement seriously. If decision-makers and social workers really understand what the ex-combatants are saying, it would help them in designing methods to rehabilitate and reintegrate them.

[58] Machel, 2001, p. 8.
[59] Interview with Sherman, December 10, 2002.
[60] Oral information given by Bishop Sumoward E. Harris (October 27/2002) and Rev. Issac S. Dowah, Assistant Pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, (October 26/2002) Monrovia.

We are reminded that these child soldiers should not be treated in isolation from the rest of the society. During formal and informal discussions, people said that former child soldiers should not be rewarded for their role in the war. Most of the Liberian children were victims of war and all need to be rehabilitated. This does not exclude making priorities in this process.

Main points from the eight testimonies

From people who participated in the semi-structured interviews, eight persons' testimonies are presented in this study. A shorter version of each testimony from four former child soldiers and four civilians is included in this study in Appendix C. An attempt is made to avoid repetitions and details in the text without changing the content of each testimony.

In this section the main points of the testimonies are highlighted. The 1989-1997 civil war had a very serious impact on the Liberian society. Both combatants and civilians have experienced the bad effects of the war. It is still going on and more damage is being inflicted upon the country. Past experiences and lessons need to be preserved to deal with new situations. Personal testimonies give detailed narratives of the experiences from individuals, which enrich our understanding of the civil war.

Former child soldiers joined the war forced by basic needs or to seek protection from constant harassment. They acknowledge their destructive part in the war, by treating each other and civilian people inhumanely. One of them expressed this as follows: "The more atrocities we committed, the greater our fame and the better opportunities we had for promotion."[61] Some had witnessed mistreatment and exploitation of women. Alcohol and drugs were widely used to make them feel brave.

Weedor in his testimony said: "these boys killed people for nothing".[62] Gbanja for her part spoke about special incidents that had taken place in her village. According to her story, a dispute among former child solders over ten Liberian dollars resulted in shooting and wounding one of their mates.[63] Weapons were used as a means to force one's will upon others.

[61] Taken from Zawoo's testimony.
[62] Interview with Weedor, December 9, 2002.
[63] Interview with Victoria Gbanja, Palala Bonga County, November 12, 2002.

Garrison said that former child soldiers smoked marijuana, drank alcohol, and did a lot that was unusual before the war. He further spoke about a loss of respect for parents, for elderly people and their tradition on the part of former child soldiers. He wished to put them into a camp and teach them lessons about how the society functions. Garrison, being a clan chief, may be thinking about the "bush" where secret societies conduct their traditional rituals. In the bush, children and young people were instructed on tradition, society norms and skills. Bringing them back to the "bush" may give the children a chance to reclaim their loyalty to their tradition and society. In doing this, Garrison's society could take back the responsibility of its children. Cultural and traditional values that once governed the society are questioned. Traditional norms have more or less collapsed without being replaced by any new ones.

These personal testimonies reveal the brutality of war. Children, with the help of weapons, forced adults to submission below their dignity. For many, life was so valuable that they accepted such a humiliation in order to survive. Young people would argue that they took up arms for revenge because they had experienced bad treatment from adults and were denied their own human dignity. Is this a protest against the society? It would be important to understand the feeling of the marginalised young people in order to rehabilitate them. It is important to find ways and means whereby the desperation of children and young people is mitigated.

It is doubtful whether the stories told by individuals are true and correct in every detail. Memories can fail or could be corrupted for different reasons in retelling a story. Nevertheless, information coming from different sources helps us to get a fair impression about the war effects.

Observations at rehab sites

Observations of facts on the scene were one of the methods used in this study. I have had the opportunity to personally see some places in Liberia, and particularly some reintegration activities on the ground. I have had some exposure to both physical environment and social activities: a/ while walking or driving through cities and rural areas; during: b/ interviews, c/ formal and informal meetings, d/ seminars, e/ trauma healing and reconciliation workshops, f/ visits to rehabilitated and reintegrated former child soldiers' work places.

Observing people and activities in their settings, helps one to compare the interview material with the reality at a given place. Physical structures and environments that need rehabilitation were observed during the research work from October to December 2002.

Anyone who arrived during the dark hours in Monrovia in October 2002 would find himself or hersef in a dark city. For most of the residents of Monrovia the nights were dark, except for the few who could afford to have their private generators. Tight roadblocks controlled mostly by young boys dressed in civilian clothes gave an impression of prevalence of fear and insecurity.

At daybreak one could observe extensively damaged buildings in the city, evidence of the brutality of this civil war. You could also find people on the streets that would smile and greet you warmly. When one took a walk or drove around the city, it was not difficult to observe many new big and small houses that were half ready. If one observes carefully, cranes could be seen that have been hanging high up in the air for years, next to big unfinished buildings in the heart of Monrovia. Most probably the workers had hastily left it hanging due to the war. Many destroyed and deserted buildings could witness that the city had lost its beauty. The situation is almost the same even outside Monrovia.

One could easily observe the damage done to the buildings and infrastructure. But it has not been easy to observe the wounds inflicted upon the minds of the Liberian people. The best way to understand the effects of war on human minds could be to talk to people who were affected by this war.

People had in different ways tried to describe the conflict situation in Liberia. During the deep interviews with former child soldiers it became clear that many of them were not yet free from their trauma. Some could not hold back their tears when reminded about the war they were part of. Others complained of being rejected by their society and wanted to hide themselves if possible. In some cases, this had contributed to socialisation problems. Some had given personal testimonies about their experiences and others had painted on walls; the guns, soldiers, women and children fleeing with bundles on their heads.

Yet others had expressed their views about this conflict by drawing certain frightening events on papers and posting them on office-walls for people to see. A visitor to the LCL-LWF/WS THRP office in Monrovia could observe a small drawing on a paper which was posted on the wall in the waiting-room. The title of the drawing is "WHAT DO YOU SEE HAPPENING". This drawing had two sections with the same question. On the first section there is a big table without legs where some people are sitting around and dining. Underneath the table there are some men and women who are holding up the table with both of their hands. Underneath this table and beside those who hold it up there are several small children.

The one who drew the incident develops his/her theme in the next part of drawing, again by asking "WHAT DO YOU SEE HAPPENING". This part shows the table with food and drink falling down. Those with big stomachs who were sitting around that table are running away chased by armed rebels.[64] Houses/huts on fire and small rebels shooting with big guns are shown. On the lower part of the drawing, some people are fighting and some are lying on the ground and bleeding. Next to this scene there are two rebels pointing their guns at three people kneeling in front of them. Most probably the three belong to those who were dining before. Further away, a crowd is standing behind those kneeling and looking at the drama.

One could describe the drawing as a short summary of the civil war that started with a coup d'état. About 2% of the ruling class had been living a life of extravagance at the expense of the rest of the people. Soldiers took to weapons and removed the leadership of this group. But fighting and misery continued where children also became rebels. Still, the fighting, exploitation and marginalization of the majority by the minority continues.

Observations made at training centres or former child soldiers' working places were limited due to the fact that the security situation in the country was not that favourable. However, some attempts were made to visit the countryside. On one such visit, which took place at the Jahtondo IDP

[64] In Liberia combatants with a piece of cloth tied around their heads are called rebels.

Camp in Montserrado County, north of Monrovia, the following observation on the walls of a school were made.

SAY YES TO CHILDREN
PROTECT CHILDREN FROM WAR
PUT CHILDREN FIRST
FIGHT POVERTY INVEST IN CHILDEN
LISTEN TO CHILDREN
PROTECT THE EARTH FOR CHILDREN
LEAVE NO CHILD OUT

Each statement could be commented upon and analysed, but each reader is welcome to interpret what message the school wanted to impart to a visitor or any observer. In these statements children are put as the focal point. It could be related to children living at the Jahtondo IDP Camp who were victims of war, or to the general situation of children in Liberia and elsewhere. Listening to children's problems, investing in them and in the future generation, protecting them and their environment are key messages.

When one saw children playing or trying to do business it seemed as if they were happy. Some of them were former child soldiers who were rehabilitated and receiving assistance from LWF/WS in Liberia. Children and young people were making shoes, repairing old radios or packaging vegetables or other products from the area. According to Wilson, there were 15,883 IDPs at the Jahtondo Camp at that time. There are former child soldiers who also live in the camp. They try to hide themselves as much as possible to not be a target of hatred and revenge.[65]

[65] Interview with Chris Wilson (Mrs), LWF/WS Jahtondo IDP Camp Manager. North of Monrovia, November 9, 2002.

4.3 Disarmament and demobilisation

Disarmament was a key measure undertaken between 1994-97 in Liberia. During this time and later many adults and children submitted their weapons which were the source of their livelihood. The risk is clear, if you do not replace the gun with another alternative, then for sure the soldiers are very likely to return to their earlier practices. This is unfortunately what is being witnessed in Liberia. According to Saa, an International Fellow of Responding to Conflict who was interviewed in Monrovia in October 2002, demobilisation is something very critical but the term has been misused. He does not think that much has been done about demobilisation, because some of the ex-combatants are still kept in institutions.

Bishop Harris held a similar view. He asserted that after the civil war disarmament has taken place but not real demobilisation. Many young boys and girls carry weapons and roam around in small groups dressed in civilian clothes. When there is no proper demobilisation there is no reintegration. Weapons are taken away from these young people, but directly or indirectly the command structure of different fighting groups remains. It is not that difficult to get weapons. Because of lack of proper demobilisation and social reintegration, the former child soldiers are going around and doing nothing.[66]

During the interview visits I saw some former NPFL fighters, living together in one place, while former AFL, ULIMO-J, ULIMO-K, LDF and others were living in another place called Barclay Training Centre (BTC). What Harris and Saa say is true in one way. But, it is difficult to say that no demobilisation has taken place. The information gathered by the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs Humanitarian Assistance Office (UNDHA-HACO) indicate that 4,306 child soldiers between 1996-97 were demobilised from those estimated 15,000 child soldiers who took part in the civil war.[67] UNDHA-HACO was responsible for the official demobilisation exercise. Other information puts the number of demobilised by the end of the process in 1997 at around 10,000.[68]

[66] Interview with Bishop Harris, November 15, 2002.
[67] David, 1998, p. 24.
[68] Don Bosco Link, September 2002, p. 6.

This figure may include those who were demobilised spontaneously, and it may also include adult soldiers. This indicates that no one knows exactly how many of the estimated 15,000 child soldiers were demobilised. It is not clear how many of them went back to the war front.

4.4 The civil war's effect on Liberian society

Human casualties

Human casualties of the Liberian war 1989-1997 were large. This partly explains the horrific context in which the child soldiers operated. Lindqvist puts the number of deaths at 200,000 and those who became refugees at 700,000.[69] Yet, others say more than 150,000 were killed and 666,000 were made refugees.[70] Total deaths, directly related to the war, were estimated by Ellis to be about 60-80,000. He feels as it is "a very high estimate" to put the deaths at 150,000 or 200,000.[71] In spite of the differences in the estimates, one could assume many have died during this civil war; not only due to direct fighting but also to war-related starvation, lack of medical treatment and accidents.

The effects of war are not limited to death. Many have become mentally and physically disabled. Those who were wounded and became disabled can be estimated in relationship to the number of deaths mentioned above. Some of the former child soldiers who participated in our interview, declared that they suffer from physical and mental disturbances. Some say the society has lost a generation of young people. Many ex-child soldiers said they have used alcohol and drugs such as marijuana that left them as addicts. As Gotomo said, children are the future of any nation including Liberia. In his words, "In Liberia there seems to be a lost generation of young people."[72] This lost generation includes those who were killed, disabled and those who lost their human dignity.

[69] Lindqvist, 2002, p. 9.
[70] David, 1998, p. 12.
[71] Ellis, 1999, p. 316.
[72] Interview with Mr Sam Gotomo LWF/WS Planning Manager, Monrovia, October 31, 2002.

The massacre of some 600 unarmed women and children in St Peter's Lutheran Church in Monrovia mentioned earlier, is said to have been an act of revenge. It was commonly said: "Kill him as he killed our relatives", and killing others with no remorse became common practice.[73] For sure, this type of unnoticed killings must have taken place.

Of the estimated 15,000 child soldiers, few were really demobilised and rehabilitated. Demobilisation and disarmament formally began in March 1994. By late June 1994, 3,400 fighters had been demobilised, and of these between 175 and 200 were child soldiers.[74] Even if physical demobilisation has taken place, it is not sure that all of these were mentally demobilised. In other words, it is doubtful if psychological breakaway from the military command structure had taken place. It is not only those who took part in the war who are victims of war. Those who have grown up during the war and who are growing up now, live with a war mentality.[75] This could be one of the long-term effects of war on the Liberian people. It would be good to note that the figures mentioned above about people killed, made refugees, and demobilised children, were based on estimates.

Effects on mental and physical health

A war situation often changes peoples' actions and reactions from what they were in peace time. During the civil war people were talking about cannibalism. Some attach such behaviour to this country's past history. Why do people engage in cannibalism? Some believe that eating bits of a great warrior's body enables them to share his greatness. Ellis wrote about the April 1996 Monrovia incident, where the heart of a former ULIMO-K Commander was consumed, which created "a deep shock" there.[76] A young man who spoke about this subject confirmed the story. For a child or an adult who was not aware of such acts before, but was forced into it,

[73] Interview with Saa, Monrovia, October 28, 2002.
[74] Easy Prey, 1994, p. 11.
[75] Interview with Sister Bette A. McCrandall, Lutheran Church of Liberia, School Inspector, Monrovia, December 9, 2002. McCrandall, US citizen, had worked with the LCL more than 30 years, before taking this job she worked as a Secretary to the LCL Bishop.
[76] Ellis, 1999, p. 148-149.

the experience would most likely lead to a long lasting trauma. It is not difficult to imagine the damaging impact acts and stories of horror can have on the mental health of a child. How much have children's feelings been affected by seeing the dead bodies of former leaders dragged and exhibited on the streets?

Many of those former child soldiers are adults today. Most of those I met, had physical disabilities. Many were without one or both legs. Some of them had lost total or partial sight. Such physical effects on their health I could easily observe, but I could not see their mental health condition in the same way. However, I felt that some of them were not mentally stable while talking to me. Others told me not to mind because they were not well. To find out the major effect of this civil war on the mental health of these young former soldiers, it is essential to carry out special medical examinations, more than interview and questionnaire methods.

To disarm former child soldiers emotionally and mentally one has to understand the problem each individual has. Generally it is stated that former child soldiers have terrible memories from the situations when their villages were burnt down and the whole village ran away into the bush. They were mentally affected because of what they saw as well as the trauma of killing others. Each individual former child soldier has experienced the war in his or her own way. Therefore, they have to be treated and cared for as individuals.

Most of those (78%) who filled out the questionnaire felt that they were badly treated by their commanders and fellow fighters. They were forced to take part in atrocities and ordered to kill people and burn down villages. They feel guilty of all these things. Many suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, such as difficulty in sleeping, lack of concentration and crying while describing their experiences. One of those interviewed stated that he could not go to bed and sleep if he did not drink alcohol.[77]

How do people get to know about the feelings of the child soldiers? Ex-combatants must speak out about their war experiences. In Saa's view, the society knows very little about the feelings of the former child soldiers.

[77] Interview with former child soldier Mr Kollie David, December 2, 2002.

Many of these children have never had the opportunity to talk to adults. He felt that this is very bad, because unless the children talk about their experiences they will not find a way out of it. In Saa's view this means that the children are still carrying the heavy burdens of their experiences. Even if they physically feel as a part of the system, mentally they are not there. He stressed: "Unless these destructive experiences are taken out and filled with constructive ones, they remain quite dormant."[78]

Unfulfilled promises

Due to the civil war, many children were in a short time transformed into adulthood. They have forgotten about themselves being children and have acted as adults. They actively or passively took part in acts like killing, rape and looting, acts which had been unknown to them before.

According to Human Rights Watch/Africa, false promises were given to the children of payment in US dollars and a house and a car in Monrovia. These promises were used to attract children to fight. Some joined to get food and clothing and others because of pressure from their mates.[79] The children testify that they were promised that they could take everything they wanted by force, and that was their salary. According to these ex-combatants they were promised houses, education, salary and more when they captured Monrovia.[80] These two young boys lived with their wives and children in former military camps, in houses without proper doors or windows. They were provided with 15 kg rice a month but no one gave them a salary or a house after the war.

Soldiers were given a free hand to confiscate private property and humiliate the owners. Those child soldiers who entered Monrovia expected to receive the promised reward as any other combatant was. What happened? After the war many did not feel that they were provided with what they were promised. It may not be difficult to predict the result of

[78] Interview with Saa, October 28, 2002.
[79] Easy Prey, 1994, pp. 28-29.
[80] Interview with former child soldiers David Solo, Monrovia, November 5 and Sam Johnson, Monrovia, December 1, 2002.

this type of promise. Child soldiers were promised things that never could be materialised. People in Monrovia said that when soldiers came into Monrovia, they forced people out of their houses and wrote on the walls of these houses, "This house belongs to General A or Commander B." These houses were not meant for the child soldiers.

Former child soldiers carry with them the wartime burden, a feeling of being exploited and given false promises by adults. Zawoo said: "Right now ex-combatants have problems. The warlords for whom we fought do not know where we are and if they did they did not care."[81]

Uncertain future

Since 1997 some of the buildings in Monrovia could have been renovated but they were not. Lack of money was one of the reasons, but it may not be the main reason. People have no confidence in the situation prevailing in today's Liberia. People are not yet prepared to invest in reconstruction. Experience from the past shows that everybody was ready to loot when a slightest disturbance took place. The city of Monrovia was looted time and time again in the past, making life unpredictable for the business community.[82]

People feel insecure about the prevailing no war-no peace situation. Liberians say that they are tired of war and do not know if it makes any difference if LURD topples the Government of Taylor. LURD's entire political agenda and their organisational structure are not known.[83] Even if people understand that the present situation in Liberia is not what they would like to see, they do not seem to support LURD's war.

Change of attitude among child soldiers is explained in relation to: a/ their mates who have gone through the same process and others who remained behind, b/ their parents, the society and tradition and c/ laws

[81] Interview with Zawoo, November 11, 2002.
[82] Information from our November 18, 2002 informal talks in Monrovia with Mr Joseph Svedberg, Swedish Consul General in Liberia.
[83] Interview with Mr Rameses A. Porte, Panta/Kpaai Bong County, November 12 and 16, 2002. Porte is Education Supervisor/Trainer, WS/Church of Sweden Mission, Integrated Rehabilitation and Development Project, Panta/Kpaai, Liberia.

and rules of the country. Children used to respect their parents and elderly people in their society. Children obeyed their orders and guidance and respected traditional norms. After taking part in the war as soldiers after having returned home, many have little or no respect for their parents and for the existing traditional norms. People who knew some of the children before they became soldiers and after demobilisation, observe clear changes in their behaviour.[84]

My informants gave the following factors as promoting such behavioural change: a/ Use of alcohol and drugs has made children disoriented with respect to the former way of life; b/ they consider themselves as bosses who have fought against bandits or oppressors; c/ freedom from their former commanders whom they obeyed without questioning; d/ traumatic experiences from the war, and e/ they have forgotten the existence of the norms they are expected to follow. All this makes the future uncertain for the whole society.

In joining the war children were taught to take orders without questioning. Their personal feelings and actions were subordinate to their commanders. The children were under high pressure that kept them silent. After demobilisation this pressure is no longer there. One could think of a pressure package. As long as the coating or the lock is in its place, the pressure is under control. Disarmament, demobilisation and being free from every external pressure or military command has contributed to their negligence toward traditional rules and its authorities.

There are mixed feelings about the atrocities they have committed. 88% of those who filled out the questionnaire feel guilty, while 12% feel that they had reason for taking part in the war and do not feel guilty. One of them said, "I do not feel guilty, I joined the war and killed people because they killed my mother. Yet, if we continue to revenge, there will be no end to war. As a former child soldier, I ask the fighters to stop fighting."[85]

[84] Interview with Hon. John Walker, Green Hill Quarry, Panta /Kpaai, November 12, 2002. Hon. Walker is Paramount Chief/Leader of the clan chiefs in the area. His position of authority is derived from traditional rule and he plays a very important role in the life of the society.

[85] Interview with former child soldier David Solo, Monrovia, November 5, 2002.

Is there a change of attitude towards war, killing, violence and destruction of property on the part of the former child soldiers? What is the impact of war on children? 94% of those who filled out the questionnaire said they understood the impact of war on children. During our interview, former child soldiers mentioned the following impacts of war on children. Those who directly took part in the fighting said that they had lost total or partial sight or hearing. Some have lost a leg or an arm and became disabled for life. Some said that they have difficulties in sleeping and suffer from mental disturbances. Yet others felt that they are rejected by the society because they have taken part in the war and killed people and looted their property.

Children who were not part of the fighting force were maltreated and abused. Many could not live a normal life because of repeated raids of their villages and looting. Children were separated from their parents. A 13-year-old girl who became a child soldier at the age of ten told me how she was separated from her family and became part of the fighting force. When a rebel force raided her village everybody ran away from the village. She tried to follow the others but she could not and she was captured.[86] She told me that she is afraid to be alone. Therefore, her mother followed her to the place where she was interviewed.

The seven-year-long civil war had disrupted some age-long traditions of Liberian society. Many parents had lost control over their children as indicated above. Communities could not initiate their youngsters in the traditional way. For example, Poro and Sande secret society initiation periods were destabilised. Youngsters missed traditional rites that transformed them into adulthood. Taking part in war filled the gap and helped them to be transformed from childhood to adulthood. According to Utas, "the importance of Poro should not be underestimated, however we need to acknowledge that in issues of warfare, Poro seems to have enjoyed quite limited direct influence."[87]

[86] Interview with former child soldier Orpha Kollie on November 25, 2002, in Totota where she was living in one of the camps for people displaced from Lofa County. She escaped from Phebe Hospital where she was taken for treatment from the war front and came to the camp.

[87] Utas, 2003, p. 93.

Even if Poro secret society is intended in the first place as a traditional initiation ritual to impart knowledge, it could be used for political and power gains. According to Nushann, political leaders become members of the Poro secret society in order to have control over the indigenous people and the activities of the society. If one is part of that society, it would not be easy to cheat him. Members of the society inform each other if there is a threat against one of their members. In the words of Nushann, "If Taylor had not joined the Poro secret society he should have been killed long ago." [88]

For our part, the very limited information collected during this study is not enough to make any generalisations about present day Poro and Sande secret societies' role in the Liberian civil war.

4.5 Rehabilitation and social reintegration needs

Societies affected by war know very well the rehabilitation and social reintegration needs in their society. They are also aware of the seriousness of the problem if this is not taken care of properly. However, it is not sure if they know how to deal with the problem itself. Therefore, the society has to learn how to deal with the problem and do its uttermost to heal the physical and psychological wounds caused by the war.

Despite an apparent need, there is very limited empirical research done on how to rehabilitate and reintegrate demobilised child soldiers. The world community in general, and the society with child soldiers in particular, must develop methods and strategies on how to rehabilitate and reintegrate child soldiers, based on the context of each country. Systematically acquired information from different countries dealing with this problem is valuable to support a successful rehabilitation and social reintegration in a given society.

Without such information, one cannot develop an effective methodology and strategy to conduct successful rehabilitation and social reintegration. Understanding the problem becomes a starting point to advocate for a policy against the use of children as soldiers. It does not stop by making policy

[88] Flumo L. Nushann (Rev.) LCL Pastor, in Lofa County Monrovia, November 8, 2002.

statements and declarations, but also helps the effort to rehabilitate the child soldiers when the damage has already taken place. Those who advocate the protection of children from abuses, exploitation, inhuman and degrading treatment and their induction into armed conflicts need to be equipped with information based on empirical studies.

Former child soldiers suffer from both physical and psychological wounds. Physical wounds of the demobilised former child soldiers are relatively easy to treat. But as stated by Raundalen and Dyregrov, "Psychological wounds and trauma suffered in childhood may affect the individual child and, as a consequence, the society for decades."[89] The issue of child soldiers is very touching and easily arouses sympathy. In Sherman's view, children are supposed to learn the values and norms of a society. Those norms and values of a society need to be restored in Liberia. "Playing with guns" exposes children to becoming adults; they learn to smoke at young age and engage in all kinds of socially damaging habits. In the words of Sherman, "The situation in Liberia shows the decadence of a society and a state."[90]

By making children fight, you develop a society that has no future. So this is what we are afraid of, said Sherman. He is of an opinion that one has to write-off most of the Liberian child soldiers who took part in fighting, because they have become detached from the norms and values of the society. They no more have respect for their teachers in a classroom, they abuse students and if possible take up a knife and do harm. He does not think that society can win back all of them. According to Sherman, "There are chances to rehabilitate some of them, but it is an uphill battle. To achieve this goal, schools, churches, communities, parents, government and international organisations need to co-operate."[91]

There is a need for reorienting former child soldiers and the whole society from war to peace and normal life. Liberian experiences may help

[89] Raundalen, M. and Dyregrov, A., "War experiences and Psychological impact on children." in eds. Dodge, C. P. and Raundalen, M., Reaching Children in War, Sudan, Uganda, and Mozambique. Sigma Forlag, Norway, 1991, p. 21.
[90] Interview with Sherman, December 10, 2002.
[91] Interview with Sherman, December 10, 2002.

researchers to develop a better understanding of the methods and strategies that best promote a successful rehabilitation and social reintegration work.

4.6 Rehabilitation and social reintegration defined by Liberians

In this section we attempt to relate the problem of rehabilitation and social reintegration to the Liberian context. What do we mean by rehabilitation and social reintegration in the Liberian context? How it is used in this study is defined above, but Liberian's define these two concepts in their own way.

Kiazolu defines rehabilitation and social reintegration of former child soldiers as, "a means of bringing them back into the value system and to bring them back to normality".[92] In talking about normality, he means the situation of a child as it was before the civil war. What he means with "bring them back to normality" may be questionable in regard to the marginalised children. Is it possible to bring back the former fighters to their status before the war? Their positions have changed, their relationship to their parents has changed and they are no longer children.

A social worker explains the two concepts in the following way: When you see someone coming from fighting you have certain prejudices. You have some facts about child soldiers, but that may not be adequate for making a clear judgement. When former child soldiers come back from the war front and roam around, the community does not accept them easily. People in the community have to see that these ex-combatants are making some changes. When the former child soldiers start to settle in the community, get married, and start farming, then gradually they become accepted. Only when they engage in the activities of their community, members of the community admit them readily for faster integration. Only then the community feels much more comfortable with the former child soldiers, and acceptance will be easier. When former child soldiers return to their families and are accepted, the change of attitude from war to normal life starts. The more the children are accepted and become part of the society, the more they will be rehabilitated and reintegrated.[93]

During my visit (November 12, 2002) to Tassah in Panta Kpaai District, I met one of the former child soldiers who had returned from the war front to the village, only a week before I visited. He told me that he was not yet accepted in the "town", but that he was trying his best by adopting proper behaviour. He said that to be accepted "I have to start soon either farming or going to school." Society members look at the former child soldiers with mistrust and do not want to open their homes to them. People remember what these young boys and girls have done some years earlier. As Paye said, the mutual suspicion of both sides could be avoided if the former child soldiers became part of the society in every respect.

Kwalula describes the rehabilitation and social reintegration of ex-combatants as a process in which one helps them to change their attitudes and way of life to a more suitable and acceptable one. Changing the attitude of one who has been living in violence, committing atrocities as a means of livelihood is not an easy matter. In the process of rehabilitation, such persons must change and adopt an attitude whereby they can respect the rights and freedoms of others. In Kwalula's view, social reintegration on the other hand means that those who are hurt and wounded accept those offenders, and are able to co-exist with the perpetrators. When people are involved in different aspects of society's life, then reintegration becomes visible. When people accept each other irrespective of what has happened during the war, then total reintegration takes place. Kwalula further stated, "In Liberia we have to rehabilitate the mind and the total person to change attitudes. Help a person to change from insane behaviour to a sane behaviour."[94]

[92] Interview with Mr David Kiazolu, General Secretary of the Interfaith Council of Liberia, Monrovia November 6, 2002. (A few months after this interview he was imprisoned by the government and later released.)

[93] Interview with Mrs Z Patience B Paye, Phebe, Bong County, November 12, 2002. Paye is Supervisor/Trainer of Community Animators, WS/CSM Integrated Rehabilitation and Development Project, Panta/Kpaai.

[94] Interview with Mr Moses Kwalula, Lutheran Church of Liberia, School Supervisor, Monrovia, November 21, 2002. Before joining LCL he has worked for United Nations Children Fund in Liberia.

Certain concrete steps are needed to facilitate the process. For example, we must help the former child soldiers to acquire skills and respect for the social and cultural values of the society, and to give them an opportunity to go to school. One can understand what Kwalula says, but this may be achieved only if there are resources and peace. Change of attitude or way of life is a process, and it cannot be expected to come about at once.

A pastor within the LCL describes rehabilitation and social reintegration in the following way. For him it means to make a person go back to where he comes from as a changed person. It means to go back into the village and improve his/her life and behaviour not only materially but also relationship wise. To better relate and do away with the language that separated them; to begin to speak peace language; to continue the communal life once lived that made them proud. He was of the view that this takes time. For some it may be long.[95]

Most of the above definitions seem to reflect expectations that are very difficult to achieve. If these persons go back to their villages, what do they face? For sure everybody would welcome them with open arms. And yet in reality it is more complex for the people to forget the past easily and reconcile at once when ex-combatants return home. A summary of how rehabilitation and social reintegration is viewed by Liberians is provided in the table below.

[95] Interview with Rev Korboi M. Weegie, Totota, November 25, 2002. Before becoming Head of Layman Training Centre within LCL in Totota, he had worked with LCL-LWF/WS THRP.

TABLE 8

Definitions of rehabilitation and social reintegration

Name	Occupation	Rehabilitation	Social reintegration
Kiazolu	Gen. Sec IFCL	- To bring back former child soldiers into the value system	- Bring back to normality
Kwalula	School inspector	- A way of changing attitudes from war and violence to normal life - To change from insane to sane behaviour	- When those who have sustained wounds accept the perpetrators and are able to coexist - Accepting each other
Patience	Social worker	- Change of attitude from war to normal life with former child soldiers	- When the community becomes comfortable - To settle in the community, get a wife and start farming
Weegie	Pastor/LCL	- To improve oneself materially and relationship wise - Do away with the language that divides them and talk peace language	- To live a communal life as before - To relate better than before - to make a person go back to where he/she comes from, as a changed person
Saa	Social worker /educator	- Pass on the social values and zeal - Give training, start capital, get material and a place to produce and sell	- It does not necessarily mean that they go back to their former community - Work and live in a community

5. Rehabilitation and social reintegration

5.1 Introduction

In this study, we have followed closely the work of the LCL-LWF/WS THRP.[96] The programme has used certain methods to promote rehabilitation and social reintegration work. Other organisations are also working with trauma healing and rehabilitation. In this study, THRP is used as an example of how a local church organisation in co-operation with an external donor agency could effectively organise to deal with post-conflict situations.

The first approach used by THRP was to reach the middle and top-level government and community leaders. This approach was chosen as a starting point to make these people understand what the programme intends to do. As Gbowee stated it, this approach was chosen to create confidence and a good working relationship between these officials and for the programme to reach the grassroots. If THRP had first chosen the grassroots approach and started to work directly with them, top-level leaders could have stopped the programme.[97] It is a politically sensitive issue to deal with the grassroots level without the government's approval. It was useful in many ways to have access to these government and community leaders first. These people are part of the wider Liberian society that live with their own trauma that needs to be treated. A healthy relationship between government, community and churches facilitates a good working atmosphere for trauma healing and reconciliation.

[96] THRP had the following groups to share responsibility among its staff: A/ Women, ex-combatant, and youth groups, B/ IDPs/Care-givers and Teachers, C/ Religious and Community leaders, D/ Security group and E/ Sports pitches, markets and other places and local community organisations.

[97] Interview with Mr Joseph Gbowee, Monrovia, December 5, 2002. Gbowee is one of the educators in the LCL-LWF/WS THRP.

In the THRP work the following methods and techniques were applied.[98]

Methods

1) Participatory

Bringing together the offender and the offended. In this way you re-connect the victimiser to a larger community by building mutual trust. For many it is very sensitive to meet the other party face to face. It must be done very carefully, to avoid direct confrontation. A participatory method helps both the offender and the offended to come to the point of realisation of what has gone wrong in their relationship. They face each other to deal with the past in order to to re-establish their relationship. Such encounters are often painful for both parties. These types of meetings are organised carefully. Participants are encouraged to take this move themselves. Organisers apply no force nor put any special conditions during this encounter, except encouraging the participants to take active part in the process.

2) Networking and co-operation

This is a process that influences the attitudes of participants of the programme. Happenings in a meeting spread through relatives and friends. Many friends have become enemies due to the war. Sharing experiences helps others also to work with their own trauma. All are "in the same boat." The goal of this co-operation and sharing of experiences is to promote rehabilitation and social reintegration.

3) Training of trainers (TOT)

This refers to training of community members, different level civilian and military leaders, the former child soldiers and many others. Most of these people know very well about the consequences of war. Some of them have participated in the war themselves and have caused destruction. Training in the first place helps them to examine their own role. The main purpose of TOT was training people who could train others.

[98] The information in this section was provided by Rev. Colley and Mr Peter Hne Wilson THRP, Information and Reporting Officer. References are also made to THRP documents in some of the sub-sections.

It is one way of spreading knowledge on how to deal with conflict resolution in a given society. During the training, one will be exposed to the core issue of the problem of making peace in a society torn by war. One could call them "Ambassadors of Peace".

4) Awareness building

Many seem to know about the problem, but they are not aware of their own role in it. In this process one will become aware of one's role in the conflict, as well as its methods of resolution. Consciousness about the problem may encourage people to take an active part to together find a solution for a common problem. Rehabilitation and social reintegration work, to be effective, has to include awareness building for everyone. This process could be manageable, when people become aware of the problem and their own contribution to it. In the context of the peace building process, it is important to raise the awareness of people so that they may become involved in peace building and conflict resolution.

Techniques

1) Speaking out or telling stories and sharing experiences

People are encouraged to tell about their experiences and their feelings. Those who tell others about their own trauma "unload their loads."[99] Many go around with problems without finding someone to share them with. Telling stories or sharing experiences does not only help the one who speaks out, but also the one who listens and has a similar problem. Such an exercise could take place in different forms. Some of the story telling or sharing could be to a pastor/priest, a counsellor or a psychotherapist. It may be kept confidential. It could also be public or told within a small group that is going through the same process. Both ways are utilised by THRP. The condition is that people are encouraged and not forced to speak out about their feelings. The objective is to help one to get relief from the trauma.

[99] Interview with McCrandall, December 9, 2002.

THRP supports and assesses needs among the civil society, which help war affected people to cope with their situation through psycho-social counselling and coping mechanisms. In this work, religious groups, youth/student groups, women's organisations and IDPs/care-givers/animators were targeted. The aim is "to develop both individual and collective coping mechanisms and approaches in dealing with issues, identifying and sharing concerns about the massive suffering and developing a collective response to alleviate the suffering."[100]

2) Listening carefully

To take an active part in listening when a person is telling or sharing his/her burdens helps him/her to deal with the problem constructively. Therefore, people are trained to listen to each other carefully. When people find someone who is interested to share one's burden, telling becomes a relief. One has an opportunity to express one's anger, fears and pains. Showing sympathy with the victim comes from listening carefully and it helps the healing process.

3) Drama and cultural activities

Songs and drama are used to entertain people and at the same time to impart messages about peace and reconciliation. Cultural performances are taken as "a vital therapy to the process of healing the trauma amongst the IDPs."[101] Actors deal with sensitive issues that are not discussed openly. The drama group can make use of the existing opinion without directly touching names of people or their positions. Drama groups may take up problems that people do not talk about openly.

On my second day in Liberia, I was in the audience when a drama and cultural group related to the THRP performed its show. The English they used was not easy for me to understand in every detail. However, I could comprehend the message of the group's show. It was about a conflict situation between an Americo-Liberian and an indigenous African-Liberian.

[100] THRP Monthly Report, June 2002, p. 1.
[101] THRP Monthly Report, July 2002, p. 2.

The issue that caused the conflict was land ownership. Each side claimed to own it to the point of fighting each other. Each side called on their supporters, and was prepared to wage war against the other. Fortunately, an old man comes in between and explains the consequences if they fight. The old man's point of departure in his reconciliation attempt was to remind them that they all belonged to Liberia. The land they claim to be theirs also belongs to Liberia. According to the old man, sharing the resources of the country and not killing each other is the best thing for everybody. The songs and the message the drama imparted put many who understood the background of the story in tears.

Tomba, who was the leader of this drama group, explained how and why he chose drama rather than his profession as a journalist. As many other Liberians, he fled the country due to the war. Upon returning from his short time of exile in Guinea, he happened to meet a man who had killed one of his brothers a year earlier. The man worked as a guard at the radio station where Tomba started his job as a journalist. The guard did not recognise him. Tomba reasoned, if this man knows that I am the brother of the man whom he had killed, he might kill me also to destroy the evidence. Tomba decided to identify himself and reconcile with the man, which they did. His decision was based first of all on saving his own life. Later, he decided to work directly with people, by using drama to facilitate reconciliation and peace building. Tomba often felt the difficulty of where to start reconciliation talks. Drama and music open up people's reactions, relieve a tense situation and provoke people's spontaneous comments and discussions about what they have heard and seen. "Let us look forward and not get caught up in the past"[102], was the main message he wanted to pass on during the interview.

There are many other such drama, song and dance groups in Liberia that are organised by grassroot level organisations to facilitate reconciliation and peace building. We met one in Palala during our visit to Panta Kpaai District Bonga County. Their songs and dances also reflected a need for reconciliation.

[102] Interview with Bongafale Tomba (Mr) LCL-LWF/WS THRP Drama Consultant, Monrovia, December 2, 2002.

5.2 Trauma healing and reconciliation

In this study, the information from people interviewed, other empirical material I have had access to and my own observations in Liberia, show that there is a strong feeling of trauma in the society. Many expressed intense fear about war, torture and lack of safety. People generally expressed a feeling of powerlessness to deal with the existing situation. Kiazolu stated, "I feel a trauma when I cannot send my son to school because of lack of money to pay the school fee."[103] For him, inability to give his child what he needed caused him distress. However, this cannot be the same thing as seeing his family being killed or tortured. This means that the understanding of trauma or emotional shock varies from person to person and from case to case.

In THRP's description, Liberia has been going through a civil war, which continues to traumatise the entire population of the country. Military and security personnel were part of the traumatised society. They also needed healing from their trauma. Therefore, since 1999 THRP has engaged Liberian security personnel in trauma healing and peace building workshops.[104] Participation of Liberian security personnel in the THRP was seen as positive. One positive story was told about the immediate result of a workshop. Before this workshop, there was a serious tension between the community and a new Police Commander in Ggrand Gedeh County who "forcibly occupied a house that belonged to another person." The commander, other policemen and some community members participated in the workshop. After the one-week-long THRP workshop, the conflict situation between the police and the community was resolved peacefully. Col. Moses B. Zinnah of the Liberian National Police was quoted to have said: "Trauma counsellors helped prevent what could have been a major civil disturbance."[105]

[103] Interview with Kiazolu, November 6, 2002.
[104] Report from a workshop conducted for Liberian Security Personnel by LCL-LWF/WS THRP, March 2002, p. 1.
[105]LWF/WS Annual Report, 2001, p. 15. At that time Col. Zinnah was a Police Commander in Grand Gedeh County.

Many adult and child soldiers face psychological trauma due to their involvement in the war. During the civil war people slaughtered each other, parts of human bodies were hanged at checkpoints and dead bodies were exhibited as a sign of success. Rumours about cannibalism had spread widely during the war. The way war was waged against an enemy leaves the participant with severe psychological trauma. Finding human intestines hanging at checkpoints is a traumatic experience. Was cannibalism practised in Liberia during the civil war? Some individuals from Liberia, who did not want to be quoted by name, confirm that in secret societies ritual killings are sometimes practised and human flesh is sometimes eaten. But this has to be checked carefully before accepting it as a reality. It would be valuable to investigate if this is a widespread practice or not. It would also be interesting to find out if such a study could establish any direct or indirect relationship between Poro and Sande secret societies and cannibalism.

There are experiences of trauma which are caused by seeing members of the family being killed, and property looted and destroyed. Civilians who never had killed a hen were being forced to take active part in slaughtering a human being, thus causing trauma. Children have participated in atrocities like using human intestines as a rope at roadblocks. When asked why they did this, one child soldier said, "It was to send a message to our enemies, if they come to fight us we will do the same thing to them."[106] Those who have seen and participated in these types of atrocities may have faced mental injury. A traumatised or a wounded body needs treatment to be healed. When the THRP conducts an awareness building workshop, participants are encouraged to tell about their war experiences. No one knows in advance what the participants are going to tell to the group.[107]

A former child soldier from Uganda, China Keitetsi, has explained about how she overcame her war trauma. She was put on medication to help her fight her trauma and has seen a psychologist. She was to write

[106] Interview with former child soldier Charles King, Monrovia, December 2, 2002.
[107] Interview with Colley, November 1, 2002.

down her feelings, which she did. She cried as she wrote, and the more she wrote the more she felt relieved. What she wrote helped her to come through her problems. She concluded her story by saying: "I don't want to see or hear of any child going through what I went through."[108]

Trauma healing as a means to reconciliation promotes and strengthens the healing process. According to Gbowee, trauma healing is a process whereby a traumatised person can understand the problem and be able to live with it. In his view, one cannot de-traumatise people, but help them to manage their trauma. He illustrated this for me by showing a scar on his hand and said, "I cannot undo this scar, but I have to live with it. It is the same with trauma."[109]

Disruption of traditional rules and regulations is also a factor that could create a trauma situation. The community was terrorised, looted, mistreated and people were killed by small children and adults. Parents or elderly people were not respected as the tradition demands. Norms governing the Liberian society were shaken from their foundation. Everybody must take part in the trauma healing and reconciliation.

5.3 Traditional, religious healing and medical treatment

Healing is both a physical and mental restoration to health. The focus here is on how much tradition and religion was utilised for mental healing. What was the role of modern medicine? In the first place we are not thinking about psychopathic disorders.

According to Weegie, there are various traditional methods in Liberia to heal mental disturbances. Conflicts could contribute to mental disturbances. In the healing process, the first thing is to hammer out differences. If someone does wrong against you, you go and complain about the case to the elders. They will take you out from the village into a traditional palaver hut at the entrance of a village. Participants stay

[108] China Keitetsi, "Life After Soldiering" in Child Soldiers newsletter Issue 5, September 2002, p. 9 (What she wrote became a book called "My Life as a Child Soldier").
[109] Interview with Gbowee, Monrovia, December 5, 2002.

there until an agreement is reached. When peace is concluded there is no confusion. Another reason for going through this process is to create an understanding about the effect of a vicious circle of violence. It is intended not to allow conflict to continue. The community heals the wounds and brings about reconciliation. This being an old tradition, unfortunately today young people do not appreciate this or listening to adults. In the church, matters are also taken in small groups and discussed to make peace between the offender and the offended. Some of the former child soldiers and other soldiers come to churches and ask for prayer. The church's role is to accept them as human beings and tell them that they are important. Often from that point they start to empty themselves and confess the wrongs they have done. [110]

During my stay in Liberia I have not heard if exorcism or battle against evil spirits is officially conducted in churches or other places for former child soldiers. Pastor Theoflos Safela of the Seed Faith International Ministry in Monrovia told me that his church conducts prayers for former child soldiers and other ex-combatants.[111] But he could not say in which form these prayers take place. It is not clear if exorcism is practised in other churches to heal the former child soldiers and other ex-combatants.

At a conference held at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Monrovia, in January 2002, the Role of the Church in Conflict Resolution was discussed. During this meeting, members of the congregation were advised not only "to ban conflict in Jesus' Name, but together with the Triune God face and transform conflict through non-violent means and also to break the vicious cycle of violence by replacing vengeance with forgiveness; to replace separation and estrangement with genuine reconciliation."[112] The mission of the church in this case is twofold, one is praying, the second is to work with rehabilitation and social reintegration in a society.

[110] Interview with Korboi, November 25, 2002.
[111] Interview with Pastor Theoflos Safela, Sr., December 1, 2002. Pastor Safela works within Seed Faith International Ministry in Monrovia.
[112] THRP Monthly Report, January 2002, p. 2.

Many of those who need medical treatment have not received it because of financial constraints in the state health system. I have not tried to find out which type of medical treatment was given to former child soldiers. They need proper treatment for their disabilities, which can hinder them from taking active part in nation building. In the final analysis it means that they become dependent on someone else.

Liberia needs a functioning health service to free those suffering from drug addiction, misuse of alcohol and those with physical disabilities. Lack of such treatment may hinder them from being mentally and physically fit. Zawoo claims that he was denied a scholarship because of two bullets in his left arm. He feels that many former fighters are rejected and made outcast. Most of them have no jobs. He says, even if there may be jobs, many lack qualifications for them. He stressed, both mental and physical disabilities caused by the war hinder former child soldiers from supporting themselves.[113]

From the questionnaire answers we could see that many did not go to any healer or church to seek help. Those who went to church said that they were happy for the prayers and the treatment they received. They were told that God has forgiven them for what they had committed. In most cases reconciliation had taken place between the offenders and offended after such actions. They claimed that going to church had helped them to overcome their acute trauma.

Zawoo and other former child soldiers said they had gone to a bush where they were given a traditional protection (juju/sakay) before going to the war front. Traditional medicine was administered by zoes who make cuttings on the body. According to Paye, "Traditional purification is done by local zoes and elders to prevent soldiers from getting bullet wounds. It is not very successful."[114] Gbowee says that she is not aware of any widespread purification rites applied to rehabilitate child soldiers.[115] It seems that there are no well-known purification ceremonies that were taking place to free those who suffer from mental disturbances.

[113] Interview with Zawoo, November 11 and December 7, 2002.
[114] Interview with Patience, Monrovia, November 16, 2002.
[115] Interview with Ms Leymah Gbowee, Monrovia, November 19, 2002. Gbowee is a social worker within the LCL-LWF/WS THRP.

5.4 Counselling

In Liberia different approaches were advocated in regard to counselling child soldiers. Some advocated a psychosocial approach, stressing the psychological impacts of the war on the mental and emotional health of a child. Others considered this approach as Western and alien to the Liberian context. Instead they advocated the reintegration programme to focus on social well-being by normalising the child's environment.[116] Yet others did not see counselling as out of the Liberian context and as foreign to them. In Liberia it was common to seek advice from an older relative to get help to resolve social and psychological problems. It is true that separation from family and relatives has disrupted such a help system. But, in the absence of this traditional way of resolving the problem, a person with knowledge in trauma healing theory would be preferred to those "unfamiliar with the concept or symptoms of trauma" to help them.[117]

Through counselling the individual and the community will be strengthened to come forward willingly to sit down and discuss the problems related to the war. Former child soldiers who were identified with widespread atrocities against their own society must come forward and confess. For reconciliation to take place, one has to tell the truth. Without confession there is no reconciliation. A careful counselling helps both the offended and the offender to be ready to confess and forgive and to be forgiven in a process of reconciliation.[118] Where there is no confession, there is no way for repairing a broken relationship. During a counselling process a change of attitude is cultivated, which helps one to admit one's mistakes and to stretch out a hand for reconciliation.

5.5 Awareness building and training

People affected by war must be aware of their coping mechanisms. Awareness building work aims at attitude change. The ambition is to make Liberians affected by war comprehend the problem, and be ready

[116] David, 1998, p. 53.
[117] David, 1998, pp. 53-54.
[118] Interview with Colley, November 1, 2002.

to take actions to solve the problem. Don Bosco Homes was one of the organisations preparing awareness building workshops. THRP's awareness building work we have already mentioned.

Both academic and vocational training was used in rehabilitation work. Awareness building as well as training requires a co-ordinated effort of internal and external NGOs and government departments. One such external NGO co-operating with some West African countries, including Liberia, is Save the Children Sweden. Save the Children Sweden "established a network of partnership with relevant local NGOs for the purpose of collaborating with the ministries of defence in 13 ECOWAS countries."[119] The main purpose of the partnership programme was to give financial support for preparing training material and for conducting training for military personnel.

The THRP carried out by the LCL together with LWS was one of the most extensive psychosocial programmes in Liberia. The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Church of Sweden provided substantial financial and personnel support to run this programme. The Swedish Pentecostal Churches through their PMU InterLife, support both awareness building and trauma healing programmes in Liberia through local NGOs.

To conduct awareness building and training, one must first prepare the ground and find financial support for the work. In an interview Pitchford said, "We do not have any rehabilitation work for ex-combatants in Liberia to speak of. Sierra Leone is a better example of such rehabilitation."[120] In his view there are too many divisions of military, police, security and militia groups. First of all they have to be brought under one command. Let them go through a systematic psychosocial demobilisation. Bring them down from a military mind. Select those who fit for the military job. Set others first in an environment where they learn skills for income generation. Give seeds and tools for those who want to go back to farming. After stating what needs to be done to re-

[119] Don Bosco Link No 14, September 2002, p. 8.
[120] Interview with Mr Charles Pitchford LWF/WS Resident Representative in Liberia, Monrovia, November 9, 2002.

habilitate the ex-combatants, Pitchford put a key question. "Where does the money come from? This government is already bankrupt." He referred to the UN's support for Sierra Leone and asked if Liberia also could get such support.

Awareness building through conferences and seminars among the Liberian civil society was one of the methods used by THRP. At the end of one such conference, the group adopted a resolution. The resolution called for the breaking of the culture of silence in order to discourage dictatorship, corruption and other societal ills, and to maintain cohesiveness and solidarity within the civil society movement of Liberia through networking in order to ensure its strength, vibrancy and cohesiveness.[121] It is important that people say what they think is right openly, without being intimidated by the state. Otherwise there is no way to develop a tradition of free speech and expression of opinion. It is important to have a cohesive civil society movement where individuals could start to exercise such rights.

Change of attitude through awareness building seminars and workshops results in understanding one's own situation. According to Yarkpazuo, what is happening in the society today is positive. People are not willing to keep quiet, as they have done before. People and churches are speaking out. Civil society is grouping together. There is a consolidation of forces within the society. People who will never normally utter a word because of fear are now speaking out. Yarkpazuo said that people are getting over their fears and that is a positive sign. In his view, Liberians have to continue in the same direction to make a change.[122]

Lindqvist shares a similar view by saying, "Today different sectors of Liberian society are speaking out against injustice committed by both government and private people."[123] Even if this may be the case, many have to sacrifice their lives and their positions for being critical about the

[121] THRP Monthly Report, August 2002, p. 2.
[122] Interview with Yarkpazuo October 31, 2002.
[123] Interview with Rev. Hans Lindqvist, Monrovia, November 11, 2002. I have asked Lindqvist many different questions at different times about Liberian history, socio-economic, political and cultural background of the 1989-1997 civil war.

situation in the country. One could assume that Taylor's government is not yet ready to tolerate critical opinion.

Training of former child soldiers in skills like carpentry, graphic arts, shoe making, tie-and-dye and different businesses is part of the rehabilitation work organisations like Don Bosco are doing. We have visited some of the former child soldiers who are making a living using the training they have received. According to Wilson, the most important work of Don Bosco is to empower young Liberians. Both boys and girls who were orphans, street children, ex-combatants, abandoned children and in general all disadvantaged children, are now provided with academic education and skills training. Child soldiers were very rough in the beginning, but gradually they changed their behaviour. After skills training they were provided with financial and material support to start businesses. Wilson stated that 90% of them were successful in their business. The main goal was to make them useful citizens in their society.[124]

Skills training was provided by many organisations. In most cases there is no follow-up plan and grant for continuity.[125] As far as my information goes, many were provided with similar training and produced similar products. The market is small and everybody cannot sell his or her product. Those who have better skills and more capital make variations or produce similar items for a lower price and push others out of the market. When they cannot continue the business they sell their production material and some decide to return to fighting.

For many ex-combatants going back to school is a high priority. Yet, there are several problems to make this a reality. Schooling in Liberia is not free of charge. There must be someone who is paying his or her school fee. Another problem is related to their past life as soldiers. According to Kwalula, many former child soldiers are hesitant to go back to school. One reason is that they have lost many years without going to school, and they feel ashamed of going back to school and sitting together with small children. Some are afraid of stigma. To hinder

[124] Interview with, Michael Wilson, Reunification & Training, Don Bosco, Monrovia, November 14, 2002.
[125] Interview with Leymah Gbowee, November 15, 2002.

stigmatisation of the former child soldiers, schools encourage former child soldiers to be called by their proper names. To conduct a peaceful and harmonious teaching and learning process, former soldiers should not be titled as Commander, General or Captain.[126]

5.6 Achievements in terms of rehabilitation and social reintegration

United Nations Children's Fund has supported Liberian national organisations that work with children. It is important to understand the context in which the rehabilitation and social reintegration process was taking place. Proper resource utilisation and programme co-ordination is decisive if this work is to be effective.

According to Liberian government officials, the government does not co-ordinate the work of international NGOs supported by UN bodies working in Liberia. Reffell, Chairman of the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission, complained that the Liberian Government lacks the resources needed for such work. According to the chairman, the government has no control over the money the United Nations is providing through different NGOs. In Reffell's view, UN agencies and other NGOs are not using this money properly. They are paid high salaries and live a luxurious life in the most expensive hotels in the country. Most of them seem to be in Liberia on a vacation and they are not doing what they are supposed to do. Reffell further challenged the UN to show the results of the work it had supported through these NGOs.[127]

President Taylor for his part also voiced a similar view. He was quoted as saying: "We invited them [UN] here for capacity building but the money going to the UN Office is doing absolutely nothing."[128] This kind of mistrust between the UN and the Liberian government hampers the rehabilitation and social reintegration process. The financial and human resources the UN provides to member states such as Liberia need to be utilised properly.

[126] Interview with Kwalula, November 21, 2002.
[127] Interview with Hon Victoria Reffell, Monrovia, December 5, 2002.
[128] West Africa, Weekly, 26th August - 1st September 2002, p. 12.

Some Liberians feel that the UN people could have done more to help stabilising the country. How the UN people live in Liberia does not correspond to what they are accomplishing there. However, sometimes it is important to speak out frankly about the role of the UN and the country it supports. Liberia's problem in the first place is not the UN problem. Liberians are the ones who are responsible for solving their own problem. The international community including the UN may not live up to the expectation of Liberian people. But the Liberian government must tell how it is using Liberia's national resources. Is the kind of life Liberian leadership is living today any different than that of the UN personnel there?

Some speak about a successful rehabilitation and others doubt it. It is clear that much is being done, but there are no official records about national rehabilitation and social reintegration accomplishment. From the information we have, it is difficult to speak of a general pattern. In private talks many said that the present government is not interested or lacks good intentions to rehabilitate Liberian society. One thing is clear, government organisations do not have any comprehensive rehabilitation and social reintegration work. The whole issue is left to NGOs.

Sherman says that so far he has not seen any effective programme that is undertaken by the government to rehabilitate and reintegrate former combatants. Schools are not functioning well and parents have many problems in helping these children. He stressed a need for experts who could help to reorient these children. It is not something that you give to the schools and think that school can do alone. It has to be funded. In his view, today NGOs and churches are at the forefront in this work. NGOs have taken over the work because the government is engaged in war and other expenditures, therefore it cannot support such programmes.[129] A social worker, Gbowee, confirms this view by saying, "In my community nothing is being done to rehabilitate or reintegrate the former child soldiers."[130] Somehow the community is made to be a passive observer in this process. It lacks resources and responsibility.

[129] Interview with Sherman, December 10, 2002.
[130] Interview with Leymah Gbowee, November 19, 2002.

In the following table post-conflict work results from disarmament to social reintegration are summarised.

TABLE 9
Summary of the process of transformation of child soldiers from war to peace

No	War to Peace Process	Indicators		Remarks
		Quantitative	Qualitative	
1	Disarmament	- No one knows for sure how many soldiers were disarmed	- In theory everybody on the losing side was expected to disarm	- Even if we do not know how many were disarmed, disarmament has taken place
2	Demobilisation	175-200 (1994) 4,306 (1996-97) Less than 10,000 (at the end of 1997)	- No one knows exactly how many of the estimated 15,000 child soldiers were demobilised	- Some still remain in camps grouped into their warring factions
3	Rehabilitation	- It is difficult to give a certain figure to show the number of those rehabilitated - We have had no access to such figures in Liberia	- Awareness building and training - Talking about war and its results openly - Taking steps to forgive - Reconciliation accepted as a means to break the spiral of revenge - Schools and institutions are not properly repaired	- Human rehabilitation and social reintegration is taking place - Little is being done to repair institutions that facilitate human rehabilitation
4	Social reintegration	- There is no comprehensive information to confirm the result	- There are some good examples of proper social reintegration - Forgiving offenders has facilitated the social reintegration process - There is a problem in getting jobs or attending school	- Those who have had training and work feel reintegrated - Those living in camps and without jobs do not feel reintegrated

5.7 Lessons learned

Under this sub-topic some of the lessons learned during the post-conflict period are stated.

I/ Problem of elections

One of the lessons learned is that an election of a president or a government alone does not bring about peace and reconciliation. People who disagreed with the results of the election continued the war. It means that this time elections had not solved the main problem. It seems that no one is ready to pay the price a genuine peace costs. Everybody wants to be a winner. There are many interests and issues that motivate continued fighting. As long as the basic needs are not met, children may continue to choose fighting to acquire food, shelter, clothing and security for themselves. To avoid this scenario, Liberian society must engage children and young people in a productive life style. A marginalised group, young or old, needs to be incorporated into the society. Bridging a big gap between the poor and the rich is one way to minimise the cause of war.

In the rehabilitation and social reintegration process different methodologies could be applied, depending on the type of society and category of people you are dealing with and their particular problems. People come from different backgrounds and different places. When you meet the victims you understand their situation. Based on their situation you design a particular methodology to solve that particular problem.

II/ Promote a community approach

You do not need to come and present your own solution. Use the potential of people in the community. It is better to challenge them to discuss issues of interest for them and let them come up with solutions they think are applicable to their society. The role of a programme leader is to facilitate free discussion and give guidelines.[131]

III/ Remedy social exclusion

A precondition for rehabilitation and social reintegration is to stop war, disarm and demobilise the fighting forces. In this process, the primary objective is human and material rehabilitation of a society. The work has to include different actors, that is, the offended, the offender and the

[131] Interview with Mr Peter Wilson, Monrovia, October 30, 2002. Wilson is Information and Reporting Officer within the LCL-LWF/WS THRP.

passive victim. The whole society was a victim of war to different degrees. Everybody must be rehabilitated within the society's framework. If only former child soldiers are rehabilitated one cannot say the main problem is solved. Inclusion of the whole society promotes a faster conflict resolution and peace building.

IV/ Strengthen the role of parents

Parents ask what they should do to stop their children from going to war. For many parents the situation after the war has changed. They feel resentment toward their own children. How should parents react towards warlords who have changed their children's behaviour? Still children continue to be part of an army. Parents understand that warring parties are not prepared to leave children alone. Families who had lost children know that they were often powerless to hinder abduction or recruitment of their children. All who had lost their children and other parents must react against all forms of war in general, and use of children in war in particular. Parents who offer their children for the benefit of others have to react and protect their children from being dragged into a war. They must do something to change the situation.

V/ Support civil society initiatives

During an interview with Telewoda, it became clear that when individual parents protest, no one listens to them. Therefore, since the 1990's, women were voicing their concern against war and societal ills in groups. Telewoda claims: "Liberian women have become a voice to the voiceless". According to her, Liberian women are playing a role in peace building and in raising awareness among women and other sectors of the society. They get together and help other women, use drama to show the effects of war, go out and talk against war and use of children.[132] Liberian women organisations such as Women in Peace Building Network, Liberian Women Lawyers Association and Mano River Union Women Peace Network are examples where women voice together for the rights of women, children and the society at large by organising both men and women.

[132] Interview with Mrs Sue G Telewoda, LCL St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Church Leader, Monrovia, November 15, 2002.

Liberian people could learn more from other countries that protest openly against the use of child soldiers. For example, in El Salvador, Guatemala and Paraguay: "ethnic groups and the mothers of child soldiers have formed organisations to pressure authorities for the release of under-aged soldiers". [133]

VI/ Seek support for peace building and reconciliation

Liberia's peace building process was supported by many national and international NGOs. There are possibilities to get support from these organisations to continue post-war reconstruction. Liberian NGOs and civil society could strengthen their contacts for example with organisations like the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva and Quaker Peace & Social Witness in London. Quakers work with decision-makers in national and international institutions. The advocacy for peace from this organisation is based on speaking out the truth and supporting small circles from which the processes of peace can develop. The Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL), AME Zion and others are co-operating with the Lutheran World Service office in Liberia as partners in placing trained counsellors or social workers in communities to work with children.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is another international organisation that advocates for the rights of children. Its mission is "To prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to secure their demobilisation and to ensure their rehabilitation and social reintegration into society." It was formed in 1998 by six non-governmental organisations.[134]

In Liberia, UNICEF is taking active part in supporting national organisations to educate the former child soldiers and other children. Children's Assistance Program, Sustainable Development Promoters, the Community and Human Development Agency, Don Bosco Homes,

[133] Machel, G. (Expert of the Secretary-General of the United Nations), Impact of Armed Conflicts on Children, Selected Highlights, UNICEF, New York, 1996, p. 30.
[134] The six NGOs were Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children Sweden for the International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva and International Federation Terre des Hommes.

Calvary Chapel of Liberia, etc., are some partner organisations to the UNICEF, which are working with youth social reintegration projects.[135] In short, Liberians know that they are not alone in their struggle in the process of reconstruction of their country. However, ultimately it is people who are "involved in or affected by war" who could build peace.[136]

VII/ Revitalise traditional values

Traditional ways of solving problems in Liberian society became more or less useless during the civil war. To put back this system in its former shape can take time. In order for rehabilitation to take place one needs an environment that promotes self-respect and dignity. There is no short cut to do this. It takes time, resources and determination. Rehabilitation and social reintegration is a long and slow process and it cannot be done overnight.

Liberians had utilised traditional methods of solving conflicts using the palaver hut to reach consensus on issues of conflict. Civil war had disrupted this system, due to the shift of power from traditional clan and paramount chiefs and the government offices to armed rebels who decided on the outcome of a conflict situation. To revitalise the traditional values and to make them respected also takes time. This could be one of the lessons learnt.

University of Liberia has two palaver huts, one for political and the other for religious debates. According to the information I received, these forums were well utilised by the university public before the university compound became a battle ground between different fighting factions during the civil war. After the civil war attempts are being made to revitalise the palaver hut forum.[137]

It has to be noted that this traditional way of solving conflict sometimes collides with the state power prerogatives. Two different "legal" bodies want to solve a problem in their own way. To avoid this there are a certain set of matters dealt with by state and community. For example a matter of capital punishment is referred to a district commissioner and

[135] David, 1998, p. 64.
[136] Lindqvist, October 2002, p. 14.
[137] Interview with Edwin Y. Weedor (Mr) University of Liberia, Student of Political Science and International Relations, Monrovia, December 10, 2002.

then higher up in the state legal hierarchy. Something has to be done to avoid power struggle and to modernise the traditional conflict resolution system. In Lindqvist's view, traditional conflict resolution and transformation techniques need to be combined with newer ones.[138]

VIII/ Reflect on the causes of conflict

People in Liberia must accept the fact that as long as war is going on children will be used for fighting if one likes it or not. The basic problem that ignited the war and made many small children soldiers should be dealt with to develop a sustainable peace. A general view is: "Liberia will never make progress in reconstruction as long as there are unmanageable political, armed, ethnic, and other conflicts."[139] Social and economic factors that marginalised the youth and children must be changed to have peace with justice.

IX/ Urgency of a co-ordinated approach

The Liberian government must have the main responsibility of rebuilding the war torn country. Many organisations do things in their own way. They have a limited forum to share their experiences and lessons learned. Such lessons are not organised because of lack of a government department that organises and controls the rehabilitation and social reintegration process. Almost all of them conduct training in areas such as shoe making, tie-and-dye, hairdressing, carpentry, etc. Similar products are everywhere and there are few to buy them. Why should everybody do the same thing? If skills training were co-ordinated, one could avoid a market saturated with similar products.

[138] Lindqvist, October 2002, p. 27.
[139] Appeal For Assistance, Conference, July 2002, Liberia National Conference on Peace and Reconciliation Organising Bureau Unity Conference Center, Virginia, Liberia, 7/11/02, p. 4.

6. Factors obstructing peace building, rehabilitation and social reintegration

6.1 Factors negatively affecting successful peace building in Liberia

Some of the possible factors hindering peace building in Liberia are discussed here.

I/ Culture of revenge

Deep seated hatred, a sense of revenge and intolerance create a spiral of violence. Issues related to history, ethnicity, economics, politics, marginalization and social injustice would aggravate the revenge instinct. Feelings of revenge will linger in the minds of the offended as long as there is unwillingness to forgive and reconcile with the offender. Continued feelings of bitterness for the offences one has experienced and a determination to pay back would make the peace building process difficult. Talking a lot about revenge is in one way an expression of frustration, more than preparing oneself to pay back by every means.

II/ Unresolved conflicts

Seemingly forgotten conflicts might be reactivated if they are considered to give advantage over another party in a conflict. To illustrate this, I would like to mention what happened while I was in Liberia for this study. Bomi County Representative Sando Johnson accused the Catholic Archbishop Michael K. Francis and Amos Sawyer, former Interim President of Liberia, of being responsible for the death of five Catholic nuns and a massacre of 500 people in 1992.[140] According to the Archbishop, such allegations were aimed "to silence him from speaking against the vices of society." He dismissed Johnson's claim and accused the NPFL for the killing of the nuns.[141] It was not clear why Johnson took up this case at that particular time. Many speculated that the Archbishop had become a power not to be neglected by the government. The Catholic Church through its institutions and mass media, including its Radio Verita's Broadcast, criticised the government and individuals of social injustice and human rights violations. This conflict involved other Liberian churches supporting the Archbishop. Church schools and institutions were closed in protest against Johnson and the Taylor government that did not stop him. Taylor intervened and the matter was put aside for the time being.

Many could take up unresolved grievances and accuse each other. Such a war of words could develop into actual violence and destabilise the peace if not controlled. To build peace in a country like Liberia, the role churches play is decisive. Churches run some of the best institutions in this country. When there is conflict between religious organisations and a state, peace building will suffer.

Due to unresolved conflict war is going on in Lofa County and other parts of the country, a war which had uprooted and forced many to live in camps. Some of the former child soldiers are part of the displaced people living in these camps. Possible rehabilitation of ex-combatants was disrupted. They were faced with fresh fighting after they had gone through the disarmament and demobilisation process.

Another factor that was not solved could be the ethnic difference that regulated the relationship between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people. Few openly talk about it, but in the long history of the country no serious attempt was made to solve the problem. If the differences between the minority Americo-Liberians and the majority African-Liberians are not solved properly, possibilities for new conflicts remain a reality.

[140] The Inquirer, Editorial, Friday November 15, 2002, p. 3.

[141] "Bishop Francis Opens up" The Inquirer, Vol. 12 No. 211, Monday, November 18, 2002 p. 1 and 6.

III/ Lack of trust

LURD may not lay down its weapons because of mistrust of the government in power, even if there is a promise not to punish the group. One may doubt the seriousness of a given promise. If one is not sure that a given guarantee would be respected, one may not be willing to disarm oneself. Due to lack of trust, few would lay down their weapons willingly. LURD intend to keep the power they have gained by force, making peace building unfeasible. IFCL made a recommendation to ECOWAS and to the UN that the Abuja accord, which calls for the restructuring of Liberian security, to be completed before elections took place in 1997. According to Harris, the UN and ECOWAS felt that it took too long and was too expensive and the best thing to do was to have the election. Harris declared: "So we are there with the problem unsolved".[142]

A country's many challenging problems can not be solved without establishing trust for each other. Openness and taking actions that establish trust is basic to make it workable. In other words, show by action what you mean in words or declarations. Trust creating action is a two-way communication. Children must have confidence in what adults, parents, leaders and officials, promise them. Children who were promised scholarships after the war but did not receive any, may not continue to trust promises that adults give. Establishing a relationship based on trust facilitates social reintegration. When people do not trust the ability of a state, they hide weapons at home to protect themselves, which could then be used for more than just self-protection.

IV/ War as a lucrative business

Liberia is rich in natural resources such as iron ore, diamonds, timber, rubber and agricultural products. Those who control areas with rich natural resources can exploit them to finance the war. Many enrich themselves from illegal trade with the country's natural resources. Some use conflict situations to increase the price of food and other basic materials.

[142] Interview with Harris, November 15, 2002.

War also becomes a way of enriching oneself by looting property or taking by force things that belong to other people. Taking enemy property is widely practised during wartime, and this was the case in Liberia. Former child soldiers remember how they forced people to give them what they wanted without working for it. Some of the demobilised and reintegrated former child soldiers left their jobs and went back to the bush. They preferred to gain from war than from the work they were doing. Profit from business was not giving them the same power. They calculated that they would win more if they went back to the war front. According to Kwalula, about 25% of those who received training through UNICEF within national NGOs, at a certain stage left their work. Some of them went back to school. It is not clear where the others are.[143]

War in Liberia is not a loss for everybody. Even if the majority of Liberians suffer because of war by being uprooted from their normal life and killed, there are some who are benefiting from others suffering, for example those who manufacture and sell weapons to the warring parties. There is a clear contradiction between talking about peace and reconciliation on one hand and selling weapons on the other. Many talk about peace making. Unfortunately, the same people or countries become war material suppliers to the same troubled country.

V/ Cheap fighting force

Adults' greed for wealth and power is said to be one of the factors for waging war and even for using children in war. It costs less to clothe, feed and manage child soldiers. For children it is more exciting to take part in war than to earn money. The use of children as soldiers is widely condemned. However, this is not enough. One must attack the root cause of most of these wars and children's participation in armed conflict.

Using children in war is cheap. They do not demand high pay as adults do. Children provide cheap labour both as fighters, household slaves and to do other duties for their commanders. To gain more from the war, warring factions recruit more children to their fighting forces.

[143] Interview Kwalula, November 21, 2002.

Putting the blame on adults alone does not stop the conscription of children for war. It is a well-known fact that most of the children became soldiers for security reasons, such as security from harassment and intimidation by those who carry weapons, and to get food by being part of a fighting force. Becoming a soldier often gave children weapons that they could use to safeguard themselves and their society. If the government takes the responsibility for their security and satisfies their basic needs, they may not be used as a cheap labour.

VI/ Regional and international actors

There are regional and international actors who are interested in the ongoing war in Liberia. There are international weapon producers and dealers who benefit from this war by selling their weapons. The UN Panel Report on Liberia in its October 2002 edition revealed that the Liberian government was receiving arms and ammunitions from the former Yugoslavia and other countries in spite of the UN arms embargo. In the same report the panel added that LURD rebels also were provided with weapons through Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast and Guinea.[144]

Liberia and its neighbours support rebel groups who fight against neighbouring countries. In doing this each country tries to destabilise the other by influencing the political course of events in that country. In many cases it seems to follow a vicious circle. Therefore, "Liberia is currently neither at peace with her neighbours nor the broader international community."[145]

Recently, Mano Rivers Union Women Peace Network was working to get Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia to stop supporting the activities of rebel groups in the neighbouring countries.

[144] "UN Panel On Liberia Report Out", The Inquirer, Friday, November 6, 2002, pp. 1-5.
[145] National Peace and Reconciliation Conference, Concept Paper, 7/2/02 p. 6.

6.2 Factors obstructing child soldiers' rehabilitation and social reintegration

I/ Shortage of resources

The official view expressed by Reffell says that due to shortage of resources caused by the war and the UN sanctions on Liberia, the government has difficulty in rehabilitating all those affected by war. The government feels the shortage of resources because of the UN embargo. One could assume that the "illegal" import of weapons to continue the war against the rebels drains much of the government's revenue. Another official reason was that the Liberian government could not identify what most of the organisations that are receiving the UN aid are doing, because most of the organisations are not known to the government. Reffell stated: "Ninety-nine percent of Liberian children who are expecting help do not receive it. These organisations report to the UN and not to us. We cannot co-ordinate their projects and we are not part of it. The UN is undermining the authority of the Liberian government by refusing to channel funds through the government."[146]

The UN Panel Report however, gave another reason for the problem. In this report it was stated: "Nearly all income appears to be used for military operations and this pattern of spending has contributed towards humanitarian hardship."[147] We have no other independent information to verify either of the above two statements, one by the Liberian government and the other by the UN Panel.

Why resources from the UN are channelled through NGOs may be a lack of trust for the Liberian government. It is not sure if the government could use the money better than the NGOs, if the UN resources were channelled through the Liberian government. Both the UN and the Liberian government must establish a trustworthy relationship, where the government becomes responsible for post-conflict reconstruction of the Liberian society.

[146] Interview with Reffell, December 5, 2002.
[147] "UN Panel Report On Liberia", The Inquirer, Wednesday, November 6, 2002, p. 4.

Continued war had left several thousand people displaced from their homes in Lofa County in northern Liberia. They left their farms and depend on rations provided by the Liberian government and international organisations. The government uses the resources at its disposal to finance the ongoing war and to administer the state. Not only war and administration but also the security situation related to war directly or indirectly costs money. It is said that, "The Lofa war has pushed government expenditure outside the estimates and disrupted priorities."[148] In addition to internal war the UN sanctions had worsened the "already precarious post-war economic condition."[149]

Shortage of resources is further aggravated by the government's isolation internationally. No business is working and the economy is ruined.[150] Officials declare that the Liberian economy had shown "5.4% negative growth rate in 2001, balance of payments deficit a surplus of expenditure over the government revenue collected."[151] This makes it clear that Liberia's economic and financial situation is not conducive to undertake rehabilitation and social rehabilitation work by itself on any large-scale.

II/ Continued war

Another factor mentioned is the ongoing war in the Lofa County. It is not only money that matters for rehabilitation and social reintegration. The environment in which this process takes place is very important. It may be very difficult to talk about rehabilitation while war is going on, and some young boys and girls are still attracted or forced to join the fighting. Due to a continuing war, resources are diverted from rehabilitation of the society and the country's physical structure.

III/ Attitude towards the former child soldiers

There were mixed feelings about returning former child soldiers. In their former villages people know what these children have done to them during the war. Seeing them coming back to the same village where they had committed crimes would stir up war wounds and hatred. Therefore, the first reaction from the parents and guardians side is resentment. How do parents react when they see their children again and know that their children were dragged into war, killed people and committed crimes? Parents could say, "no, that can not be our child"! For good reasons parents are reluctant to associate themselves with their own children labelled as "rebels". But how long could they do this?

Parents may have another reason to distance themselves from their children. If news that their son or daughter had taken part in reported cannibalism (yet to be confirmed) reaches the village, how do parents react if their children have been seen using human intestines at checkpoints and taking marijuana and many other substances? What would be their reaction? How do parents receive them, as commanders, as soldiers or as their children? So, the resentment is there.[152] When one of the former child soldiers living in an institution was asked why he is living in the camp, he replied: "I am living here because my parents rejected me."[153]

Some parents may look upon the return of their children with satisfaction and forgiveness. Gbanja, a mother of a former child soldier from Palala, said, "I lost and found my son". When he came back the whole family was very happy. The parents prepared a feast for him and invited relatives to take part in the happiness. The family had forgiven and accepted him.[154]

Kamei, the National General Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Liberia, said that former child soldiers and youth feel isolated. He further explained that most of those who caused atrocities during the war were youth, and therefore the relationship between the older and the younger generation was strained. In the words of Kamei, "In Africa the hardest punishment that anybody experiences is isolation."[155] YMCA works to break the isolation of the youth in their

[148] "Nursing the Economy: The Barnes Solution", The Nationalist, Vol. 1 No.3 April 2002, p. 31.
[149] Jackson, S., "Avoiding the Red", The Nationalist, Vol.1 No.3, April 2002, p. 32.
[150] Interview with Harris, November 15, 2002.
[151] Jackson, 2002, p. 32.
[152] Interview with Colley, November 1, 2002.
[153] Interview with former child soldier, Salah George, Monrovia, November 5, 2002.
[154] Interview Mrs Victoria Gbanja, Palala, November 12, 2002.
[155] Interview with Mr Peter Z.N. Kamei, National General Secretary of YMCA of Liberia Monrovia, November 1, 2002. Including him six people from YMCA's National and Liberia Office Participated in this interview.

social life. According to Hare from the same organisation, change was observed among the youth who participated in YMCA programmes. In 1991, youth generally showed symptoms of withdrawal, isolation and violence. By 1996 the situation had changed for many and they became more sociable and tolerant in their relationship with others. YMCA treats all children and youth equally irrespective of their background.[156]

For the former child soldiers it might not be that easy to find out how well they will be received upon returning home. Rehabilitation and social reintegration processes seem to be very demanding. The children must be prepared for returning home with doubts whether they will be accepted or not. Some are afraid of reprisals and do not want to go back to their village. Some cannot return to their home because of lack of security in their villages. Others have problems in tracing their family members and do not know where to go. Yet others cannot return home because their families are too poor to help them. However, it was observed that many former fighters in Liberia have returned home with relative ease.[157]

IV/ Problems of readjustment

Child soldiers have left their parents, relatives and their community as small children. Many of them return home as grown-ups. They have lived as commanders, generals and rebels with drug addictions. They have different experiences from the war front, which may not be accepted by parents or relatives. Former child soldiers may have problems of reorienting themselves, from using weapons to get what they need to get it through peaceful means require a change of attitude. Leaving weapons that had given them power and respect and going back to school to learn a trade could be a problem for many.[158]

A peace building process that does not address the issue of "daily bread" is not a serious one. For some of the former child soldiers the primary reason for joining war was to find security and food. As long as they are not provided with these and other basic needs, the prospect for normal rehabilitation and social reintegration remains only a hope. Access to basic needs facilitates effective reintegration and readjustment of these ex-combatants.

[156] Interview with Mr Same Hare, Jr. Dev. Secretary, YMCA of Liberia, Monrovia, November 1, 2002.
[157] Ellis, 1999, p. 131.
[158] Interview with Kwalula, November 21, 2002.

6.3 Views from some Liberians on rehabilitation and reintegration[159]

Liberian people have views about how to build peace and how to improve the process of rehabilitation and social reintegration in Liberia. Several aspects are expressed by these people. However, many of the suggestions seem to be difficult to implement. Nevertheless, it is important that people express their concerns and come up with suggestions.

The role of ex-combatants

1) Intensive counselling programme

People expose their problems and their need for counselling, but there are few trained people and resources to make the follow-up and help this people. Social workers say that there is no use asking people to tell them their problems when they cannot give them counselling and support. The need is well known but there is lack of resources to help all the suffering people.

2) Academic and vocational education

Many of the ex-combatants left school or did not get an opportunity to go to school because of war. The problem is not limited to former child soldiers. It is a problem for many Liberian children. Many young Liberians lack academic and vocational education opportunities. They remain in their position of marginalization. Liberia needs a long-term

[159] The texts given in italics are a summary of suggestions from Liberian people during the interview with 72 people and informal talks with many others.

strategy and plan that includes all children. There are some former child soldiers who received vocational training and who are able to make a living from it. Others have different problems that hinder them from utilising their ability. One problem often mentioned is that there are too many of the same products in the market but few to buy them. Problems in selling what they have produced discourage them from continuing with it. Market assessments, variation of products and types of vocational training may help them to be successful.

3) Financial support

These young boys and girls must have money and education, and qualified advice to start a business. If they could make a living by their work, it could give them social status and human dignity. It is not enough with money, education and advice only. The first thing is to make them change their mind from fighting to working. Other children and other ex-combatants need to be part of such support.

4) Medical and psycho-social treatment

Many former child soldiers in Liberia are suffering from mental and physical disabilities. Some claimed that they had a bit of metal or broken bone in their body that should have been removed long ago. No one had helped them to get rid of it. They need to be treated for visible or invisible disabilities they are suffering from. Again it is a matter of resources and priorities. Treatment of ex-combatants does not seem a priority when there is lack of resources.

5) Trauma healing and reconciliation programme

Many say that the whole population of Liberia is traumatised. It could be assumed that it is not possible to conduct normal development work among the people who suffer from trauma. As far as interview information shows, the war in Liberia has been a somehow chaotic one. For example, when shooting starts in one part of a city or a village, people start to take weapons and shoot, plunder, loot and harass their own neighbours.

Many do not know who their friend or enemy is before such incidents. Brutal treatment of civilian people by small boys and girls had left people powerless and dehumanised. People were traumatised again and again. Healing the trauma and reconciling the community is a basic factor to be included in the work for peace building and sustainable development in Liberia.

Family relationship

1) A strong family system

The type of relationship a child has to his/her parents is decisive in the life of a family. Wealth and poverty of a family in some cases destroys the parent-child relationship, and in other cases it unites them. In most African societies older brothers or sisters care for their younger brothers and sisters. In this way the mother and father become free to work for their families' livelihood. Those who consider such life to be hard, choose to go out on the streets or even join criminal groups. Some children go out on the streets to support their parents by sharing responsibility for the survival of the family. It was said that some children from poor families in Monrovia go out on the streets and beg or do small business to support their parents. They return home with what they have earned. Others never come back to their parents. It is not that easy to keep parent-child relationships constructive when parents are unable to feed their children.

2) Empower the family

Due to their weak position (economic, social, political) in a society, many parents had difficulty in resisting the conscription of their children.[160] Again, this is a very difficult matter for parents. How do you empower a person? The call is to help parents to have a say in the life of their children, but do they have an alternative to stop it? It was already mentioned that some parents had encouraged their children to join warring factions.

[160] Interview with David Kiazolu, Monrovia, November 6, 2002

3) Reinvigorate Liberia's traditional values and norms

As far as we understand, this suggestion is made because old children and young people are neglecting Liberian traditions, values and norms. Civil war had separated children from their parents mentally and physically. Liberian society had lost control over some of its young population owing to the war situation. Now, parents demand the Liberian society and the international community to help them to reclaim the parent-child relationship.

Suggestions made under the heading "Family relationship" above are a call to get help to resist conscription of children by rebels or by the government. Secondly, families need to have the possibility to keep their children from joining the war due to poverty. Parents have problems in resisting conscription of children because in most cases they have very little to provide as an alternative. The gap created between parents and children due to the war has made it clear how sensitive this relationship is. How do parents establish their legitimate right over their children, if children are forced to join the war to satisfy their basic needs or if someone else have forced them to abandon their families?

Providing children with their basic needs is one way to hinder them from joining the war. It is not a simple issue to reinvigorate traditional values or norms when they have been disrupted by different circumstances. It could be argued that, as long as basic needs are not met within family and society, children seek external help and do not follow the tradition. Some go out on the streets to work or steal, others head for the war front. This type of life negatively affects all children.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

Factors which contributed to the civil war, such as years of bad governance, race relations, ethnicity, socio-political cleavages, corruption and marginalization of the majority of people, were not seriously dealt with. These and other serious problems remain the same. The 1980 military coup and the civil war that followed affected the whole society negatively. It also destabilised the peace in the Ivory Coast, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

As many as an estimated 15,000 children have willingly or by force participated in the Liberian civil war. They have committed atrocities that you do not expect to be carried out by children. On the basis of the available information, children were not totally innocent. Their atrocities are well documented and need not be doubted. It is true that adults have used children for their own benefit by feeding them with drugs, yet children were part of the problem. This fact should not be ignored in the analysis of the Liberian civil crisis. Denying the fact on an assumption that children are innocent, and arguing that these small children could not have done these atrocities, may hinder a proper rehabilitation and social reintegration.

In spite of child soldiers' behaviour during the war, their families and societies that resent receiving them have to be encouraged to forgive and accept them. Rehabilitation and social reintegration must include all those affected by war. It has to start from the individuals and should reach the entire society. The need to involve ex-combatants, their families, community and government leaders and the entire society, is one of the main lessons learned from the work in Liberia.

Rehabilitation and social reintegration is a long-term process. It needs a concerted effort of all the stakeholders. There are many young people that still go around with weapons in cities and in the countryside, looting and terrorising civilian people. They must be disarmed and put into work or training. Liberian society has to recapture the imagination of its children from war to peace by engaging them in productive work.

The civil war ended almost five years ago. Most of the infrastructure and buildings damaged during the war are not yet repaired. One may wonder how much has been done to heal the wounds of the society during these last five years. Liberians show a sense of fatigue. Very little is being done to revitalise the physical structure of education, health, communication, water and electric system. One could witness from visiting Liberian schools at the end of year 2002, that many of them were not a conducive place to conduct a proper teaching and learning process. Houses, schools, libraries and national archives were in ruins, and very little is being done to rebuild them. These and other facilities were almost totally destroyed by Liberians themselves. Adults need to set good examples and teach children to appreciate the existing cultural heritage that is for a common good, and help the children to learn the values of caring for nature, the environment, human beings and physical infrastructure.

Big cities including Monrovia lack a reliable electricity supply. Wires hanging with no function are a common scene. Dark streets contribute to feelings of insecurity during the night hours. On the other hand, those who can afford to buy and maintain private generators have access to an electricity supply. Functioning financial institutions, postal services, health and educational institutions are in disarray. Without clean water it is difficult to keep minimum hygiene. Without water and electricity one cannot think of proper health services.

During my stay in Monrovia, I could see children doing their homework in the evenings below the streetlights, outside rich people's homes, embassies and organisations that own private generators. Lack of basic needs create frustration and discontent on the part of the marginalised people including the youth, which may fuel violence in a society where social and economic gaps are so wide.

Even if Liberia lacked the proper facilities for rehabilitation of ex-combatants, some work of trauma healing, reconciliation, counselling, education, awareness building and skills training was going on. Fighting stigma and bridging the gap between former child soldiers and others is also an area of concern for many NGOs.

Former child soldiers need their self-respect and dignity restored through provision of jobs or training. However, today almost all of them are over 20 years old, and many of them have nothing to do. Those who are not properly rehabilitated and reintegrated into the society remain vulnerable for future recruitment into violence.

As far as the information we have is concerned, there is no rehabilitation and social reintegration work to speak of done on the national level in Liberia. To state it in simple words, no national rehabilitation and social reintegration has been initiated and carried out by the government in power. The Liberian government has difficulty in co-ordinating the work of NGOs. Unfortunately, dealing with the marginalised people in the society is left to national and international NGOs alone.

One of the factors hindering systematic rehabilitation is said to be financial problems. However, Liberia is not a poor country. It has natural resources that could sustain its ca 3.2 million population. The question is how the available resources are being utilised.

The Liberian society that had involved children in war, has no other choice than to carry out well planned and well motivated rehabilitation and social reintegration work, to hinder these former child soldiers from regressing back to old ways.

7.2 Recommendations

In principle, it is the responsibility of every national state to care for its people. Yet, the international community also has an obligation to do its part to support states like Liberia destroyed by civil wars and other calamities. To give emergency help is good, but does not bring any long-term solution. The international community must work more on the preventive aspects of peace building, more than on handouts for those affected by war.

Poverty and lack of democratic governance, that appear to be the cause of most of the conflicts in the world today, need to be dealt with on a long-term basis. If the existing gap between the rich and the poor on both national and international levels continues and is not dealt with properly, conflicts on resource sharing may increase.

Based on the findings of this study, the following short and long-term recommendations are made to stress the above statements. Even if Liberia is the focus in these recommendations, it also concerns other countries with similar problems. These recommendations are made to the Liberian government and the Liberian civil society, to international organisations, international civil rights movements and to those who work directly with child rights.

I/ Short-term recommendations for Liberia and its youth

Give attention to the situation in Liberia and to its young generation.

A/ Give priority to disarming and demobilising child soldiers who are still at the war front.

B/ Rehabilitate and reintegrate as soon as possible those former child soldiers and other ex-combatants living in institutions and on the streets.

C/ Encourage repairing broken relationships between family members, between communities, regions and ethnic groups.

D/ Repair schools and teaching materials and give special training to teachers to cope with traumatised children.

E/ Help the process of training and awareness building of the Liberian civil society.

F/ Support a peaceful and negotiated settlement between Taylor's government and the LURD leadership to end the ongoing war in Lofa County and other parts of the country.

The present situation in Liberia may not be favourable for implementing all these recommendations at once. However, those who deal with peace building and reconciliation work must not lose hope and give up.

If there is a will, there is a possibility to make peace a reality in Liberia.

An appeal from Liberian people
"Help us to stop the ongoing war!"
"We want peace and not handouts!"

II/ Long-term recommendations

To minimise conflicts and to build a sustainable peace, one must have a long-term perspective. The recommendations made below are intended in the light of experiences we have today.

A/ The Liberian government must design a long-term and comprehensive plan for rehabilitation and reintegration of society and its infrastructure.

B/ Identify and develop the local capacity to reinforce the prevention of the use of children as soldiers.

C/ Support comprehensive international agreements that prohibit every form of child exploitation and dehumanisation.

D/ Advocacy for a binding agreement to bring to an end the use of children as soldiers.

E/ Act consequently against the use of children in war.

F/ Empower and support parents and relatives to resist abduction and all sorts of recruitment of children under the age of 18.

G/ Establish a birth-registration system in countries that lack that system, to minimise uncertainty in identifying the age of a child.

H/ Identify the direct and indirect relationship between peace and development.

7.3 Some specific proposals

One of the objectives of this study was to make some proposals, which could help to promote successful rehabilitation and social reintegration work, based on the Liberian experience.

I/ Proper organisation and systematic documentation of first hand empirical material from countries that has worked with post-conflict resolution.

Example: The LCL-LWF/WS THRP has very important documents and information about the Liberian civil war and the work being done to bring about peace and reconciliation. As I found it, the documentation of the material is not systematic. THRP staff need more theoretical and practical training in collecting and preserving information.

II/ Supporting the grassroot level civil society working with peace building. Example: There are many important Liberian civil society sectors, which work with advocacy and they need support:

1/ Women in Peace Building Network
2/ Mano River Women Peace Network
3/ Liberian Women Lawyers Association
4/ YMCA, which works with preventive and rehabilitative work among the youth. It gives the youth a place where they can meet other youth, and stay away from the streets.

III/ Using more former child soldiers who have been active fighters, and who have achieved full social reintegration and are motivated to go out to tell other young Liberians about their experiences.

IV/ Development, production and distribution of teaching material to those who work with rehabilitation and social reintegration of former child soldiers and their societies. In such material, experiences from different countries could be included with a contextual description.

7.4 Epilogue

Development of the situation in Liberia since December 2002

Many new developments have taken place since this field study was concluded in December 2002. Some of the questions raised in the study about the future of Liberia are answered in a way many did not expect.

For example, doubts about holding elections in July 2003 were stated such as, “Time has to show, which way Liberia moves.” Time has shown that no election took place in July 2003.

Since March 2003 the security situation in the country has worsened, due to extensive fighting in the southern part of the country between the Liberian government forces and another rebel group know as the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). Little by little the government lost its positions. At last, LURD and MODEL rebel movements and international pressure forced President Charles Taylor to go into exile in Nigeria. After Taylor left the country, the LURD and MODEL rebel groups, members of the former government and 18 political parties signed an agreement to share power.

Mr Gyude Bryant, a 54-year-old businessman, who was a founding member of the Liberian Action Party, was selected to be a new leader of Liberia. On October 14, 2003, he was sworn in as Liberia’s new interim leader to lead the country until the 2005 elections. On October 20, 2003, Liberia’s transitional assembly elected George Dweh, a founding member of the LURD, as its speaker.

Even if Monrovia is enjoying relative peace these days, the security situation in the rest of the country remains unstable. Armed gangs are terrorising the countryside. The United Nations Peacekeeping Force has taken over the peacekeeping and monitoring of the situation. A certain level of stability has since been restored.

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QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE FILLED IN BY FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS IN LIBERIA

Name: _____ Age: ____ Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Date: _____ Place: _____

NOTE: 1. Please confirm your answer by putting X in the box in front of the possible answer.
2. Write a short answer for questions in the space marked.

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1/. Where did you live before you joined the warring faction?
- ☐ a. In a rural area
- ☐ b. In a town or city

2/. On which warring faction side did you fight?

_____

3/. How old were you when you joined the warring party? _____ Years

4/. Why did you join war?
- ☐ a. Pressure from anti government fighters, family members, or other children
- ☐ b. Forced
- ☐ c. For revenge
- ☐ d. I had no other thing to do
- ☐ e. For access to food
- ☐ f. I wanted to be a soldier

5/. How many years have you been a soldier?
- ☐ a. Less than one year
- ☐ b. Between one and two years
- ☐ c. Between two to five years
- ☐ d. More than five years

6/. What was your main duty within the warring group?
- ☐ a. Fighting
- ☐ b. Guarding
- ☐ c. Had other duties

II. EXPERIENCE OF WAR

1/. Did fighting take place in your village? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2/. Were you mistreated by the warring factions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3/. Did you see children of your age being killed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4/. Did someone kill a member of your family? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5/. Did you kill anyone of your family members? ☐ Yes ☐ No

6/. Are you afraid of war? ☐ Yes ☐ No

7/. Do you feel guilt because you have taken part in the war and killed people? ☐ Yes ☐ No

8/. Do you feel proud of your role in the war? ☐ Yes ☐ No

9/. Have you had a sleeping problem? ☐ Yes ☐ No

III. REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

1/. Are you reconciled with your family and relatives? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2/. Where do you live?

- ☐ a. With my parents.
- ☐ b. With my relatives
- ☐ c. Somewhere else

3/. Did you have problems in coming back to your family and village/ part of the town? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4/. Have you gone through purification rites? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5/. Did your parents or other people take you to

- ☐ a. healers
- ☐ b. church
- ☐ c. other place

6/. What are you doing now?

- ☐ a. attending school
  Who pays for your school?

  _____

- ☐ b. Employed

7/. Did you have problem in getting a job, school or other benefits?

☐ Yes ☐ No

IV. GENERAL VIEWS ABOUT WAR, REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION WORK

1/. Do you want to go back to war? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2/. Is it good that children are used as soldiers? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3/. Do you understand the impact of war on children?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I do not know

4/. What do you wish to do in the future?

- ☐ a. To live with your parents and relatives
- ☐ b. To attend school
- ☐ c. To get a job

5/. Do you feel that you are reintegrated in your society? ☐ Yes ☐ No

6/. If you have any other comments, please write here

_____

_____

List of people interviewed

I. FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS (16)

No	Name	Date	Place
01	Morlee G. Zawoo (Mr)	Oct 28, Nov 11 & Dec 7, 02	Monrovia
02	Maria Sumo (Mrs)	November 05, 2002	Monrovia
03	Salah George (Mr)	November 05, 2002	Monrovia
04	William Gilay (Mr)	November 05, 2002	Monrovia
05	James Farah (Mr)	November 05, 2002	Monrovia
06	Moa Lester (Mrs)	November 05, 2002	Monrovia
07	David Solo (Mr)	November 05, 2002	Monrovia
08	Samuel Kampe (Mr)	November 18, 2002	Jahtondo IDP
09	Mulah Adam (Mr)	November 12, 2002	Tassah/Panta Kpaai
10	Junior Kollie (Mr)	November 12, 2002	Tassah
11	Moses Alf (Mr)	November 22, 2002	Monrovia
12	Kennedy Moses (Mr)	November 22, 2002	Monrovia
13	Orpha Kollie (Mrs)	November 25, 2002	Totota
14	Sam Johnson (Mr)	December 01, 2002	Monrovia
15	Charles King (Mr)	December 01, 2002	Monrovia
16	Kollie David (Mr)	December 02, 2002	Monrovia

II. FAMILIES OF THE FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS (9)

No	Name	Date	Place
01	Victoria Gbanja (Mrs)	November 12, 2002	Palala
02	Michael Garbo (Mr)	November 12, 2002	Tassah
03	Kullie M. Bazzie (Mr)	November 25, 2002	Totota
04	Suah K. Dolo (Mrs)	November 25, 2002	Totota
05	Anthony N. Korval (Mr)	November 25, 2002	Totota
06	Alice Dolo (Mrs)	November 25, 2002	Totota
07	David S. Colley (Mr)	November 25, 2002	Totota
08	Yarkpa Z. Kpoto (Mr)	November 25, 2002	Totota
09	Mabel C. Zawoo (Mr)	December 01, 2002	Monrovia

III. REPRESENTING ORGANISATIONS (13)

No	Name	Name of organisation	Date	Place
01	Peter Hne Wilson (Mr)	THRP, Information and Reporting Officer	30/10/2002	Monrovia
02	Edward Yarkpazuo (Mr)	LWF/WS, Programme Co-ordinator	31/10/2002	Monrovia
03	Sam Gotomo (Mr)	LWF/WS, Planning Manager	31/10/2002	Monrovia
04	Peter Z.N. Kamei (Mr)	Nat'l Gen. Secretary YMCA of Liberia	01/11/2002	Monrovia
05	Same Hare, Jr (Mr)	Dev. Secretary, YMCA of Liberia	01/11/2002	Monrovia
06	Lester N.M. Paye (Mr)	Youth Director, YMCA of Liberia	01/11/2002	Monrovia
07	Yah-Yeplah Dolo (Ms)	Ex. Director, Monrovia, YMCA	01/11/2002	Monrovia
08	Vida Brace Well (Mrs)	Finance Officer, YMCA of Liberia	01/11/2002	Monrovia
09	Bernice G. Williams (Mrs)	Executive Secretary YMCA of Liberia	01/11/2002	Monrovia
10	B. B. Colley (Rev)	LCL-LWF/WS THRP	01/11/2002	Monrovia
11	Charles Pitchford (Mr)	LWF/WS Resident Representative	09/11/2002	Monrovia
12	David Kiazolu (Mr)	Interfaith Council of Liberia	06/11/2002	Monrovia
13	Victoria Reffell (Hon)	Chairman of NRRC of Liberia	05/12/2002	Monrovia

IV. SOCIAL WORKERS AND EDUCATORS (18)

01	William Saa (Mr)	International Fellow- RTC	28/10/2002	Monrovia
03	Chris Wilson (Mrs)	Jahtondo IDP's Camp Manager	09/11/2002	Montserrado County
05	Rameses A. Porte (Mr)	Education Supervisor/Trainer	12,16/11/2002	Phebe/Monrovia
07	Michael Wilson (Mr)	Reunification & Training, D.Bosco	14/11/2002	Monrovia
09	Mannah Dunn (Mr)	THRP Trainer	19/11/2002	Monrovia
11	Moses Kwalula (Mr)	LCL, School Inspector	21/11/2002	Monrovia
13	Johnson Weah (Mr)	THRP Assistant Trainer	28/11/2002	Monrovia
15	Joseph Gbowee (Mr)	THRP Senior Trainer	05/12/2002	Monrovia
17	Edwin Y. Weedor (Mr)	University of Liberia, PSIR Student	10/12/2002	Monrovia
18	S. Tarnue Sherman (Mr)	University of Liberia, Head of PSIR	10/12/2002	Monrovia

V. COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS (16)

No	Name	Position	Date	Place
01	Flumo L. Nushann (Rev)	LCL Pastor, in Lofa County	08/11/2002	Monrovia
02	Mulbah Kennah (Mr)	Community Leader	12/11/2002	Tassah
03	John D. Waker (Hon)	Paramount Chief	12/11/2002	GH Quarry
04	Antant Garrison (Hon)	Clan Chief	12/11/2002	GH Quarry
05	James M. Tucolon (Rev)	LCL-LWF/WS THRP Field Counsellor	12/11/2002	Gbarnga
06	Sumoward Harris (Rt. Rev Dr)	LCL Bishop & V. Chairman of LCC	15/11/2002	Monrovia
07	Sue G. Telewoda (Mrs)	St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Leader	15/11/2002	Monrovia
08	Anthony N. Korvah (Mr)	Community Leader, Totota IDP Camp	25/11,2002	Totota
09	Korboi Weegie (Rev)	LCL Layman Training Centre, Totota	25/11/2002	Totota
10	Kullie M. Bazzie (Mr)	Community Leader, Totota IDP Camp	25/11/2002	Totota
11	Popo Chea (Mr)	Community Leader, Totota IDP Camp	25/11/2002	Totota
12	Junior Yarkpazuo (Mr)	Community Leader, Totota IDP Camp	25/11/2002	Totota
13	John Tokapa (Mr)	Community Leader, Totota IDP Camp	25/11/2002	Totota
14	Theoflos Safela (Rev)	Seed Faith Int'l Ministry, Church	01/12/2002	Monrovia
15	Marina Rau (Rev)	Pastor, St. Andrew Lutheran Church	06/12/2002	Monrovia
16	Peter C. Weedor (Rev)	Special Assistant to LCL Bishop	09/12/2002	Monrovia

Testimonies

Former child soldiers

In this section, except Zawoo's name, others are replaced by fictitious names to cover their real identity.

I. Testimony

NAME: Morlee G. Zawoo
RECRUITED YEAR: 1990 at the age of 15
CLASS: 9th Grade
DEMOBILISED/LEFT THE WAR: 1994

I was born on April 2nd 1975 in Tubmanburg, Bomi County. I was a 9th Grade student in Tubmanburg at the St. Dominic Catholic School.

Then, thousands of displaced people due to the war were living in Tubmanburg, which was the provincial capital of Bomi County. There was intense starvation and intimidation. This area was under the control of the NPFL. They tried to persuade me to join them but I first resisted. On their advice I went to their base in search of food. I found favour with the commander Col. Bobby Gonzon who took me as his small soldier/body guard. In this way I was conscripted into the NPFL fighting force at the age of 15 in 1990.

I travelled with Commander "One man One" as an armour bearer to the battlefront and assisted him in loading and reloading his guns while Col. Gonzon was in serious battle with the ECOMOG/AFL/Black Beret forces.

I was encouraged by my commander to be trained as a commando. After the training I was appointed at the age of 15 as a squad leader for 11 men, old and young. The key objective of the training was to destroy lives and properties of the enemy. In the same vein, I was under charm and became brave under the influence of alcohol and drugs. I was very violent and lawless, never took anything for granted. I was nicknamed "terminator". The more atrocities we committed, the greater our fame and the better opportunities we had for promotion.

I fought in many fronts as a leader of a squad. At times captured enemy forces were tortured and killed. During the civil conflict I lost my two brothers Mark David and Alex Zawoo. I survived two armed ambushes. I escaped the second ambush on December 12, 1992 by ECOMOG/ULIMO forces in Tusa Field, Barnersville, with a broken arm.

Discouraged by the death of my two brothers on the battlefront and my physical disability, I escaped from Greater Liberia to the displaced and refugee shelter in Voice of America, Brewerville, and Montserrado County in 1994. Later I moved into the city and went to school and graduated from high school in 1996.

For a long time I suffered from fear and nightmares of scenes that reminded me of the atrocities committed. There were times I decided to commit suicide but I was comforted and encouraged to go to church, by my God fearing girlfriend who later became my lovely wife. (They have two children.)

I went through LCL-LWF/WS Trauma Healing and Reconciliation training and became a trauma-healing counsellor within the programme. I am a repented and converted Christian, a student of the Divinity College, a preacher of the Gospel. I am an example that people can change for the better.

II. Testimony

NAME: Sam Johnson
RECRUITED YEAR: 1990 at the age of 14
CLASS: 7th Grade
DEMOBILISED/LEFT THE WAR: 1996

Before joining the war I lived with my parents. I left school because of war. When the war came to my village, I joined the war. I was not forced to join, but I wanted to survive by joining the war. My smallest brother who was five years old was killed and I was afraid. I thought if they saw me they would kill me. Therefore, I wanted to be part of the fighters to protect the rest of the family.

During the war there was no food to eat. We were told that what we capture is ours. This became another reason for joining the war and owning a gun that gave me power to get food and security. We looted people's belongings and killed many by ambushing. When people were killed, we took the things they had. During the war I lost my mother and my two sisters. I was fighting in Bomi County with the ULIMO-J function lead by Roosevelt Johnson.

Now I am living in Monrovia because my father does not want me to return home. I was wounded during the war and I have nothing to give to the family. I see no improvement in the society. We are still suffering. I have received vocational training. After the training there was no support given to me to start business. We are wasting our time and doing nothing.

It is bad that people are still fighting. So I want the war to end. Those who recruit and use children must stop. It is not good for small children to go to war.

III. Testimony

NAME: Kennedy Moses
RECRUITED YEAR: 1992 at the age of 10
DEMOBILISED/LEFT THE WAR: 1997

I was not forced to join the war, but the situation compelled me to do it. I have seen my friends coming back to the village with new clothes and many other things in their hands and became attracted. I was embarrassed to find myself sometimes running away and hiding when rebels came to the village.

Another reason for me to join the war was because the rebels killed my brother. It was not in exchange of fire. They caught him and made him sit on a chair, then they tied his elbows together backwards on a chair (tabay) so that he could not move. They split his chest. (While telling me this he was shedding his tears.) Seeing my brother being killed in this way, I was confused. So I decided to join the war and to become one of them and not to be afraid of rebels anymore.

I joined the ULIMO and they took me to Sierra Leone for military training. When ULIMO split into two, I went with ULIMO-K. I do not want to tell you everything I did and saw. But I will tell you that war is not good. Many people, even those who have guns and are fighting, can lose their lives. I am afraid of war. I have seen many nasty killings, including my own brother. But I will not tell you how it was at the war front. Innocent children who did not know what war is were killed. I had never seen children being killed and killing before.

People were killed during the fighting, now people are willing to forgive each other. I believe that reconciliation is best for me. I cannot forget what had happened to me. While I am sitting here, I know the people who killed my brother. I asked why they killed my brother. They explained that they killed him because they suspected him of being a rebel. I know he was not a rebel. They killed him without reason. Now he is dead, and I cannot do anything more than forgiving them.

After demobilisation, I was given training by Don Bosco Homes in carpentry, on how to draw and make furniture. Now I am one of the professional carpenters in this area. I have no problem with my family. My mother wants to see me often, because she has lost her other son during the war. I do not want to tell you where I am living right now. Here no one knows that I was a child soldier, because I do not behave like many other former child soldiers.

It is not good to use innocent children in fighting. Those fighting, let them stop fighting and build their country if they love it. If God agrees, I want to be a peacemaker.

IV. Testimony

NAME: Maria Sumo
RECRUITED YEAR: 1990 at the age of 9
DEMOBILISED/LEFT THE WAR: 1997

Because of the war situation I had many problems and high tension. The rebels were killing my friends and relatives. I felt so hurt and wanted to revenge. I fought five good years in Lofa County. After demobilisation, I have had problems in coming back to a normal life. Now I am living with my relatives.

Even today I have no job and nobody to support me. I get a small ration of rice from the government but it is not enough. I am afraid of war and I do not want to go back and fight. I have killed people during the fighting. I was a captain in the NPFL rebel movement. There were men and women under my command. Even if it was to revenge that I took part in the war, I am not happy about it.

My father and my mother took me to church to help me forget the war and to get forgiveness for what I did during the war. In the church a pastor prayed for me and I became happy. But I cannot forget the past. In the future if I can get assistance, I want to go back to school and learn something and get a job.

It is not easy to remember all the atrocities I have taken part in and seen. I clearly remember people being beaten, killed and many bad things being done against each other. Before going to the battlefield we were provided with alcohol and drugs. I used to drink cane juice (local alcohol made from sugarcane), and smoked cigarettes and grass (marijuana). The reason why they forced us to drink alcohol before going to the battlefield was because many of us were afraid of fighting. When they gave me drugs I understood that it was bad. But if I would refuse to take it, they would kill me. It would have been difficult for me to start attacking the enemy, if I did not take these things.

I have observed women being badly treated. Some were tied to a tree and beaten. Some were raped, yet others were killed, including their

children. Their belongings were taken from them by force. They were often suppressed and looted of their belongings. As a woman I felt very bad about the bad treatment of women.

I want to see peace in Liberia. I would be happy if we get peace. I want things to become normal as before. I would be too happy to have peace. I want to tell boys and girls that war is not good and they must stop fighting. We want peace in Liberia. If they stop fighting, I would be very happy.

Testimonies from Liberian society

I/ Parent

NAME: Mrs Victoria Gbanja
OCCUPATION: Housewife
AGE: 43
DATE: November 12, 2002
PLACE: Palala, Bong County

When war came to Palala in 1990, everybody left the town in panic. During this time our son also disappeared. For a long time we did not know where he was. After the war he came back as a grown up boy. We did not want to ask him where he had been and what he had done. He did not want to tell others or us about the war. However, for me he was a lost son. When he came back we were very happy. We prepared a feast for him and invited our relatives to share our happiness.

From stories told about the soldiers and what we have seen, we know what kind of life he has lived. We do not think that our son was different than others. We have forgiven him. There is nothing we could do. There are many former child soldiers in this town. They are not respecting adult people as they did before. They were smoking and making trouble in the town. Last week one of the former child soldiers was shot in his stomach, because he did not want to give his friends 10 Liberian dollars they demanded from him. It is not good.

Our son is not in Palala with us now. He did not get any support after the war. He left the area because he had nothing to do. We have heard that he is in Guinea. I wanted him to go back to school and get education. You see me trying to read and write during the evenings. I know what it means to be unable to read and write. Evening classes are organised for us by LWF/WS. I am very thankful for this.

When children are fighting they do not get education, they do not respect people and they take by force things that do not belong to them. I want my son and others to go back to school and get education. They must learn to fear God and respect other people. I pray for them who are fighting today. I pray for peace. I wish an everlasting peace for Liberia.

II/ Community leader

NAME: Hon. Antat Garrison
OCCUPATION: Clan Chief
AGE: 48
DATE: November 12, 2002
PLACE: Green Hill Quarry in Panta-Kpaai District, Bong County

In my area the war had affected the normal life. Property was destroyed and looted. Children were left to grow without education. Some small girls became pregnant due to rapes.

Children were attracted by what they saw on other children who joined the rebel group. Many of these children have seen how their own friends from the village came back with weapons and tied their parents and looted their property. Some of the former child soldiers were recruited willingly because of the advantages they saw. Not joining the war to protect oneself and their town was regarded as a disadvantage. When they joined the rebel group they also received weapons, clothes and food. Weapons gave them power and advantage for protecting their families. Because of war there was no school or work, and some of the young boys wanted to join the rebel group because they had nothing to do.

I know that children below the age of 15 years have become soldiers. But I have no knowledge of children below 15 years joining the war from my town. Some of the young boys who were above 15 from my clan also joined the war for those reasons I mentioned before. Many of those child soldiers who were demobilised have gone back to school, others are engaged in business.

The war had a negative effect on the behaviour of our children. Some are smoking marijuana, drinking too much alcohol, going around and doing nothing. They lack regard for their parents, the elderly people and our tradition. This was unusual before the war. They have become rude. When you tell them to do something they do not listen to you. We are trying to tell them that this is not wartime, we have a legitimate government and the rebel way of doing things is over. They have no reason to continue to behave in this way. When we talk about war damage we can say the minds of children are damaged in many ways. Many of them do not understand that we have an elected government and that they have to obey law and order.

To improve this we need the United Nations to help our government to help us. We must have a chance to talk to all of them at the same time. We want to put them into a “camp”, talk to them and educate them to bring them back to normal life in the society. This is our appeal to the United Nations. We cannot do everything by ourselves.

This does not mean that we are not doing anything. We are using our traditional way of making peace when they make problems in our society. We do not allow ex-child soldiers to insult and abuse people and go free. If the matter becomes serious we follow the traditional way of solving the problem, using people elected by the community to investigate the matter and punish the one who has done wrong.

III/ Social worker

NAME: Mrs. Z. Patience B. Paye
OCCUPATION: Social worker
AGE: 34
DATE: November 12 &16, 2002
PLACE: Phebe, Bong County & Monrovia

People are starting to say, "enough is enough". To exemplify this she told the following story. Even if there is an elected government small boys with weapons terrorise people in their own society.

On May 9, 2002, fighting in Gbarnga, the capital of Bong County took place between the LURD rebels and the government forces. One day in June 2002, five child soldiers started to put up a checkpoint after writing "Police Head Quarters" on a small building on the roadside of the Phebe hospital.

While they were doing this a young boy from the same village came walking on the road. They told him to stop, saying he belonged to a dissident group. He told them that he did not and that he was living in that same village. They did not accept his explanation and told him to take off his shoes. The boy refused to do so. They started beating and dragging him into the small house called "Police Head Quarters" beside the road.

Some people, who knew the boy, were watching the drama from distance. When the beating continued, some of them rushed to rescue the boy. People told them to stop beating him. When these child soldiers did not listen to their advice, people took the matter in their own hands and took the only gun these boys had. The angry crowd beat them up and chased them away from the place. People were chanting and singing, "Today is our day!" "Today is our day!" After getting rid of these boys from the place, people painted over the sign "Police Head Quarters". These child soldiers did never come back to this place.

People of Liberia are fed-up with all kinds of intimidation and maltreatment by small boys with a weapon in their hand. People have started to say openly, "Enough is enough!"

IV/ Religious leader

NAME: Rev. Peter C. Weedor
OCCUPATION: Special Assistant to the Bishop of LCL
DATE: December 9, 2002
PLACE: LCL Head Office, Monrovia

I served as pastor in the LCL since 1978. I took my first assignment in Slay, Lofa County, where I stayed as a parish pastor. Since September 1997 I work as Special Assistant to the Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Liberia.

When war broke out we were told to stay at the same place where we were. Sometimes the war was so intensive that we were forced to leave the area. We kept on preaching in the churches. Some of the soldiers including the child soldiers came to our church services. I spoke that God does not want people to take-up weapons and kill others. I told the soldiers not to bring their weapons into the church and they respected that.

I did not and I do not like war. War is not a way to gain power. Some of the boys were about six, eight or ten years old. They come and say, "Pappy, have you no food today? You have to give us food." They demand food. If I say we have no food they say, "Pappy do not make us shame you, you have to get us food." Some of them were from the Lutheran Church. Because of the war situation they joined the rebels. They damaged their own people and the buildings.

I kept on saying that God does not let anyone who kills innocent people go free. Therefore, they started to hate me. I ended up in jail in a container in February 1995. This was one of Charles Taylor's rebel controlled area. I do not want to talk about it. It is horrible. While I was in that container, they arrested a person saying he is ULIMO fighter and put him too in the container with me. About midnight, they opened the container and told us to come out from the container. One of the guys told me to take a knife. I told him, I have never killed a chicken, and I do not want to do this. He said, if you do not do it, we will kill you instead. They used a word of abuse to my mother. I was forced to take part

in the killing of this guy. Two guys with guns forced me to carry away the body and dump it in a deep ravine nearby.

Then they took me back to the container and locked me in along with some other guys. That was a very horrible time in my entire life and I will never ever forget that as long as I live. That was the time I really understood that we were at war. I said, Lord if you want me to die in this way; let your will be done. (Rev. Weedor was in tears when he uttered these words.) I recited Psalms 37:3 "Trust in the Lord". Every morning for one whole week, they took me out and lashed me several times.

In the morning of February 8, 1995, I heard a voice "Where is the pastor, Where is the Pastor." Someone came and whispered to me, "Pastor they want to free you." They opened the container and told me to come out. "Where are your trousers and your shoes?" I said I do not know where they are. They asked if someone else had them and everybody said no.

The president has called you to come to Gbarnga. When I came to the former Cuttington University College campus (NPFL Head Quarters in Gbarnga), which was the place where they have killed many people, I was terrified. One night they woke me up and said, "You pastor! You are a ULIMO supporter." I said I am not a ULIMO supporter. I am a pastor. "Why did you go to Guinea?" I said because the tensions were so high for me I could not stay in the area. Therefore, I fled to Guinea where my forefathers had come from. They told me to come out from the building. One of the soldiers felt sorry for me and told me not to go out otherwise they would kill me, he said. Yet, I came out. They told me to utter the last word I wanted before they killed me. They said, "We are going to kill you because you are a ULIMO supporter". I said, no! I am not a ULIMO supporter. I am a pastor. "Pastor of what church?" they inquired. Pastor of the Lutheran Church, I answered.

They said "If you are a Lutheran pastor tell us one of the Lutheran Churches in this area?" I mentioned Phebe, and the soldiers looked at each other. These are our own Lutheran boys who have left the church and had followed the evil way of life. They asked me to tell them names

of other churches in the area, which I did. While asking these questions, I was subjected to a torture known as tabay. (His elbows were tied backwards on a chair). "Wawoo! We were to kill our pastor!" Then they said to me, "Pastor sorry for treating you in this way". After this I became free. These are some of the problems I encountered during the war. I tell you that these boys killed people for nothing.

These small boys have killed Liberia's best people and looted property. Today many of them have nothing and they are beggars. War should not be a means to come to power. Stop war and using children in war.

General information about Liberia

Area	97,754 sq. km
Population:	3,288,198 (2002 estimate)
Capital:	Monrovia
Geography:	Liberia is divided into 15 counties and bordered by Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone
Independence:	26 July 1847
Head of State and Government:	Charles Ghankay Taylor, President from August 1997 to August 2003.
Official Language:	English (There are 16 major languages : for example Bassa, Dan (Gio), Kpelleh, Kru, Loma, Mano
Ethnic groups:	1/ Indigenous groups 95% (Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kru, Grebo, Mano, Krahn, Gola, Gbandi, Loma, Kissi, Vai, and Bella) 2/ Americo-Liberians 2.5% (Descendants of immigrants from the US who had been slaves) 3/ Congo People 2.5% (Descendants of immigrants from the Caribbean who had been slaves)
Religions:	Indigenous beliefs 40%, Christians 40% and Muslim 20%
Literacy:	Age 15 and above: 38.3 % of the total population
Source:	Official Country Information 2002

Map of Liberia



About the author

Teferi Sendabo received his PhD in Political Science from the University of Lund, Sweden, in 1996. His doctoral thesis focused on foreign aid and state sovereignty in relation to the Ethio-Swedish aid co-operation. Tefari Sendabo also holds a degree in Political Science and International Relations from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. He has Diplomas in Teacher Training, and has worked as a teacher and headmaster in Ethiopia for many years. After having completed his PhD, Tefari Sendabo has mainly been working as a consultant dealing with development projects, for example with the Church of Sweden International Department. He has also been employed by LPI as a Programme Officer/Researcher.

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Building the Peace: Experiences of Collaborative Peacebuilding in Somalia 1993-1995, Wolfgang Heinrich, 1997. The story of LPI's Horn of Africa Programme in Somalia evaluates the programme supporting grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Somali communities, and offers insights for the future of both peacebuilding and a lasting peace in the Horn. 290 pp. *Please note that this book is out of stock, but available at the LPI library.*

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