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**Challenges of Child DDR: A Case Study of the
Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Master's thesis

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Study programme: Security Studies

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Year of the defence: 2020

Declaration

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2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 21. 05. 2020

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References

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Abstract

This Master's thesis is devoted to the study of Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration programs for children formerly associated with armed groups. Its main task is to critically assess the implementation of child Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration programs, to identify the main challenges of these programs, and to provide recommendations for their future improvement. The theoretical part of the work focuses on the concept of child soldiers and the concept of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. The work examines the case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo closely. It explores the history of the conflict, the history of using child soldiers, and the history of Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration programs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, this work analyzes the phenomenon of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the challenges the current Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration programs are facing and provides recommendations for the Congolese government and for the international actors which are providing the Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration programs for children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The work concludes that through the implementation of new policies on the national and international levels, the Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration programs for children formerly associated with armed groups can improve in the future.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce je věnována studii programů odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace pro děti dříve spojované s ozbrojenými skupinami. Hlavním úkolem práce je kriticky posoudit implementaci programů odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace v případě bývalých dětských vojáků, identifikovat hlavní problémy těchto programů a poskytnout doporučení k jejich budoucímu zlepšení. Teoretická část práce se zabývá konceptem dětských vojáků a konceptem odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace. Tato práce úzce zkoumá případovou studii Demokratické republiky Kongo. Zkoumá historii konfliktu, historii využívání dětských vojáků a historii programů odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace v Demokratické republice Kongo. Dále tato práce analyzuje fenomén dětských vojáků v Demokratické republice Kongo a výzvy, kterým nynější programy odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace čelí a poskytuje doporučení konžské vládě a mezinárodním aktérům, kteří poskytují

programy odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace pro bývalé dětské vojáky v Demokratické republice Kongo. Práce usuzuje, že skrze implementaci nových opatření na národní i mezinárodní úrovni, se programy odzbrojení, demobilizace a reintegrace pro děti dříve spojované s ozbrojenými skupinami mohou v budoucnosti zlepšit.

Keywords

Child Soldiers, DDR, Demobilization, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Disarmament, Peacebuilding, Reintegration, United Nations

Klíčová slova

budování míru, DDR, demobilizace, Demokratická republika Kongo, dětské vojáky, odzbrojení, OSN, reintegrace

Title

Challenges of Child DDR: A Case Study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Název práce

Problémy a výzvy dětských programů DDR: Případová studie Demokratické republiky Kongo

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Introduction

All over the world, thousands of children are actively participating in various armed structures. These children are either forced to or choose to participate in armed conflicts, mostly due to their social situation. In war-torn countries, many leaders of armed groups use children in the role of soldiers, fighters, cooks, for sexual purposes, et cetera. The leaders of the armed groups tear the children apart from their families, steal away their chance for education, and force them to commit murder or other atrocities or force them to witness such deeds. Furthermore, these children are also subject to rape, enslavement, and torture. Children who have to undergo brainwashing, torture, and participation in war should have an opportunity to lead an everyday life in the future and should have a chance to be disarmed, rehabilitated, and reintegrated into the normal society after they leave the armed structures.

In countries that have been recently at war or are still in conflict, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration opportunities for ex-combatants overall and especially for child ex-combatants, are the most important. Well-designed and well-executed programs can help with the re-establishment of peace and the following re-establishment of a peaceful post-war society. The establishment of sustainable peace is the exact reason for the emergence of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs and processes. These programs support disarmament, demobilization, and the returnees after wars as well as the communities they return to, to create sustainable peace in the long term. Furthermore, when it is too early for such programs, and the armed groups are not yet willing to stop the violence and allow the programs to be adequately implemented, the United Nations (UN) can support the disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants through community violence reduction programs.¹

These programs are vital for the de-escalation of conflicts and the development of a peaceful environment. Furthermore, they provide a chance for the former combatants to live an everyday life after leaving the violent structures. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of these programs is their focus on children in the armed conflicts and the aftermath of the armed conflicts. Thousands of children are subject to or take part in unimaginable cruelty in many armed conflicts all over the world every day. They are the most vulnerable victims of any

¹ Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Section. "COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION - Peacekeeping.un.org." PUBLICATIONS. Accessed September 1, 2019. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf>.

given conflict, and therefore the focus on their disarmament and reintegration should be given the utmost priority.

Disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration of children after an armed conflict is one of the most challenging aspects of the DDR programs. There have been many different academic studies and studies conducted by numerous international organizations presenting various issues connected to the implementation and functionality of such programs. However, they appear to lack cohesion. Child DDR is exceptionally challenging to all parties of the process, but once the challenges are addressed and the programs improved, the social revenue would be immense.

For almost thirty years now, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been in some kind of violent conflict. Starting with the First Congo War in 1994,² the recruitment of child soldiers has unfortunately become quite common practice for both the government and the rebel movements active within the country. The armed groups abuse the internal instability – legal and financial – in the country and recruit children for their cause.³ The recruitment of child soldiers, voluntary or other, is considered a war crime. However, there is a high degree of impunity, and very few arrests made on such charges.⁴ Therefore, the DRC requires highly efficient child DDR programs, and the case of the DRC presents a practical example of the whole process of recruitment and usage of child soldiers. This is after all corroborated by the continuous presence of the DRC in the United Nations Children and Armed Conflict Reports as one of the countries where grave violations against children rights (including recruitment and use of children in armed conflict) are committed. These reports substantiate the selection of the DRC as the case study. Furthermore, the child DDR programs and the community violence reduction initiatives which are implemented in the country are a perfect opportunity for analysis of the current DDR processes, which are the main topic of this work.

To contemplate the issue subjectively, the broader the academic debate on the issue of child soldiering and child DDR becomes, the more recommendations for international

² “Eastern Congo Initiative.” History of the Conflict. Accessed February 10, 2020. <http://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict>.

³Steffen Krüger and Diana Hund. *ARMY AND SOCIETY*. Report. Edited by Wahlers Gerhard. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014. 21-35. Accessed February 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10100.5.

⁴ Steffen Krüger and Diana Hund. *ARMY AND SOCIETY*. Report. Edited by Wahlers Gerhard. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014. 21-35. Accessed February 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10100.5.

organizations to improve their programs there are. None of the children that are being part of or exposed to violence deserve such fate. Moreover, since the international community is not capable enough to prevent the involvement of children, it should at least intensively work on its capabilities in the field of the child DDR and community violence reduction. After all, the children are the future of the world, and if they are taught to lead their lives violence-free and if they are capable of learning a peaceful conflict resolution in the future, the whole world would eventually become a much less violent place.

The thesis is divided into four parts. The first part introduces the thesis objectives and the main research question. The second part focuses on the theoretical approaches and methodology. The third part explores the case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in detail, and the fourth part presents the author's analysis of child DDR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and provides recommendations for the future improvement of the DDR.

More specifically, the first chapter lays out the thesis objectives and presents the main research question. The second chapter of the text introduces the review of the existing literature on the topic of child soldiering and child DDR programs, methodology, and theoretical approaches. The theoretical part discusses the phenomenon of child soldiering and its conceptualization. Later, the concept of DDR programs and the DDR programs targeting children is thoroughly discussed. Together, the theoretical approaches that are used to create a footing for the analysis in the latter part of the work.

In the third chapter of the research, the case study is thoroughly explained. The case study provides a detailed analysis of the case of the DRC. Firstly, a brief history of the DRC and the conflicts within needs to be laid out. The historical part is followed by the history of child recruitment and child soldiering. Altogether, it provides for a comprehensive overview of the situation in the country in history and now. Lastly, the DDR programs implemented in the DRC are thoroughly examined.

The last chapter of the text is analytical. The analytical part analyzes the child soldiering in the DRC and the issues connected to it. Also, it analyzes the child DDR and community violence reduction efforts, which are currently taking place in the DRC against the criteria set for their efficient functionality. Lastly, the research provides a conclusion about the child

DDR and the recommendations for its improvement in the future. This structure seems to be the most logical one to provide a comprehensive result and an answer to the main research question.

1. Thesis Objectives and the Main Research Question

The main objective of this research is to identify the critical challenges of child disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs. Through a single case study, it critically assesses the implementation of child DDR initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through such an assessment, the work provides a ground for further research into the challenges of child DDR and their potential improvement.

The main question which has to be asked in this research is: How can the child DDR programs be improved to provide a better ground for the successful reintegration of war-affected children into society? The main focus of this work is on the child DDR, and the case study of the DRC will serve such purpose well. The DRC is a country that has not been entirely at peace in the last almost thirty years and therefore is in a desperate need of a change of the system of governance. The issue of child soldiers has been connected to the DRC for most of the period of the conflicts.⁵ Therefore, there is a need for addressing the issues of the child soldiers' disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, preferably in an urgent matter.

There are, of course, many more questions to be asked during the research. Such questions should address the history and the present of the conflict situation in the DRC itself, the current academic debate on the issue of child soldiering, the decision of children to willingly or unwillingly enter an armed structure, the current state of the DDR programs and the community violence reduction initiatives being implemented by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) mission, et cetera. All of the questions mentioned will be answered through this work to come to a conclusion that will answer the main research question.

Through assessing the case of the DRC, it will be possible to identify the main challenges to the DDR programs targeted at the rehabilitation and reintegration of children. Once these are identified, it is possible to analyze them and provide recommendations for their future

⁵ "Populations at Risk Serious Concern." Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Accessed September 1, 2019. http://www.globalr2p.org/regions/democratic_republic_of_the_congo_drc.

improvements. Such recommendations could be later possibly applied to any similar cases and might lead to the future improvement of the whole framework for the child DDR.

Moreover, this thesis is a contribution to the existing literature and research on the subject of child soldiering and the child DDR programs. The existing literature seems to be failing to address this topic thoroughly. Most of the literature at the moment targets the theoretical approaches connected to child soldiers, either from the legal perspective or from the humanitarian perspective, and thus concentrates on the criteria of the age limit or the criteria for the acceptance into the DDR programs. Also, most of the literature seems to be aiming its attention on the notorious case studies such as Sudan or Uganda. Thus, this work is my addition to the existing literature as it focuses on the assessment of the child DDR and the case study of the DRC, as both of these topics are rather under-researched in the current literature.

2. Theory and Methodology

2.1. Literature Review

Disarmament and child soldiering are both widely discussed in the field of international relations and security studies. The body of the literature on the topic is immense, but for this thesis, the literature can be divided into three different categories. Firstly, the literature focusing on the theoretical approaches to disarmament and child soldiers. The second part of the literature review consists of the literature mainly centered around the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, their processes, and their problems. Lastly, the literature provided by the governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field research, as well as materials produced by the United Nations, should be taken into consideration.

The first part of the literature is the literature that explores the theoretical base of the child soldiering and usage of children as weapons. Together with that, the literature focuses on the effects such a lifestyle has on children in their later life. The critical pieces of literature in this part are *Child Soldiers and Restorative Justice* by J.C. Kiyala,⁶ and *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism* by M. Bloom and J. Horgan.⁷

Both of these books are different in many ways, while Bloom and Horgan focus on children's involvement in terrorism, Kiyala focuses on the judicial aspect of child involvement in a conflict and the case of the DRC in particular. However, there are some common perspectives in these books. The first one is the militarization of the children, and the second one is the demobilization of children, though there are some other parallels as well, these two are the most important ones in connection to this work. Bloom and Horgan talk about the various ways in which education can be twisted to serve as a method of indoctrination of children who are, especially at a very young age, extremely susceptible to the brainwashing by a terrorist organization. Furthermore, Bloom and Horgan explore the motivations of children to be involved in militarized structures willingly or unwillingly. Similarly, Kiyala, in his work, explores the militarization from his perspective. He analyzes

⁶ Jean Chrysostome K. Kiyala *Child Soldiers and Restorative Justice Participatory Action Research on North Kivu in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*. Cham: Springer, 2019.

⁷ Mia Bloom and John G. Horgan. *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.

the push and pull factors that lead to child soldiering. These include, for example, the presence of war or economic, social, or cultural constraints as well as the changes in warfare, which essentially lead to the desire of the armed structures to include children in the war or armed conflicts.

The second parallel that can be found in these pieces of literature is the fact that they both focus on the demobilization of children after their involvement in the armed structures. In a chapter called “Leaving Terrorism Behind”, Bloom and Horgan touch upon the issue of what happens with the children after they are released from terrorist structures. Furthermore, they focus on the assessment of the damage caused by the violence and the methods of such assessment. They use different examples to show the different effects the indoctrination and violence can have on the children’s minds. Due to this violent upbringing, there is a need to rehabilitate the children so that they can be later reintegrated into the normal society. However, there are many challenges to the rehabilitation of the children who are connected to armed structures. Mainly these are the accessibility of the psychological care or the prevention of reengagement in violence. Kiyala focuses on similar issues in his book. He dedicated a part of his book to a detailed analysis of the demobilization of the children, their reintegration, and the healing of the former child soldiers. He discusses the DDR, self-demobilization, and the prevention of further violence. He focuses on “Healing Child Soldiers” and the challenges which the demobilization presents. Kiyala analyzes the demobilization, perhaps more in-depth than Bloom and Horgan. Furthermore, he analyzes the legal aspects of the child soldiers, and he specifically analyzes on the case of the DRC as well. Therefore, this book is particularly useful for this work.

Related to the two books above is a book by M. Drumbl called *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*.⁸ Similarly to Bloom and Horgan, Drumbl offers a fascinating new perspective on the issue of child soldiers while focusing on the problematics of children affiliated with armed structures. Drumbl also studies almost exclusively the case of male child soldiers in the gravest African conflicts, namely in Sierra Leone and Uganda. He first presents an overview of the facts and perceptions of child soldiers. Later, he moves to how these facts are being applied within the fields of international policy and international lawmaking, where he mainly discusses the issues connected to the accountability of the

⁸ Mark A. Drumbl, *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

soldiers and their recruiters as well. Lastly, Drumbl explores the possibility of reforms and recommends how to improve the international policy and legal frameworks to be more effective in the future. Overall, this book challenges the conventional assumptions that are being made about the child soldiers, such as always putting the children into the role of victims or the belief that child soldiers always join the armed structures involuntarily, and explores how the flawed policies and laws may be improved.

To further add to the list of the literature on the topic of child soldiers, it is essential to mention the book *The War Crime of Child Soldier Recruitment* by J. McBride.⁹ Even though the book aims primarily at the legal aspects of child soldiering, it provides an exciting insight into the legal frameworks connected to the issue. McBride firstly introduces the basic definitions connected to child soldiers and, similarly to Kiyala and Bloom, focuses on the definition of child soldiers. Further on, the book studies the codification of the crime of child recruitment and presents the case study of Sierra Leone and the judicial process of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Also, importantly for this thesis, McBride examines the cases of child soldier recruiters at the International Criminal Court and namely at the Lubanga case of Thomas Dyilo Lubanga of the DRC.

The next book connected to the issue of child soldiers and the way the international community views it is *The Child and the World: Child-Soldiers and the Claim for Progress* by Jana Tabak.¹⁰ Tabak, in her book, analyzes the international discourse on child soldiers. She begins the book by discussing the phenomenon of child soldiers in comparison to the “world-child”, meaning the normal vulnerable and immature child, where the “world-child” is the classical perception of a child while the child soldier is seen as defective. She continues her discussion by focusing on the international programs targeted at helping the child soldiers and how these are, with the help of international rights and norms, designed to turn the children into the “world-child” and later into a world-citizen. Then, Tabak focuses strictly on the legal and normative discourses, which make the child soldiers out to be a defective version of a child or an international emergency, which calls for an immediate resolution. The analysis of the legal frameworks brings Tabak to the United Nations programs created as a helping tool for the war-affected children and to the fact that they

⁹ Julie McBride, *The War Crime of Child Soldier Recruitment*. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2014.

¹⁰ Tabak, Jana. *The Child and the World: Child-Soldiers and the Claim for Progress*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2020.

continue the vicious circle of normalizing the children according to the vulnerable model of the “world-child”. She concludes the book by proposing that the child soldiers are not all the same as the “world-child” image and that the international community needs to realize that these children are neither “normal” nor “deviant”, but that they are in between childhood and adulthood and that they should be treated as such. They are “children between boundaries”, and they present a challenge to the international view of what constitutes a normal child as well as bring about the need to explore the flaws in the international protection and development strategies that are supposed to help these children become normal “world-citizens”.

The second part of the literature focuses on the DDR programs themselves. Most important for this research is the literature which targets the DDR programs and processes for children and the problematics connected to them. The central readings for this are *The Study of Child Soldiering: Issues and Consequences for DDR Implementation* by R. Haer¹¹ and country-specific studies of child soldiering and DDR – mostly the cases of Syria, Uganda, and Colombia.

In this part of the literature, it is primarily important to mention that the previously examined book by J.C. Kiyala is a part of the literature focusing mainly on the child DDR programs as well. Other than that, the beforementioned study by R. Haer is very significant for this research as it engages directly with the challenges the child DDR is facing, and it presents an overview of the academic debate on the subject of child DDR. Haer points out three main theoretical issues that are present in the theoretical debate about the child DDR. These are: “the age aspect of the official definition; the alleged lack of accountability (sometimes connected to how children are recruited); and the fact that differences between former child soldiers are often overlooked, especially concerning gender”.¹² Furthermore, Haer points out the fact that there is still much research to be done on the topic of the child DDR, especially regarding the notoriously problematic areas of the programs and the criteria for the assessment of the functionality of these programs. Haer and other authors conducting research similar to Haer’s are crucial for the analytical part of this work as their works help

¹¹ Roos Haer, “The Study of Child Soldiering: Issues and Consequences for DDR Implementation.” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2016): 450–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166946>.

¹² Roos Haer, “The Study of Child Soldiering: Issues and Consequences for DDR Implementation.” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2016): 450–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166946>. pp. 9.

with the analysis of the functionality of the DDR programs and the recommendations for their improvement.

Furthermore, the previously done case studies combine the theoretical research comparable to Haer's research and the actual case studies of the previously implemented DRR and child DDR programs. A book published by the United Nations University called *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*¹³ is a collection of case studies focusing on the various aspects of child DDR efforts. The authors came together to create an extensive study of child engagement in armed structures with the main goal of mapping the situation on the ground in many different countries and coming up with a roadmap for a future improvement of the United Nations work in the field of child DDR. Each of the chapters discusses a different phenomenon connected to the topic, ranging from defining the basic facts about children in the non-state groups, through the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, to identifying the challenges in child protection and reintegration into the society. The case studies cover most of the countries which are known for the use of child soldiers such as the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Thus, the study overall displays a very wholesome overview of the overall situation and is perfect as a starting point in identifying the main issues connected to the child DDR issues the United Nations are facing when implementing their programs. Furthermore, the main issues presented by the authors are not dissimilar to those presented by Haer in his work mentioned above, therefore creating a stable basis for the later research in this work.

A. Hardgrove in her book *Life After Guns: Reciprocity and Respect Among Young Men in Liberia*,¹⁴ brings into focus the consequences of the Liberian civil war on the young men in the country. She performs a structural analysis of the implications the civil war had on the ex-combatants as well as the young men who were not involved in the conflict. As an ethnographic study, Hardgrove's book provides an insight into the lives of the war-affected youth and the everyday struggles of these men as well as into the structure of their world. She makes some critical reflections on the situation in Liberia, looking back at the influence of the "Americo elite", and at the structural flaws connected to the ex-combatants; she

¹³ S. O'Neil and van Broeckhoven, K. (2018). *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*. New York: United Nations University.

¹⁴ Abby V. Hardgrove, *Life After Guns: Reciprocity and Respect Among Young Men in Liberia*. Rutgers University Press, 2019.

mentions that the inhabitants of countries where the war took place are seen as predisposed to conducting violent acts. Hardgrove then identifies this predominant assumption regarding the former combatants, especially the young men, as the central issue in the structure of the DDR programs and the Liberian society as well. The stigma placed on the young men not only by the programs, but the society as well creates a vicious circle of structural violence. The vision of these children and young adults as “the others” and as a danger to the society creates grave inequalities and could lead to the repetition of violence.

On the other hand, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development* by M.H. MacKenzie analyzes solely the female aspects of the war and the post-war lives of women and girls in Sierra Leone.¹⁵ This book brings a study of the female soldiers from their perspectives. MacKenzie focuses heavily on the feminist issues in the study. However, she also discusses the critiques of the development logic and post-conflict reconstruction methods. Particularly in the fourth chapter, she criticizes the approaches of the DDR programs towards the women and girls and the fact that, rather than empowerment of the women and girls, the programs bring disappointing experiences. Since most of the women and young women have to take on the supporting roles during the conflict, they are not always recognized as someone who needs to be a part of a DDR program. Furthermore, they complained about the programs being targeted at helping men and giving men a priority within the programs. Also, the children DDR programs ended due to the lack of funding rather than them being fully finished. MacKenzie points out the apparent gender bias in the DDR programs and overall gives a wholesome study of the difficulties, the complexities, and the stigmatization of female and girl soldiers in Sierra Leone.

The collective of authors of the book *Building Peace from Within*¹⁶ examine the functioning of various approaches to the creation of sustainable peace in African countries. The book includes the analysis of theoretical approaches to community peacebuilding as well as the country-specific studies of Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya, and others. Of particular interest to this work are Chapters Six and Seven. Chapter Six, written by P. Machakanja, examines the case of South Sudan. She firstly defines the child soldier phenomenon, later she continues to

¹⁵ Megan H. MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development*. New York: NYU Press, 2014.

¹⁶ Laura De Luca and Sylvester Bongani. Maphosa. *Building Peace from Within*. Oxford: Africa Inst. of South Africa, 2014.

examine the reasons why children join the armed structures, and she points out the need for the re-conceptualization of the term. Later she continues to examine the case of South Sudan specifically and the incentives made to rehabilitate the former child soldiers. Machakanja concludes by listing the weaknesses of the DDR programs and propositions for their future improvement. In Chapter Seven, Keasley and DeLuca interview Matadi, a former child soldier, about his journey from an ex-combatant to a peacemaker. Through the contemplation of his life experience and his work with the former child soldiers in Liberia, the authors create a set of policy recommendations for the future improvement of the child DDR. All in all, the collection creates a fascinating study of the African approaches to peacebuilding processes, highlights the strengths of these, and provides propositions for the future improvements of the weak areas in each chapter and collective propositions at the very end of the book.

The last book which needs to be mentioned in this literature review is the *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*.¹⁷ Similarly to *Building Peace from Within*, it is an edited volume. Divided into five parts, the book proposes an improvement in the analysis of the most problematic areas of the DDR programs, such as age or gender. Furthermore, the authors focus on the issues mentioned previously by Hardgrove – agency and social navigation. The authors again use various case studies to showcase the issues of the DDR and the reintegration in general. The latter three parts of the book are almost solely focusing on the issues which the former child soldiers have to face when returning to the ordinary society. Perhaps the most dominant message of the whole book is that the lack of nuances in the DDR programs and the lack of innovative approaches when it comes to the reintegration, in general, can cause even further damage to the former child soldiers. That is precisely the reason why the authors call for a more detailed analysis of the programs and lessons learned from the past programs.

The last category is the literature provided by the governmental and non-governmental organizations. The reports, news pieces, and policy recommendations prepared by the humanitarian organizations that work in the area of the DDR efforts or in the territory of the DRC can prove to be very valuable further in the research. These, as well, can be divided into two categories. First, the newsletters, reports, interviews, and briefs, which help to

¹⁷ Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder. *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011.

create an overview of the actual situation in the area and the actual state of affairs. Second, the analyses, recommendations, and reflections provided by specialists who present their opinions on the situation in the DRC and the processes in the field of the DDR. The agencies which produce these are, for example, the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, or the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). This part of the literature is significant for the analysis of the past flaws and successes because they present the information that is possibly the closest to the primary sources.

Furthermore, there are documents provided by the United Nations. Either in the form of Resolutions or any other form – such as the United Nations news or statistical findings. This body of materials should be taken into consideration as well because it consists of much valuable information that is useful in understanding the processes within the United Nations, the planning of the programs and the missions, and the funding of these. Therefore, these documents may be important for the analytical part of this research.

Many different points of view could be taken when it comes to child soldiering and the reintegration of former child soldiers into the civilian population. However, there seems to be a gap in the existing research. The majority of the academic literature focuses on the theoretical issues connected to child soldiering – such as age limit, criteria for acceptance into the programs, et cetera. It assesses quantifiable components of the DDR programs on the theoretical level. While the actual literature on the DDR programs and the statistical results which would be useful for future improvements seem to be slightly lagging behind. Furthermore, if any such research appears, it is usually based on case studies of Sudan or Uganda, which provide for great case studies but are rarely enough to provide for generalizable facts about all the cases of the child DDR worldwide.

This thesis is my contribution to the already existing literature. It will be slightly different from the previously mentioned literature. It will combine the main points which run through the majority of the theoretical literature and apply them to the case study of the DRC. The case study of the DRC is not as broadly discussed, and therefore it provides for a different outlook on the problematics of child DDR and its future changes.

2.2. Methodology and Limitations

This subchapter presents the methodology and limitations of the thesis. The thesis is composed of three parts - a theoretical part, a single case study section, and the analysis of the case study in the last part. The first part of the work presents the thesis objectives and the research question. Subsequently, the theoretical background to child soldiers and the research connected to the DDR programs is presented, which, together with the case study of the DRC, is systematically analyzed in the concluding chapter and recommendations for the improvement of the existing DDR programs are made.

A single case study method is most suitable for a detailed analysis of an issue or any kind of problematics. A case study essentially is an “intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units ... observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time”.¹⁸ The single case study method provides a certain degree of flexibility to the researcher, as the study is essentially the researcher’s definition of a given phenomenon.¹⁹ According to Michal Kořan, some central aspects need to be present when designing a single case study. First of all, the study needs to have a rigorously defined timeframe and a well-defined object of research. Secondly, a correctly executed single case study should be a detailed analysis of the beforementioned, it must present the context of the researched situation, and it should try to explain all of the complexities of the researched phenomenon. Kořan further points out the benefits of using a single case study in social sciences. Generally, the objective of the studies is to comprehend a complex reality through a detailed examination of a well-defined and limited subject, issue, or process. Specific goals, such as assessment, creation, or development of a theory, are also possible with the use of case studies. Should a case study be presented correctly; the results of the research should also be possibly applicable to other similar cases.²⁰ For the findings of a case study to be universally applicable to similar cases in the future, it is of the utmost importance to choose a proper research question and analytical criteria beforehand. Yin stresses the possibility to generalize the results of the study as opposed to the evaluation of theories and notes that the goal of a single case study might also be testing of hypotheses or their

¹⁸ Saša Baškarada, “Qualitative Case Study Guidelines.” NSUWorks. Accessed February 15, 2020. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss40/3>. pp.1

¹⁹ John S. Odell, “Case Study Methods in International Political Economy.” OUP Academic. Oxford University Press, February 28, 2003. <https://academic.oup.com/isp/article/2/2/161/1815937>.pp. 162

²⁰ Petr Drulák, *Jak Zkoumat Politiku: kvalitativní Metodologie v Politologii a mezinárodních vztazích*. Praha: Portál, 2008.

evaluation.²¹ This thesis uses the single case study method because it allows for the evaluation of the case study of the DRC in the context of the theoretical framework of child soldiers and the concept of DDR programs.

The method used to analyze the situation in the field of child DDR is an instrumental single case study of the child DDR efforts in the DRC. The instrumental case study method is the most suitable for this research as it allows studying the case in detail and then gives a comprehensive analysis of the situation and the efficiency of the DDR programs. Perhaps the most crucial benefit of the instrumental case study is that the examined issue is at the center of the attention, and the emphasis is placed on the depth of the research of the topic. Here, the case study chosen is the Congolese DDR process because, in the DRC, the DDR programs are being applied nowadays and thus can be examined and evaluated. Furthermore, it is crucial to specify all the elements of the case study. Firstly, the time period, which here is defined as the period from the year 1994 to the present. Secondly, the social context, in this case, the issue of child soldiering and the DDR processes in the DRC. The specification of the case study boundaries is the same as in the intrinsic case study. However, in an instrumental case study, the case study serves as a basis for the application of theoretical approaches to the topic. The case study in this text is later analyzed with the help of the theoretical framework of child soldiers and mainly of the concept of DDR programs. The analysis of a case study against the main criteria set within the theoretical part of this work allows the author to evaluate the functionality of the DDR programs in the DRC and to create recommendations for their improvement in the future.

There are some potential limitations to this approach to the research. The single case study might not be ideal for generalizing the results and creating recommendations for the future of the child DDR programs. However, for the extent of this work, a detailed description of one case is more logical than many cases. Therefore, the thesis will be mostly focused on the cases that are similar to the case of the DRC. Also, there are many different conceptualizations and issues connected to the definition of child soldiering, which may cause slight analytical difficulties later in the research.

²¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009.

2.3. Types of Data

The research is based on an analysis of an instrumental single case study. Therefore, the usage of qualitative data is the most logical one. The research is targeted at explaining the state of the child DDR in the DRC, analyzing the situation according to the theoretical background, and ultimately providing recommendations for future improvements in the end. The use of quantitative data will be necessary in cases of statistics or other numerical information. However, it will not be needed too often.

The main sources for this research are the already existing pieces of literature. The sources available are secondary sources. They are usually well organized and refined by their respective authors. The further literature and materials used might, in a very small part, consist of interviews with the child soldiers and reports from the conflict – which would account for primary sources. Further primary sources used are the United Nations official documents, resolutions, and news.

The literature used for this research consists mostly of the key sources mentioned in the literature review. Along with these, the crucial literature sources for this work come from academic articles, journals, and other researches. Further, the necessary readings used are the above-mentioned resolutions, documents, and news, as well as various other documents written by the governmental and non-governmental organizations that are taking part in the DDR processes in the DRC.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This subchapter explores the theoretical basis for my research. The first concept that is thoroughly examined is the concept of child soldiers. Secondly, the concept of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration or the DDR is explained. Both of these concepts must be laid out as the conceptualization of child soldiers should have to serve as a basis for the policymakers when designing the DDR programs for the child ex-combatants.

2.4.1. Child Soldiers Conceptualization

The phenomenon of child soldiers is a sensitive topic in many countries all over the world. These countries are usually in a state of conflict, more often internal than external, which often affects the civilian population. Perhaps the worst effect the conflicts have on the civilian population is the inclusion of children in the armed structures. The international

community explicitly bans the use of children in the armed conflict, and many of its laws ban it as well, the most important of them being the fundamental human rights. Furthermore, turning a child into a soldier is one of the most condemnable deeds possible. However, the child soldiers keep reappearing in conflicts all over the world due to the easy manipulation of a child's mind and the inability of the children to anticipate the consequences of their actions. Below, this work presents the conceptualization of the phenomenon of child soldiers.

To begin the conceptualization of a child soldier, one must first identify the concept of a child. The concept of a child is a social construct because every society has a different outlook on what constitutes a child. The basic assumptions about a child are the same in most of the cultures. A child is generally a human being on the way to becoming an adult, which happens at a certain age, depending on the social and cultural background of the child.²² The social and cultural differences historically made the protection of children very difficult. The first efforts were made in 1924 through the League of Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Since then, the international community has continuously been making efforts in the field of children's rights.²³ The first explicit definition of a child came in the 1989 version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to Article 1, "...a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".²⁴

For the purpose of this work, a child soldier can be defined as the UNICEF defines the children associated with the armed groups. According to the UNICEF, "a child associated with an armed group is any person under 18 years of age who is a part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed groups in any capacity – including, but not limited to, combatants, cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage".²⁵ The UNICEF discourages the use of the phrase "child soldier" due to the terms

²² Sultana Ali Norozi and Torill Moen. "Childhood as a Social Construction." *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, May 2016. <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n2p75>.

²³ Mia Bloom and John G. Horgan. *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. pp.7

²⁴"Convention on the Rights of the Child." OHCHR. Accessed April 1, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

²⁵"Child Recruitment by Armed Forces or Armed Groups." UNICEF, March 22, 2011. https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58007.html.

inadequate representation of the range of actions performed by the children. However, the former UNICEF definition included in the Cape Town Principles of 1997 used the term “child soldier”.²⁶

Once the term child soldier is defined, it is essential to examine the legal framework which protects the rights of children worldwide as well as the laws protecting children from being recruited by the armed organizations. The first legal document which has been dealing with the rights of children was the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted in 1924 by the League of Nations. The 1924 Geneva Declaration consisted of five points aimed at the protection of children and their well-being.²⁷ The first legal document designed for the international protection of children in the armed conflict was the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Article 50 of the Convention states that children must be given protection during a conflict and shall not be enlisted by the Occupying Power.²⁸ The amendments that explicitly prohibited the recruitment of children under fifteen years of age in the armed conflict were the 1977 Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions.²⁹ Even though initially, the Additional Protocol I applied only to the interstate conflicts, the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions applies to the internal conflicts. Thus, the Geneva Conventions are universally applicable.³⁰

Another central document connected to the rights of children is the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly. It is essentially an expansion of the rights laid out in the 1924 Geneva Declaration. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child grants a basic set of universal rights to every child without any exception.³¹ This document was a forerunner to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was

²⁶ *Guide to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*. New York, NY: United Nations Children's Fund, 2003. pp.14.

²⁷ “Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1924.” Humanium. Accessed April 3, 2020. <https://www.humanium.org/en/geneva-declaration/>.

²⁸ “ARTICLE 50.” Treaties, States parties, and Commentaries - Geneva Convention (IV) on Civilians, 1949 - 50 - Children. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=E09D15BDEC76F8D9C12563CD0051BDCC>.

²⁹ “Practice Relating to Rule 136. Recruitment of Child Soldiers.” IHL DATABASE. Accessed April 4, 2020. https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_rul_rule136.

³⁰ “The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Their Additional Protocols.” ICRC, October 29, 2010. <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/overview-geneva-conventions.htm>.

³¹ United Nations. “Declaration of the Rights of the Child.” Refworld. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38e3.html>.

adopted thirty years later, in 1989, by the UN General Assembly. As mentioned before, this Convention applies to every human being under the age of eighteen years.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child addresses a much broader spectrum of rights. In its 54 Articles, the Convention deals with all the possible rights a child is entitled to have. According to the UNICEF, the Convention has become the most widely recognized human rights treaty in the history and, should the laws incorporated in it be followed, it grants every child in the world the right for a protected and happy childhood.³² The main article important for the issue concerned in this subchapter is the Article 38, which is very similar to the Geneva Convention Additional Protocol I mentioned above. The Article 38 calls for the Parties to the Convention to respect the international humanitarian law, to prevent any persons below the age of fifteen from the participation in hostilities, to refrain from recruiting minors, and to ensure the protection of children in armed conflicts.³³

Perhaps the most crucial document tied to the protection of children at the time of conflict is the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly in 2000 (in force since 2002).³⁴ The Optional Protocol aims mainly at reducing the impact of armed conflicts on children worldwide. The two most important adjustments to the legal framework brought by the Optional Protocol were the increase of the minimal age of conscription from fifteen to eighteen years of age and the prohibition of recruitment of minors into the non-state armed groups.³⁵ Every state which ratified the Protocol must ensure its right implementation and the adequate prevention of the recruitment of minors and it must provide the Committee on the Rights of the Child with regular reports on the status of children's rights within the country. In case of breach of the Optional Protocol, the state must provide the affected children with a proper care and ensure their social reintegration.³⁶ In case a state or a non-state actor is not able to uphold the laws contained in

³²“What Is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?” UNICEF. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention>

³³ “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” OHCHR. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

³⁴ “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” OHCHR. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>.

³⁵ Mia Bloom and John G. Horgan. *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019. pp.8

³⁶ “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” OHCHR. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>.

the Optional Protocol and the Geneva Convention, they might be subject to prosecution on the grounds of committing war crimes.³⁷

Another important document arose from the Non-Governmental Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UNICEF cooperation in April 1997. At a symposium in the Cape Town, the group of experts developed the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa. This document defines the term “child soldier”, and its sole purpose is to identify the necessary actions that need to be taken by the national governments to end the problem of children serving in armed forces. The document consists of three parts. The first part of the document deals with the prevention of child recruitment. It again identifies the age limit of 18 years for the recruitment of people into the armed structures. Also, it urges the national governments to adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other similar documents, and it calls for the implementation of the rules against child recruitment into the national legislations. It further calls for the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which would be able to enforce the laws against child recruitment. The second part of the document deals with the demobilization of child soldiers and the demobilization best practices. The third part of the Cape Town Principles is dedicated to the reintegration of child soldiers and it proposes the implementation of programs that would assist the children, their families, and their communities.³⁸

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) is a document particularly important in Africa. The ACRWC was adopted by the African Union in July 1990 and entered into force in November 1999. The ACRWC builds directly on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and addresses issues specific to the African social and cultural context. The main incentive behind the creation of the ACRWC was the feeling of the African states that the United Nations Convention does not fully confront the Africa-specific issues.³⁹ The Charter recognizes any human being younger than 18 years as

³⁷ “United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/war-crimes.shtml>.

³⁸ UNICEF. “The Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa.” UNICEF. Accessed April 6, 2020. [https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/Cape_Town_Principles\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/Cape_Town_Principles(1).pdf).

³⁹ “ACRWC - African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.” African Union. Accessed April 6, 2020. <https://www.acerwc.africa/about-the-charter/>.

a child. The purpose of the charter is the establishment of the fundamental children's rights, including the right to life, the right to be registered and have a name, the right to freedom, and the right to education. Furthermore, the Charter takes into account the region-specific challenges and addresses the economic exploitation of children, the protection against abuse and torture, children in armed conflicts, or refugee children. The Article 22 forbids explicitly the recruitment of children, calls for the respect for the international humanitarian law and urges all the States Parties to protect and care for all children affected by armed conflicts.⁴⁰

The last part of the legal framework that needs to be mentioned at this point is the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention introduced in 1999 by the International Labour Office. The Convention is meant to stop the worst forms of child labor. Namely, it includes the practices similar to slavery, child prostitution, the use of children for illicit activities, and any other similarly atrocious use of children. The Article 3 of the Convention explicitly states that one of the worst forms of child labor is the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for the use in armed conflict. The Article 7 of the Convention further states, similarly to the Optional Protocol, that every state needs to prevent all the forms of the worst child labor, needs to work towards the removal of the children from the already existing labor, ensure the access to free elementary education, reach out to the children at risk, and take account of the unique situation of girls.⁴¹

With the legal framework laid out, it is important to focus on the recruitment of children to the armed structures. It is estimated that about 250,000 children can be classified as child soldiers in about 50 countries all around the world.⁴² Some of these children have joined the armed groups voluntarily, and some of them were forced to join. The reasons to join voluntarily and the involvement in the armed group shapes the identity of the children. These factors need to be taken into account during the process of designing the DDR programs for the former child soldiers. This section will firstly look at the reasons of children to join the

⁴⁰ "The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)." The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) | African Union. Accessed May 1, 2020. <https://au.int/en/documents-45>.

⁴¹ "C182 – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)." Convention C182 – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Accessed April 5, 2020. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182.

⁴² "Child Soldiers." Theirworld. Theirworld, December 15, 2017. <https://theirworld.org/explainers/child-soldiers#section-5>.

armed groups and later at the steps that are currently being taken as a precaution to the recruitment.

As mentioned before, the main reason for the children to join the armed structures is their background. The economic, social, and security situation in the country of origin of the child are one of the most important contributing factors when it comes to the recruitment of child soldiers. Some of the children, who are growing up in unstable countries, are forced to live from one day to another. They struggle with the basic human needs and often are separated from their elders. They are forced to live on the streets and often become members of the street gangs.⁴³ One more factor that contributes to the desire of the leaders to recruit children to their armed groups is the proliferation and dispersion of small arms. The small arms, such as pistols or AK-47s, are easy to obtain in most conflict countries as well as they are easy to use. Due to the size and easy operability of the weapon, the children can learn how to shoot and take care of the weapons.⁴⁴

Overall, there are two different types of recruitment of children into the armed groups, involuntary and voluntary. The involuntary conscription is more common than the voluntary one and it can be divided into two main ways. Firstly, the children are forcibly conscripted or abducted. Secondly, the children are born into the armed groups.⁴⁵ The involuntary recruitment is often done through abduction or coercion. The voluntary recruitment cannot, under the international law, be considered legal for any person under the 18 years of age, however, in some conflicts, the forcible recruitment is not necessary, because a large number of the recruits wishes to join the armed groups of their own free will. The children who decide to join armed groups on their free will usually do so based on patriotism, protection, and support of their families. or for the possibility to punish the counterparty in the conflict.⁴⁶

The international community should give the prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers the utmost priority. It should focus primarily on the removal of the main factors which lead the children to join the armed groups voluntarily. Furthermore, the international community should focus on the creation of stable programs for the children. These programs should

⁴³ "Street Youth:" *Life after Guns*, May 2017, 58–78. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1p0vkjj.7>.

⁴⁴ Julie McBride, *The War Crime of Child Soldier Recruitment*. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2014. pp.9

⁴⁵ Mark A. Drumbl, *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. pp. 63

⁴⁶ Mark A. Drumbl, *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. pp. 64-66.

primarily address the reintegration of the former child soldiers into society, the prevention of their re-recruitment, and the elementary education of all of the children worldwide. The right approach to education and vocational training can provide the children with opportunities for their future development as functioning adults and the opportunities for obtaining stable work and being able to support themselves even without the participation in illegal activities or armed groups.⁴⁷

Furthermore, all states in the world must focus on upholding the laws and recommendations made within the international legal frameworks mentioned in the previous part of this work. Of the utmost importance is the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, which should both be upheld by all the states at all times. The conscription of children and their voluntary and involuntary recruitment are the most heinous crimes against children, and the international community needs to prevent them or, at least, harshly punish anyone who commits them.

In conclusion, the conceptualization of a child soldier I apply in this thesis can be summarized as follows: it represents a person under eighteen years of age, who is supposed to be protected by the international legal framework stated above. A child soldier is a child, recruited – voluntarily or involuntarily – by an armed force or armed group and is used either as a combatant or in a supportive role to benefit the force or the group.

2.4.2. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

When the legal framework created to prevent the recruitment of the child soldiers fails, when the push and pull factors affecting the children in the conflict zones become too strong, when the armed conflict ends, or when the children simply decide to leave, the children who used to be a part of an armed group still have hope to become productive members of their respective society. The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process is the most crucial tool in this context.

The United Nations states that the DDR process has the main objective of contributing to the security and stability during the post-conflict phase. The DDR has many different

⁴⁷ Anne-Lynn Dudenhoefer, “Understanding the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Africa.” ACCORD. Accessed April 6, 2020. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/understanding-recruitment-child-soldiers-africa/>.

dimensions, including humanitarian, military, and socio-economic ones, and it is a very complicated process. Overall, the whole process aims at the removal of weapons from the ex-combatants, the release of the ex-combatants from the armed structures, and the reinsertion of the ex-combatants into their respective communities. Once a part of this process, the former combatants themselves become a valuable part of the peace process. The DDR itself is not the only process that would lead to the resolution of the conflict and the creation of sustainable peace. However, the United Nations see it as an integral part of the conflict resolution process.⁴⁸

Moreover, it is also vital to examine who is eligible to join the DDR process. In most of the cases, the peace agreement explicitly states which armed groups are entitled to take part in the DDR program. Also, within the peace agreement, it should be clearly stated what are the eligibility criteria for the DDR. The criteria should fit all the possible participants of the conflict, including women, children, the elderly, and others. In this sense, the UN is also trying to respond to the fact that not all of the people included were fighters. Some of the participants were also acting in the supporting roles of, for example, cooks, messengers, sexual slaves, or similar. The UN, therefore, proposes that the criteria be based on tests that prove the participants' involvement in the armed group.⁴⁹ This change in thinking about the development of the DDR helps to include more people, including the child soldiers. Due to the realization that not all of the participants are ex-combatants, more children can participate in the programs even if they served only in the supporting roles.

The following paragraphs will define the three main components of the DDR. The first component is disarmament, in which all the weapons, small arms, and any other similar materials are collected from the ex-combatants. In case of the demobilization of the whole groups of former fighters, the group needs to surrender all its weaponry as well. The weapons are then documented, controlled, and eliminated – according to the terms of the peace agreement. This component can also include the responsible management of weapons. The United Nations see this part of the DDR as very important for the future of the peace process,

⁴⁸ UNDDR.org. “What Is DDR?” What is DDR?, May 2005. https://www.unDDR.org/what-is-ddr/introduction_1.aspx.

⁴⁹ UNDDR.org. “What Is DDR?” What is DDR?, May 2005. https://www.unDDR.org/what-is-ddr/introduction_1.aspx.

because it clearly shows the will of the former fighters to change the situation and continue to resolve their disputes peacefully.⁵⁰

Once the disarmament is done, the process moves to the demobilization. Demobilization is the second component of the DDR programs, and it is the controlled removal of the former fighters from their respective armed groups. This process usually has two phases. In phase one, the former fighters are registered and placed into camps or holding centers. In phase two, they receive assistance from the mission staff. Once the ex-combatants are placed in camps, they are educated about the peace process and the peace agreement. Also, the program staff works on the arrangement of their return home or to another safe place. The phase of the demobilization, when the former combatant receives help and assistance in the short-term is also called the reinsertion. During the reinsertion phase, which can take as long as one year, the ex-combatants receive food, shelter, education, work, and sometimes even a small allowance. These provisions are supposed to help the person to acclimatize back into the general society.⁵¹

The last component is the reintegration. In the reintegration stage, the former combatants acquire the civilian status and are allowed to transition back to the everyday life. Apart from the help with the acquisition of the civilian status, the former combatants are working together with their communities on the local level. The main aim of this phase is for the former combatants to earn a job and give back to the community into which they have returned. For the reintegration, there is not any set timeframe.⁵²

Later, as a part of some UN missions, there were two more components added to the DDR, turning it into the DDR/RR. The abbreviation stands for Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDR/RR).⁵³ The two additional components are essentially an extension to the existing program, which is designed to help a better

⁵⁰ *Practice Note: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*. New York (NY): UNDP, 2006. pp. 11.

⁵¹ *Practice Note: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*. New York (NY): UNDP, 2006. pp. 12.

⁵² Angel Rabasa, John Gordon, Peter Chalk, Christopher S. Chivvis, Audra K. Grant, K. Scott McMahon, Laurel E. Miller, Marco Overhaus, and Stephanie Pezard. "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration." In *From Insurgency to Stability: Volume I: Key Capabilities and Practices*, 51-80. RAND Corporation, 2011. Accessed April 8, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg1111-1osd.12.

⁵³ "DDRRR." MONUC, June 10, 2016. <https://monuc.unmissions.org/en/ddrrr>.

reinsertion of the former combatants into society. The repatriation component exists to help the former foreign fighters and their return to their home countries.

In addition to that, in case of an ongoing conflict and without the existence of a peace treaty, which would specify the DDR process, the UN devised a different strategy called the Second-Generation DDR. The Second-Generation DDR is applied in the contexts where the preconditions for a successful implementation of the traditional DDR cannot be met. It has the same goals as the traditional DDR and can take place alongside the traditional DDR or after the traditional DDR is unable to meet its goals. Moreover, the Second-Generation DDR expands the DDR scope to the violence reduction and building trust within communities in unstable environments. It connects the traditional DDR with peacebuilding efforts and incentives for political and security change in the given country. The choice of policies and programs within the Second-Generation DDR is relatively broad and it aims at the violence reduction, the increase in employment, and the reinsertion of the former combatants. The main target groups are the former commanders and senior officers, youth, and the elderly.⁵⁴

An integral part of the Second-Generation DDR framework is the Community Violence Reduction (CVR) program. The CVR has mostly the same objectives as the traditional DDR programs. However, the CVR is used within smaller communities and it works towards the resolution of their internal issues. The CVR programs are more flexible than the traditional DDR programs. And although the strategic decisions regarding the programs are given through a top-bottom approach, the selection of the actual tasks is decided through a bottom-up approach, i.e., tailored precisely according to the needs of the given community.⁵⁵

The DDR processes for children are not dissimilar to the ones for adults. However, there are some distinguishing factors. The first steps in the DDR process involving children are the disarmament, in case the child possesses any weapons, and the demobilization. When a child is released or flees an armed structure, it is usually accompanied by mission staff or a member of staff of an organization and taken into a camp where it officially leaves the armed structure. The children are then registered, receive the necessities, and healthcare. Usually,

⁵⁴ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "SECOND GENERATION DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION (DDR) PRACTICES IN PEACE OPERATIONS", New York, NY: United Nations, 2010.

⁵⁵ Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Section. "COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION - Peacekeeping.un.org." PUBLICATIONS. Accessed April 8. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf>.

this step takes about two days as the children should avoid any former contacts and any possibility of falling back into their old tracks. From the camps, the children are usually taken into the care centers or reception centers, where the DDR staff works on finding their families. Once the family is found and informed about the child, the reintegration process can start.⁵⁶

The programs for the reintegration and rehabilitation of children focus mainly on the creation of a support network for the children, once they return to the normal society. The support network should provide the children with life skills, education, and work skills to ensure their success in the future. According to the UN, the programs should last for an extended period and require sufficient funding from the earliest stages. Furthermore, the programs must be wholly indiscriminating and tailored to the specific needs of the children. Also, to prevent stigmatization of the former combatants, the programs for children should include all of the vulnerable children within the given community, not only the former child soldiers.⁵⁷

As idyllic as the DDR and child DDR sounds, it is usually not as idyllic in reality. There are many challenges that the programs have to face. The main challenges the DDR is facing are presented below. Of course, there are many more that can be mentioned and analyzed, but for the purpose of this thesis, the focus is set on the major ones. The author of this work has identified the four most significant challenges which need to be taken into immediate focus and resolved as soon as possible. They are the failure to meet the necessary preconditions, age and gender, the program duration, and the effectiveness of the programs.

Massimo Fusato, in his article *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, identifies five main preconditions to the successful launch and completion of a DDR program. They are security, the inclusion of all warring parties, political agreement, comprehensive approach, and sufficient funds. By security, Fusato means a secure environment in which all of the parties to the conflict can trust each other to comply with the ceasefire agreement. All of the warring parties need to be involved on the same level and at the same time. If not, one of the not yet disarmed parties could potentially take advantage

⁵⁶ “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of Child Soldiers: War and Peace.” The information portal war and peace. Accessed April 8, 2020. <http://warpp.info/en/m2/articles/ddr-child-soldiers>.

⁵⁷ UNDDR.org. “Key Topics - Children.” Key Topics. Accessed April 8, 2020. https://www.unDDR.org/key-topics/children/read-more_2.aspx.

of the situation. The political agreement in which the DDR is rooted and specified must specify the DDR, create credible institutions to control the implementation, and a reasonable timetable for the DDR process. The approach to the DDR must be comprehensive and bring the international, national, local, and community workers to work in tandem under a clear structure. Lastly, a sufficient funding is essential for a successful DDR program. With sufficient funding, the program can last as long as necessary to complete its tasks and to prevent the recurrence of violence.⁵⁸

The fulfillment of all of the preconditions mentioned above seems to be problematic in most of the contemporary post-conflict environments. Peacekeeping missions in general have to face the issues connected to the mentioned five conditions. Achieving security, the will of all the warring parties to participate, and the reaching of a comprehensive political agreement is practically impossible in the cases of the gravest conflicts. Also, a sufficient funding is usually an issue because the actors involved in the DDR are usually non-profit organizations or the UN, and their budgets are not able to cover the whole length of the programs. There are some steps the UN is taking towards the solution of these issues. However, they seem to be too little and too late.

Connected to mainly to the funding issue mentioned previously is the length of the programs. The main purpose of a DDR program is to help the former combatants return to the everyday life. As simple as it may sound, it is a too complicated task, which takes a long time to achieve. Especially in the case of children, the whole process needs to be very thorough to prevent all the possible problems – such as the re-recruitment and stigmatization. Many former child soldiers have pointed out that the programs were terminated due to the lack of funding or the withdrawal of staff from the country.⁵⁹ After the first two phases come to their end, many of the foreign helpers seem to tend to forget about the program and to leave it to the community to continue the process by itself and without any further funding. The DDR is a long-term process, and once started, it needs to be finished in order for it to work as a part of the peacebuilding process properly.

⁵⁸ Massimo Fusato, “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants.” *Beyond Intractability*, July 13, 2016. <https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/demobilization>.

⁵⁹ Robert Muggah and Chris O’Donnell. “Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.fs>.

Another major challenge the child DDR programs are facing is the eligibility criteria. Exceptionally problematic in this area is the age and the gender of the children. Initially, all the DDR programs were designed to support adults, which has slowly changed, and the programs for children became available. However, at present, the problem of age is twofold. Firstly, some of the older children pose as adults in order to receive a cash benefit to which the adult members of the programs are entitled. Or the children are forced to lie by their former leaders who are afraid of prosecution for the recruitment of child soldiers. Secondly, some of the children are identified by the mission staff as adults, by accident or deliberately, and sent to participate in the adult programs. These children are at risk of not receiving the proper care and education and not being reunified with their families, which can have long-term adverse effects on the future life of the child. The issues with age happen mainly because, in some cases, the identification of the child and his/her age is virtually impossible due to the lack of his/her identity papers. This challenge could be resolved by a proper screening process and a better cooperation of the mission staff with the child protection specialists.⁶⁰

The second part of this issue is the gender of the children who are being accepted to the programs. Many DDR initiatives fail to cater to the needs of all the children. Especially the girls who were formerly active within the armed structures suffer greatly after their exit from them. MacKenzie, amongst others, points to this problem in her study of the female soldiers in Sierra Leone. Most of the women affected by the conflict did not participate in the DDR, but the few who had participated had a disappointing experience. The vocational training offered did not present the women and girls with many choices. Due to the narrow choice of training for women, most of them later had the same skills and therefore were not able to find work.⁶¹

Furthermore, the programs did not empower women to become better. They pushed them towards becoming a part of a community that has not been prepared to receive them and usually stigmatized them for their past hardships.⁶² The issue of stigmatization in the

⁶⁰ Kirsten Gislesen, "A Childhood Lost? The Challenges of Successful Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Child Soldiers: The Case of West Africa." NUPI Working Paper;712. NUPI, July 4, 2016. <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/2395610>.

⁶¹ Megan H. MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development*. New York: NYU Press, 2014. pp. 63-84.

⁶² Megan H. MacKenzie. *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development*. New York: NYU Press, 2014. pp. 63-84.

community of origin has been pointed out by many scholars and workers in the field repeatedly, but the DDR framework is still lagging behind in implementing a solution to the problem. The current DDR processes do not offer enough support to the females in the field of the psycho-social help and opportunities for education. Females are usually facing a much bigger challenge when reintegrating into the civil society, and the DDR programs must carefully address this fact. Otherwise, the girls will eventually be forced by the society to live a life they do not deserve, or rejoin the armed movements.⁶³

The fourth major challenge is the effectiveness of the DDR programs. Once the former child soldiers are to be reintegrated, the receiving community should be prepared to receive them. This part of the process can bring about two major issues. The first issue emerges in case the children are not well prepared to be received in the community. They may not have any family awaiting their return. They may fear stigmatization or may not be accepted by the community. If the child and the community are not prepared psychically to be reunited, it can create a significant problem as the child faces a high possibility of being marginalized and re-recruited due to the difficulties within the receiving community.⁶⁴ The second issue is connected to the economic state of the child and the receiving community. The children often receive some form of education or vocational training. However, it is not often that the training matches the opportunities available in the community. This mismatch creates long-term issues as the children are not able to support themselves in the later life and are forced to rejoin the armed groups, to turn to crime, or to work in extremely harsh conditions.⁶⁵

These are the overall problems of all the DDR programs because the DDR framework is missing a suitable assessment method for the reintegration period. While the previous stages of the process are usually carefully analyzed, the reintegration is almost without any monitoring after the initial phase.⁶⁶ This lack of monitoring and feedback is potentially the main factor for the reintegration to be perhaps the most problematic, as well as for the DDR

⁶³Priya Pillai. "A 'Call to Arms:' A Gender Sensitive Approach to the Plight of Female Child Soldiers in International Law." *The Human Rights Brief* 15, no. 2 (2008): 23–27. <https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/vol15/iss2/6/>.

⁶⁴Ephrem Rugiririza. "The Challenges of Reintegrating Child Soldiers in South Sudan." JusticeInfo.net. JusticeInfo.net, May 23, 2018. <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/other/37569-the-challenges-of-reintegrating-child-soldiers-in-south-sudan.html>.

⁶⁵Anne-Lynn Dudenhoefer. "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Is Not Enough." ACCORD. Accessed April 11, 2020. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/disarmament-demobilisation-and-reintegration-is-not-enough/>.

⁶⁶Jean Chrysostome K. Kiyala, *Child Soldiers and Restorative Justice Participatory Action Research on North Kivu in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*. Cham: Springer, 2019. pp.313.

programs' lack of improvement. If the reintegration processes were analyzed in the long-term, the socio-economic issues which are quite common in the communities with returnees would possibly be more visible, and the program designers would be able to tailor the programs according to the practical needs of the children and the community. Reintegration, especially in the case of the former child soldiers, is a complex and long-term commitment and it should not be fully abandoned by the program leaders before the community and the children can take care of themselves.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Morris Matadi, Alphonse Keasley, and Laura Deluca. "An African Odyssey:" *Building Peace from Within*, July 2014, 109–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh8r4g3.13>.

3. Case Study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

This chapter of the thesis presents the case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The first subchapter examines the history of the contemporary conflict in the country to set the background for the second subchapter. The second subchapter presents the use of child soldiers in the DRC in the past and the present. Lastly, the case study thoroughly inspects the DDR practices in history and the present.

The DRC gained its independence in 1960 after almost a hundred years of the Belgian colonial rule. The situation in the country has, however, not stabilized after gaining independence. The DRC faced a deep political turmoil and a deep insecurity about the future configuration of the state. Therefore, the post-independence era was mainly characterized by rebellions and secessionist wars. The main disputes have stemmed from the regional and ethnic disagreements within the country, as well as the external pressures caused by the former colonial power and other Western powers who used the DRC as a pawn in the pursuit of their financial and geopolitical interests.⁶⁸

3.1. History of the Current Conflict

The present conflict in the DRC is closely connected to the genocide which occurred in 1994 in Rwanda. In the context of the Rwandan genocide, the DRC, formerly named Zaire, was the primary target country for the Rwandan refugees. After the establishment of a new Tutsi government in Rwanda in 1994, millions of Hutu refugees sought refuge in the Eastern Congo. A small percentage of the Hutu refugees were also the *génocidaires*, known as the Interahamwe or the Federation for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). These genocide perpetrators were trying to hide in the refugee camps. The refugee camps were becoming increasingly unstable, armed groups, whose main goal was the prosecution of the *génocidaires*, came together and further destabilized the environment.⁶⁹ The local government was unable to control and stabilize the situation and to find and extradite the genocide perpetrators. Therefore, in November 1996, the armies of Uganda and Rwanda, supporting the Alliance for Democratic Liberation (AFDL), an anti-Mobutu movement,

⁶⁸ Adeyemi Olayiwola Kayode Dipeolu. *Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Causes, Impact and Implications for the Great Lakes Region*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, 2015. pp.9

⁶⁹ "Eastern Congo Initiative." History of the Conflict. Accessed April 12, 2020. <http://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict>.

invaded the Eastern Congo as a part of their joint effort to find and prosecute the remaining *génocidaires*. The invasion eventually forced the local dictator Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, otherwise known as Mobutu Sese Seko, to flee the country and remain in exile. After Mobutu fled and later died, the former rebel leader named Laurent Kabila became the new president in September 1997 and renamed the country to the DRC again.⁷⁰ Kabila's assumption of the presidential office marks the end of the First Congo War.

When Kabila became president, the local population was hoping that his rule would end the poverty and corruption, which characterized the Mobutu's regime. However, Kabila did not manage to establish peace in the country and was not able to properly cooperate with the Rwandan and Ugandan forces in the pursuit of the genocide perpetrators. Furthermore, in 1998 Kabila asked for the foreign powers to leave the country and purged the Tutsis from his government. This anti-Tutsi sentiment and the demand for the armies to leave the DRC led to an uprising of the anti-government rebels and to the foreign armies' attack on the DRC, which almost led to Kabila's political demise. However, an intervention by Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe helped to stabilize Kabila's position for a short time.⁷¹ In the upcoming months, nine states and many other regional actors have joined the Second Congo War or Africa's Great War.

The Second Congo War grew to monstrous proportions over the course of the next years and became the bloodiest conflict in the history of the African continent with more than three million casualties.⁷² The two warring sides were divided as follows: On the side of the DRC there were Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and the Mai-Mai militias and Hutu forces. Against them stood the coalition of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), the Movement for the Liberation of Congo, and the Tutsi forces.⁷³

The reasons for the War were not only political, but economic as well. The DRC is extremely rich in natural resources, namely the mineral resources, timber, and oil, and all of the actors

⁷⁰ "DR Congo: Chronology." Human Rights Watch, January 23, 2012. https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/21/dr-congo-chronology#_War.

⁷¹ John Pike, "Congo Civil War - 1996-2000." GlobalSecurity.org. Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo-1.htm>.

⁷² "Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo – Global Conflict Tracker." Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo>.

⁷³ John Ahere, "The Peace Process in the DRC: A Transformation Quagmire." ACCORD, December 2012. <https://www.accord.org.za/publication/peace-process-drc/>.

involved had their private agenda.⁷⁴ In August 1999, six of the involved countries (the DRC, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe) have come together and signed the Lusaka Agreement. The peace agreement was supposed to help with the stabilization of the situation in the DRC, to create the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, and to form a transitional government. Furthermore, the agreement called for the establishment of a joint military commission and a UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC.⁷⁵ A month after the agreement was signed, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issued the Resolution 1279, which mandated the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). Officially launched in November 1999, the mission was supposed to oversee the ceasefire, the disengagement of forces, and to monitor the parties to the conflict.⁷⁶ The mission capabilities were later further expanded to the supervision of the implementation of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, the oversight of withdrawal of foreign forces, the facilitation of humanitarian assistance, and others.⁷⁷

The Lusaka Agreement was only partially successful, as the parties to the conflict were not able to fully implement its provisions. Internally, president Kabila was the main party opposing the implementation of the agreement and the deployment of the MONUC forces. Even with the agreement in place, the situation continued to deteriorate during the upcoming months. In 2000, the UN shifted its attention to the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the DRC and its connection to the perpetuation of the conflict.⁷⁸ The UN panel of experts issued a report in 2001. The report pointed to the fact that the war has evolved into a conflict over the control of the country's mineral riches.⁷⁹

In January 2001, president Laurent Kabila was assassinated by his bodyguard and was replaced in the presidential office by his son, Joseph Kabila. Later in 2001, the Inter-

⁷⁴David Shearer. "Africas Great War." *Survival* 41, no. 2 (1999): 89–106. <https://doi.org/10.1093/survival/41.2.89>.

⁷⁵"Ceasefire Agreement (Lusaka Agreement) - UN Peacemaker." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://peacemaker.un.org/drc-lusaka-agreement99>.

⁷⁶"MONUC Background – United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/background.shtml>.

⁷⁷"MONUC Mandate – United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/mandate.shtml>.

⁷⁸"Groups and Panels Security Council." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 14, 2020. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/repertoire/groups-and-panels>.

⁷⁹"DR Congo: Chronology." Human Rights Watch, January 23, 2012. https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/21/dr-congo-chronology#_War.

Congolese Dialogue began and continued throughout the year and throughout 2002. Eventually, the talks led to the creation of an all-inclusive power-sharing agreement, which was signed in Pretoria in December 2002. The agreement allows the creation of a transitional government, allows Kabila to continue as a president, but it also gives power to the former rebels. Furthermore, by the end of 2002, most of the foreign armies have left the country.⁸⁰

In 2003, the Second Congo War officially ended after the signing of the Sun City peace accord. The internal political situation stabilized, and the creation of a transitional constitution and government followed shortly.⁸¹ The official end of the war, however, did not bring about the end of violence throughout the country. However, the main goal of the government and the MONUC mission was the disarmament of the former combatants. Thus, the first DDR program in the DRC was launched after the signing of the peace agreement. Unfortunately, the number of armed groups in the region continued to grow, and the initial DDR efforts were not successful.⁸² All of the former rebel groups were bound to release their former combatants into the official state army - the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) - or civilian life. However, not all of the former combatants agreed with the joining of the FARDC.

In 2006, the DRC held its first democratic elections of the National Assembly and later the presidential elections. The MONUC helped to organize both of these elections and stayed in the country due to many ongoing ethnic and regional conflicts in many parts of the DRC.⁸³ Even though democratically elected, the government lacked the power to bring the country together and to resolve the internal disputes and power struggles. During the 2006 elections, one of the most notorious groups active in the DRC has emerged, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP). The CNDP emerged as a politico-military group under the rule of General Nkunda.⁸⁴ Rwanda supported the CNDP, and its main goal was the

⁸⁰ John Pike. "Second Congo War (1998-2003)." GlobalSecurity.org. Accessed April 14, 2020. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo-2.htm>.

⁸¹ Mollie Zapata. "Congo: The First and Second Wars, 1996-2003." The Enough Project, November 29, 2011. <https://enoughproject.org/blog/congo-first-and-second-wars-1996-2003>.

⁸² Christoph Vogel, and Josaphat Musamba. "Recycling Rebels? Demobilization in the Congo." RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE PSRP BRIEFING PAPER 11 MARCH 2016. Rift Valley Institute, March 2016. <http://riftvalley.net/publication/recycling-rebels-demobilization-congo#.VxfGnvmLSU1>.

⁸³ "MONUC Background – United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/monuc/background.shtml>.

⁸⁴ Steven Spittaels, and Filip Hilgert. *Mapping Conflict Motives Eastern DRC*. Antwerp: International Peace Information Service, 2008. pp.6.

removal of the Hutu FDLR. In 2008, the armies of Rwanda and DRC came together in the fight against the FDLR in the North and South Kivu provinces. The joined attack was unsuccessful.⁸⁵ However, this union brought about the creation of the Goma Agreement between the FARDC, CNDP, and the Mai-Mai groups, which served as a basis for the second phase of the DDR.⁸⁶

As a response to the rapidly deteriorating situation and the increase in the number of armed groups, in July 2010, the UNSC renamed the MONUC the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Resolution 1925, which renamed the mission, also changed its mandate. The mission staff count increased to almost 20,000 military personnel and 1,500 members of the police units. This increase helped to support the stabilization and peace consolidation efforts of the DRC government as well as helped to protect the civilians and humanitarian personnel.⁸⁷

The CNDP was eventually incorporated into the FARDC, but in 2012, the former CNDP fighters rebelled and formed the March 23 Movement (M23) under the leadership of Bosco Ntaganda. The group was composed mainly of ethnic Tutsis and active in the Eastern Congo.⁸⁸ The M23 group was defeated by the FARDC, supported by the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade in 2013. Ntaganda surrendered the same year and was convicted of 18 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2019 and sentenced to 30 years of imprisonment.⁸⁹

In the next years, the DRC government, supported by the MONUSCO, was able to stabilize most of the country. However, the Eastern regions, which are the richest in natural resources, are still facing an intense instability. At present, there are countless armed groups active in the DCR, the country is in a deep state of conflict, and the civilians are directly targeted by the armed groups as well as the FARDC.⁹⁰ The most active and the biggest groups active in

⁸⁵ “Democratic Republic of the Congo .” World Without Genocide – Making It Our Legacy. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/congo>.

⁸⁶ ISSAfrica.org. “Will the Goma Peace Agreement Bring Peace to the Eastern Part of the Democratic Republic of Congo?” ISS Africa, February 4, 2008. <https://issafrika.org/iss-today/will-the-goma-peace-agreement-bring-peace-to-the-eastern-part-of-the-democratic-republic-of-congo>.

⁸⁷ “Background.” MONUSCO, April 13, 2020. <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/background>.

⁸⁸ “Eastern Congo Initiative.” History of the Conflict. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict>.

⁸⁹ “Ntaganda Case.” Home. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/drc/ntaganda#14>.

⁹⁰ “Democratic Republic of the Congo.” Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Accessed April 16, 2020. <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>.

the region are the FDLR, the Mai-Mai Militias, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the National Liberation Forces (FNL), and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). All of these groups are fighting for the control over the mineral-rich regions or for the influence in the region. The activity of these groups must come to an end if sustainable peace is ever to be achieved.⁹¹

The last matter that needs to be mentioned to create a wholesome picture of the contemporary situation in the DRC is the issue of the continuous Ebola outbreaks throughout the country. The complicated health situation affects the conflict resolution efforts as well. In the last 40 years, the DRC was affected by ten Ebola outbreaks. The last Ebola outbreak happened between 2019 and 2020 and it was the largest in history. The main affected provinces were Ituri and North Kivu, which are currently the most unstable regions in the country. The mortality rate of the most recent outbreak was in average 65 percent. The *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF) responded to the emergency and successfully contained and resolved the situation. They managed to resolve the issue of Ebola at the end.⁹² However, the solution of this issue came at the expense of their other medical responsibilities. Prioritizing Ebola and the lack of response to other medical issues, such as the recent outbreak of measles, causes angry response within the local communities and it has led to numerous attacks on the treatment centers. However, without the presence of the organizations such as the MSF, the region will suffer even further as the civilians affected by the conflict will not be able to seek any medical attention.⁹³

The history of the conflict in DRC clearly shows that the DRC is caught in a vicious circle of violence and incapable of protecting its citizens. The underlying causes of this violence are ethnicity and the control of mineral riches. Both of these can be prevented through the establishment of a functional non-corrupt government and strong institutions. The DRC has been trying to end the conflict for almost thirty years now, and the results are disappointing.

⁹¹ "Eastern Congo Initiative." History of the Conflict. Accessed April 16, 2020. <http://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/history-of-the-conflict>.

⁹² Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International. "Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): MSF Medical and Humanitarian Aid." Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International, April 23, 2020. <https://www.msf.org/democratic-republic-congo-drc>.

⁹³ Crisis Update 23 April, 2020. "DRC Ebola Outbreak Crisis Update: MSF." Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International, April 23, 2020. <https://www.msf.org/drc-ebola-outbreak-crisis-update>.

However, there is a chance for the establishment of peace if the current methods the DRC government and the MONUSCO mission use to establish peace are sufficiently improved.

3.2. History of Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Child soldiers, also known as *kadogo*, which means “little ones” in Swahili, have been a part of the conflict in the DRC since the beginning of the First Congo War. This subchapter focuses on the use of child soldiers in the conflicts in the DRC. The previous chapter has shown that violence and conflict are the main characterizing factors in the DRC. Connected to the history of violence is also the violence against children and especially the use of children as soldiers. This subchapter firstly provides a historical overview of the use of child soldiers in the DRC, and later provides an overview of the contemporary use of child soldiers.

In the pre-colonization era, children enjoyed the protection of their families, and society relied on them as the future leaders. However, the colonization was the first factor that changed the Congolese society and affected the social structures which protected children. The Eastern and North-Eastern regions have been the most affected by the phenomenon of child soldiers. It is because these regions have been experiencing continuous outbreaks of violence since the beginning of the First Congo War.⁹⁴

The First Congo War was the first armed conflict that included the use of child soldiers. In the First Congo War, the children who participated in the conflict mostly did so voluntarily. Some of the children volunteered to become a part of the official Congolese army or to become a part of Mai-Mai militias, which fought against the Rwandan aggression. However, the main surge in the numbers of child soldiers came during the Second Congo War.⁹⁵

The Second Congo War started in 1998 and brought about the forced recruitment of children into the military structures. During the war, most of the military structures have recruited

⁹⁴ Jean Chrysostome K. Kiyala, *Child Soldiers and Restorative Justice Participatory Action Research on North Kivu in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*. Cham: Springer, 2019. pp. 93

⁹⁵ Jean Chrysostome K. Kiyala, *Child Soldiers and Restorative Justice Participatory Action Research on North Kivu in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*. Cham: Springer, 2019. pp. 93

children into their ranks, including the AFDL led by the future president Laurent Kabila.⁹⁶ The end of the war was supposed to be a turning point in the lives of the child soldiers. However, at the beginning of 2003, there were approximately 30,000 child soldiers present in the country, according to the Congolese government. The number of child soldiers slowly declined during the next year. However, the Mai-Mai local defense militias, the RCD, and other armed groups continued to recruit or abduct children throughout 2003.⁹⁷

The end of the war meant that the 30,000 children were to be released from the national army or their respective armed groups. From 2003 to 2007, the country focused on the integration of the rebel groups into the national army and demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers into the general society. However, the efforts were highly unsuccessful. According to Hussein Mursal, the country director of Save the Children, by 2007, the situation in the DRC regarding child soldiers was catastrophic. The armed groups continued to recruit, re-recruit, and abuse children in the most atrocious manner. The CNDP, under the rule of General Nkunda, and many other armed groups used the Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda and Uganda for involuntary recruitment of child soldiers. Furthermore, the FARDC continually used children in the fight against the FDLR and actively obstructed the removal of these children from their ranks.⁹⁸

One of the most important developments in 2009 was the beginning of the International Criminal Court (ICC) trial with Thomas Lubanga Dyilo. Lubanga was a leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), a group most known for its participation in the Ituri region conflict between 1999 and 2006. The UPC was known for its attacks against civilians and the forcible recruitment of children. Lubanga was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment in 2012 for the recruitment of child soldiers.⁹⁹ The Lubanga case was a landmark case as it was the first time a military commander was sentenced for the recruitment of child soldiers. Thus, this case set a precedent in the prosecution of military leaders who recruit children. Moreover, it sent a message to all the other leaders who were actively recruiting that their

⁹⁶ Steffen Krüger and Diana Hund. *ARMY AND SOCIETY*. Report. Edited by Wahlers Gerhard. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014. 21-35. Accessed February 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10100.5.

⁹⁷ United Nations. "Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 - Congo, Democratic Republic of The." Refworld. Accessed April 17, 2020. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49880668c.html>.

⁹⁸ C. Rakisits, "Child Soldiers in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (January 2008): 108–22. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdn054>.

⁹⁹ Julie McBride, *The War Crime of Child Soldier Recruitment*. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2014. pp.145-196.

crimes will not be left without punishment.¹⁰⁰ However, the issue of the recruitment of children in the DRC has not been resolved, and at present, thousands of children are still suffering the inhumane treatment in the hands of the armed structures active in the country.

The DRC has recently been facing a growing number of conflicts and armed groups, especially in the Eastern regions. Children are perpetually being targeted, and their rights are continuously violated. The government has not been able to control the situation in the country. Even with the support from the MONUSCO, the situation in the country remains critical.

3.3. DDR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The following subchapter describes the DDR in the DRC. The DDR in the DRC can be divided into three phases, which are described below. The examination of the DDR programs is crucial for the understanding of the challenges the DDR is facing.

The first DDR program in the DRC was established based on the 2002 peace agreement. Even though the peace agreement officially ended the conflict in the country, the reality was vastly different. The conflict continued in the Eastern part of the country, together with the recruitment and use of child soldiers.¹⁰¹ The first phase of the DDR began in 2003 and lasted until 2006. At the end of the year 2003, the government in the DRC established the *Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion* (CONADER). The CONADER was to be the leading agency in the process of DDR. In 2004, the government had adopted the National Plan for DDR primarily funded by the World Bank and the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP). The former combatants of the DRC origin were able to participate in the CONADER DDR program – the National Program of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reinsertion (PNDDR). The ex-combatants were offered to either return to the general society or to join the FARDC once they finished the program.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Jacqueline Bhabha, *Child Migration & Human Rights in a Global Age*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp.180-181

¹⁰¹ *Louder than Words: an Agenda for Action to End State Use of Child Soldiers*. London: Child Soldiers International, 2012. pp. 111.

¹⁰² Joanne Richards, Report. Small Arms Survey, 2013. Accessed April 19, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10604.

In the same year, the CONADER also adopted the DDR framework for children. The child DDR was mostly unsuccessful due to the delay in its implementation and the lack of funding. Therefore, rather than participating in the child DDR programs, the child soldiers participated in the adult DDR programs. They did so to receive the financial support. If they did not manage to enter an adult program, they were voluntarily or involuntarily re-enlisted into the armed groups. Furthermore, the girls affected by the conflict were either overlooked by the child DDR programs, or their presence was denied by their commanders, and thus they were not able to receive the much-needed assistance.¹⁰³

The PNDDR was successful in demobilizing of over 100,000 former soldiers in the initial phase. However, the reintegration phase was much less successful, as only half of the demobilized people were able to receive some form of support. Furthermore, the success of reintegration cannot be adequately assessed due to the lack of reliable data. The PNDDR projects focusing on children were able to provide support for the disarmament and demobilization of 12,551 children, but by March 2006, only 604 children were successfully reintegrated.¹⁰⁴

The first phase of the program ended in June 2006, mainly due to the lack of funding. The CONADER was forced to close 18 of its Orientation Centers and to suspend the DDR.¹⁰⁵ The main challenges to the successful implementation of the first DDR program were the funding issues, corruption, and the lack of governmental support in all parts of the country.¹⁰⁶ According to the World Bank, the CONADER faced internal and external challenges. The internal challenges were mainly corruption, a weak capacity and management. The external challenges were mainly the lack of the political will of all the parties to manage the demobilization and logistical issues. Nonetheless, at the time of the establishment of a new government in 2006, the existence of the program helped with the processing of 186,000 ex-combatants. Out of those, 132,000 were successfully demobilized (including 30,000 children), and 50,000 of them which joined the FARDC. However, by the end of 2006, the

¹⁰³ *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2008*. London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008.– pp.109-110.

¹⁰⁴ André Kölln, “DDR in DRC: the Limitations of Externally Led Approaches ...” *peace insight*. Accessed April 20, 2020. <https://www.peaceinsight.org/blog/2011/12/ddr-drc/>.

¹⁰⁵ Joanne Richards, Report. *Small Arms Survey*, 2013. Accessed April 20, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10604.

¹⁰⁶ Iffat Idris, “Lessons from DDR Programmes.” GSDRC, June 1, 2016. <https://gsdrc.org/publications/lessons-from-ddr-programmes/>.

budget provided by the World Bank and other international partners was spent, and the DDR goals were not achieved. Thus, the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) decided to support the second phase of the DDR.¹⁰⁷

The second phase of the DDR began in 2007, after the CONADER was replaced by the *Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réintégration* (UEPNDDR).¹⁰⁸ The establishment of a new main DDR body was only the first step towards the creation of the DDR Phase II. The conflict in the Eastern DRC was very far from being over in 2007, and many FARDC units had to relocate there as well. Therefore, the integration of ex-combatants into the national army was impossible at that time. The signing of the Goma peace agreement between the FARDC, CNDP, and the Mai-Mai groups in 2008 was not successful in resolving the conflict in the Eastern DRC. However, it gave a new chance to the establishment of the second phase of the DDR. The PNDDR had to alter its initial DDR plans due to the continuance of the conflict. By 2009, the program for the DDR was altered and ready to be implemented. The most significant change in the new DDR was the provision of more appropriate vocational opportunities for the former combatants according to the environment they reintegrate into and the economic situation in the country.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, in 2009, the World Bank has ended its project in the Great Lakes Region and withdrew from the project. Thus, the support role was transferred to the Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP), which was managed by the World Bank and financed by the AfDB.¹¹⁰ In July 2010, the MONUC changed to the MONUSCO through the Resolution 1925. The extension of the MONUC to MONUSCO also meant the extension of its mandate to the Protection of Civilians (POC), humanitarian workers, and human rights

¹⁰⁷ World Bank. "DDR in the Democratic Republic of Congo – Program Update – Democratic Republic of the Congo." ReliefWeb, September 30, 2009. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/ddr-democratic-republic-congo-program-update>.

¹⁰⁸ Joanne Richards, Report. Small Arms Survey, 2013. Accessed April 19, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10604.

¹⁰⁹ World Bank. "DDR in the Democratic Republic of Congo – Program Update – Democratic Republic of the Congo." ReliefWeb, September 30, 2009. <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/ddr-democratic-republic-congo-program-update>.

¹¹⁰ Nelson Alusala, Guy Lamb, Gregory Mthembu-Salter, and Jean-Marie Gasana. "Rumours of Peace, Whispers of War : Assessment of the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants into Civilian Life in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri Democratic Republic of Congo." Documents & Reports. The World Bank, March 26, 2012. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/208281468028477015/Rumours-of-peace-whispers-of-war-assessment-of-the-reintegration-of-ex-combatants-into-civilian-life-in-North-Kivu-South-Kivu-and-Ituri-Democratic-Republic-of-Congo>.

activists from the threat of physical violence and the support of the government in the consolidation of peace.¹¹¹ The Resolution 1925 also calls for a comprehensive security sector reform and the implementation of the DDR and DDRRR programs and ensures the mission's support and the international donor support of these processes under the POC mandate. The resolution also calls for close cooperation of the government of the DRC and the mission on the release of children from the FARDC and on the prevention of their further recruitment.¹¹²

The second phase of the DDR ended in December 2009, but some of the DDR activities were still taking place under the supervision of the MONUC/MONUSCO mission until 2011. During the second phase of the DDR, almost 13,000 combatants participated, and almost 5,000 demobilized and 8,000 integrated into the FARDC. After the official DDR ended, the rest of the budget was allocated to the *Programme de Stabilisation et de Reconstruction des Zones sortant des conflits Armes* (STAREC). The STAREC and MONUC/MONUSCO continued the DDR activities until the third phase of the DDR has started.¹¹³

Another part of the processes aimed at ending the recruitment of child soldiers was an Action Plan signed by the government of the DRC in October 2012. The Action Plan called for the ending of recruitment of children into the FARDC and other national security services. The Action Plan had four major components. Firstly, the DRC government should have identified the children within the national security forces. Secondly, the children should have been reinserted and should have received support during the process. The last two components of the Action Plan called for the establishment of an accountability mechanism for the perpetrators and the establishment of a cooperation link between the DRC government and its UN counterparts. Furthermore, this Action Plan was the first one to deal with the sexual violence and its perpetrators. The successful completion of the Action Plan would allow the UN to remove the FARDC from the list of parties who recruit and abuse children.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ "Timeline." MONUSCO. Accessed April 21, 2020. <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/timeline>.

¹¹² "Resolution 1925." United Nations Official Document. United Nations. Accessed April 21, 2020. [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1925\(2010\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1925(2010)).

¹¹³ Gerrie Swart, *A Vanquished Peace ? Prospects for the Successful Reconstruction of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. London: Adonis & Abbey, 2010. pp.96-97.

¹¹⁴ "DRC Signs Agreement to End Child Recruitment and Other Conflict-Related Violations against Children." United Nations. United Nations, October 4, 2012. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2012/10/drc-signs-agreement-to-end-child-recruitment-and-other-conflict-related-violations-against-children/>.

The joined action of the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade and the FARDC against the M23 in 2013 and the defeat of the M23 brought about the need for a new DDR initiative. The DDR was needed not only for the former members of M23, but also for other groups that surrendered because of the M23 defeat as well. Thus, in 2013, the DRC government made an official decision to start the third phase of DDR.¹¹⁵

On 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo was signed by representatives from 11 countries in the region. The Framework aims mainly at the resolution of the root causes of the conflict and the future prevention of conflict recurrence. Furthermore, the Framework outlines the principles of engagement on the domestic, regional, and international levels. The principles of engagement for the DRC include a security sector reform, consolidation of state authority, structural reforms, economic development, and reconciliation, tolerance, and democratization. Regionally, the document calls for a renewed commitment in non-interference in neighboring countries, regional cooperation, and administration of justice, namely for the war crimes and crimes against humanity. At the international level, the Framework focuses on the revision of the MONUSCO. Also, the Framework calls for oversight mechanisms that would be present at all levels.¹¹⁶

When designing the third phase of the DDR, the PNDDR took into account the previous lessons learned and the third phase of the DDR was designed to avoid these issues. The DDR takes into account the Framework above through the UNSC Resolution 2098. Resolution 2098 further calls for the development of a comprehensive DDR plan for the DDR of foreign fighters. Moreover, the UNSC Resolution 2147 equipped the MONUSCO with the power to provide guidance and support to the government of the DRC in the designing of the DDR and DDRRR for the local and foreign combatants.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” ACCORD, March 13, 2017. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/disarmament-demobilisation-reintegration-democratic-republic-congo/>.

¹¹⁶ “Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 22, 2020. https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/131.

¹¹⁷ “GLOBAL PLAN ON DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION (DDR III).” Google Drive. Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs, 2014. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1UXITEYMzbhNXNTbUcyb2U3N2c/edit>.

The plans for the third phase of DDR were finalized in July 2014, the program's initial plan was to include approximately 12,000 combatants. The DDR III strategy consisted of four main steps. The first step was to focus on the armed groups and the most sensitive communities. The second step consisted of the disarmament of armed groups and the relocation of the disarmed ex-combatants to the already existing transit camps. The third step was the demobilization of the said ex-combatants and their transfer to one of three existing DDR facilities. In these facilities, the ex-combatants would be identified, and they would receive medical attention and screening, and given a background evaluation. In the fourth step, the former combatants would be allowed to choose between a civilian and a military reintegration. In case of choosing the military option, they would be vetted for human rights abuses and later sent into military training programs. In case of choosing the civilian option, the ex-combatants would receive assistance through the Reintegration Preparatory Centers (CPRs). The CPRs would provide support, guidance, and education to those ex-combatants for the next five years.¹¹⁸

The national DDR plan, however, did not develop any unique strategy for the DDR of child soldiers and children associated with the armed groups. The child DDR was left to be developed by the international bodies involved in the DDR. In 2013, three central international actors were responsible for the child DDR, the MONUSCO mission, the UNICEF, and several non-governmental organizations. The MONUSCO was responsible for the identification and release of children from armed structures. The UNICEF, together with the non-governmental organizations, was responsible for the demobilization and reintegration of the children. The UEPNDDR was then responsible for the oversight and the documentation of the whole process.¹¹⁹

More than one thousand children, who were recruited during 2012 and 2013 were successfully removed from the armed structures by 2014. One-third of these children were under the age of fifteen at the time of their recruitment. They were separated from various armed groups, including the FDLR. Furthermore, in August and September 2014, the MONUSCO and FARDC managed to rescue 60 children abandoned by the ADF. Almost

¹¹⁸ Fidel Bafilemba, Aaron Hall, and Timo Muller. "Crafting a Viable DDR Strategy for Congo." The Enough Project, February 27, 2014. <https://enoughproject.org/files/Crafting-Viable-DDR-Strategy-for-Congo.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ Child Soldiers International. "Briefing to the UN Security Council Working Group on the Recruitment and Use of Children in the DRC." Refworld, July 31, 2014. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53eb6c8e4.html>.

half of these children have been used as combatants, and all were severely malnourished. Moreover, the government of the DRC showed its serious commitment to ending the recruitment of children into its ranks.¹²⁰

In 2015, the UNICEF was involved in the DRC through the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign. In September 2015, the Congolese Ministry of Defence adopted a Road Map of the most important activities which would address the remaining hurdles in the implementation of the 2012 Action Plan. Together with the adoption of the Road Map, the government established the Provincial Joint Technical Working groups to increase the speed of the implementation process.¹²¹ During 2015, more than 2,000 children were separated from various armed groups as well as from the FARDC. The government continued to work towards the implementation of the Action Plan. Furthermore, the Action Plan was also the grounds for the arrest of 69 individuals, some of which were high-ranking officers of the FARDC and the Congolese National Police, for the sexual violence against girls and the recruitment of child soldiers. Moreover, the staff of the MONUSCO was accused and adjudged of sexual violence and abuse of children.¹²²

In 2017, the FARDC was de-listed by the UN from the blacklist of those who commit violations against children. The de-listing was one of the most significant achievements in the history of child protection in the DRC. This fundamental change in the FARDC recruitment policies was possible through the cooperation with the MONUSCO’s Child Protection Section. Moreover, the MONUSCO has been working on the perpetuation of this positive change in the other active armed groups in the DRC as well. The primary responsible agency in these matters is the MONUSCO Child Protection Section (CPS). The MONUSCO CPS is also the main actor in the process of helping children separate from armed groups, in the process of getting released from detention, or the access to DDR.¹²³ The MONUSCO child protection focuses mainly on the children affected by the conflict and

¹²⁰ United Nations. “Children and Armed Conflict – Report of the Secretary-General,” June 5, 2015. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F69%2F926.

¹²¹ The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. “Children Not Soldiers: Countries.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 24, 2020. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-not-soldiers-countries/>.

¹²² United Nations. “Children and Armed Conflict – Report of the Secretary-General.” s/2016/360–E–s/2016/360. United Nations, April 20, 2016. <https://www.undocs.org/s/2016/360>.

¹²³ MONUSCO. “Report on the Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Groups in the DRC (2014-2017).” MONUSCO, October 16, 2019. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/190128_monusco_our_strength_is_in_our_youth_child_recruitment_and_use_by_armed_groups_in_the_drc_2014-2017_final_english_0.pdf.

on the prevention of future problems as a part of the transition process. The MONUSCO works together with the local authorities and local staff on monitoring, reporting, and advocacy for a better child protection. However, the MONUSCO provides only a limited number of programs specifically aimed at children. It rather relies on the support of other partners, such as the UNICEF or non-governmental organizations, which are the main actors in the current child DDR process in the DRC.¹²⁴

The DDR programs currently implemented in the DRC still have many challenges to address if there is any chance for their improvement in the future. Initially, the CONADER was the central agency tasked with the implementation of the DDR programs after the Sun City agreement signed in 2003. This agency was supposed to design and implement the first phase of the DDR.¹²⁵ However, the CONADER was struggling with its task as it was corrupted and lacking proper management. Furthermore, the CONADER encountered many other obstacles when designing and implementing the programs. The CONADER was poorly informed about the security situation in the country due to the lack of the prior assessment of the situation on the ground and its policies eventually led civilians to join militias and later to demobilize for the purpose of receiving monetary support.¹²⁶ These reasons led to the emergence of the UEPNNDR and the dissolution of the CONADER and the establishment of the second phase of the DDR. The second phase of the DDR was successful in processing over 13,000 combatants. However, it was not successful in addressing the challenges its predecessor was facing.

The first two phases of the DDR were finalized in December 2009 and the third phase of the DDR started in 2014. The plan for the third phase of the DDR includes a section dedicated to the support of children associated with the armed groups. According to the plan, the main responsibility for care of the children is delegated to the UNICEF but the progress of the child DDR will be consistently monitored by the UEPNNDR. Furthermore, the children are supposed to be processed more rapidly than the adults and the time they spend in the DDR centers is supposed to be shorter. All of the planned activities should be tailored to the

¹²⁴ “Child Protection.” MONUSCO, March 24, 2016. <https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/child-protection>.

¹²⁵ Nduwimana, Donatien. *Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges and Prospects*. Karen, Kenya: International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC), 2013.

¹²⁶ Vogel, Christoph, and Josaphat Musamba. “Recycling Rebels? Demobilization in the Congo.” RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE PSRP BRIEFING PAPER 11 MARCH 2016. Rift Valley Institute, March 2016. <http://riftvalley.net/publication/recycling-rebels-demobilization-congo#.VxfGnvmLSU1>.

children according to their age, gender, capacity to make informed decisions, et cetera. Also, the DDR should specifically focus on strengthening the capacities of the children and their families, developing of the community protection mechanisms and networks for the children to rely on, and the establishment and operationalization of the legal framework protecting the children.¹²⁷

The activities for the child ex-combatants must include four different phases. In the first phase, the children will be received by the Interim Care Centers or Transit Centers. This phase should last three months, and the children should receive an immediate health care and necessities. The Centers will further provide psychological help and counseling and will conduct a health and identification screenings. In the second phase, the children will receive psychosocial therapy and necessary treatments. In the third phase, the families of the ex-combatants will be found, and the children will be reunified with them. The last phase of the process consists of socioeconomic reintegration. Children under the age of 15 will receive formal education and children above 15 years will receive vocational training. The UEPNDDR also vouches to provide assistance to the children attending primary and secondary schools for the minimum of three years. All in all, if the plan is executed properly, the children will be reintegrated into their community of origin.¹²⁸

In the third phase of the DDR, the UEPNDDR plans and oversees the DDR of children. However, the implementation of the DDR is conducted by other organizations. First of all, the MONUSCO CPS and its DDRRR section are highly active in the process of the child DDR even without being its main providers. The MONUSCO provides a safe space for children in need, helps with the process of screening and documentation of children, and provides repatriation assistance to foreign ex-combatants. Furthermore, the MONUSCO broadcasts radio messages for the children involved in armed conflict and for their commanders urging them to demobilize – this method has proven to be quite effective in the past. The mission delegates the children in need of the DDR to the UNICEF.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ “GLOBAL PLAN ON DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION (DDR III).” Google Drive. Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs, 2014. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1UXITEYMzbhNXNTbUcyb2U3N2c/edit>.pp.22-23.

¹²⁸ “GLOBAL PLAN ON DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION (DDR III).” Google Drive. Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs, 2014. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1UXITEYMzbhNXNTbUcyb2U3N2c/edit>.pp.22-23.

¹²⁹ Donatien Nduwimana. *Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges and Prospects*. Karen, Kenya: International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC), 2013.pp.13.

The well-being of children worldwide is the highest priority for the UNICEF. In the DRC, the UNICEF works together with the government to create the possibility of a happy childhood for every child. Since 2004, the UNICEF works in the DRC and supports the all of the children affected by the conflicts by providing medical care, education, vocational training, and economic support. Since 2013, the UNICEF was able to aid almost 7,000 children with reintegration into their communities.¹³⁰ The UNICEF and its partners work towards the establishment of a safe environment for the children in the DRC. The UNICEF runs numerous projects supporting health care, education, and social help for all of the children in need. In 2019, the UNICEF was able to assist nearly 1,900 children with exiting from the armed groups and further assisted over 120,000 displaced children in the DRC.

Other non-governmental organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or the Save the Children International, provide help with the education and reintegration to war-affected children in the DRC as well. Furthermore, other small organizations focus on the child DDR in the DRC, such as the RET Germany, which concentrates on the implementation of the child DDR initiatives on the local level, especially in the North Kivu and Eastern DRC.¹³¹

¹³⁰ UNICEF. “Together to End Use of Children in Conflict.” Press release, February 23, 2017. <https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/en/press-releases/together-end-use-children-conflict>.

¹³¹ “Latest Projects.” RET Germany, November 15, 2019. <https://retgermany.de/latest-projects/>.

4. Analysis of Child DDR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The following chapter explores the use of child soldiers in the DRC and the issues this phenomenon causes. Furthermore, it analyzes the child DDR efforts currently implemented in the DRC and their functionality. The last subchapter then provides a conclusion about the issues the DDR programs are facing and also provides a set of recommendations for their future improvements.

4.1. Child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The history of child soldiers in the DRC in the previous chapter showed that the phenomenon of recruiting child soldiers is deeply embedded into the Congolese society. The international legal framework presented in Chapter 2 does not help to prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups, and the government of DRC, which has reportedly stopped the recruitment of child soldiers into its ranks only recently, seems powerless. Furthermore, the continuous increase in the intensity and number of conflicts and the increase in the number of armed groups increase the chances for child recruitment. Children are the most vulnerable part of the population in any given country, and their protection should be maximally prioritized. However, the Congolese government does not have the situation in the country under control and thus is incapable of protecting children who suffer due to the ongoing conflict.

According to the last Report issued by UN Secretary-General, a total of 631 children were recruited in the DRC during 2018. The most prominent recruiters are the Mai-Mai militias in the North Kivu region. Ten of the recruited children were recruited by the FARDC and the Congolese National Police. This information clearly shows that the government has not been able to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers fully. The children recruited by the government forces performed supporting roles and not for combat, unlike the children recruited by the armed groups. Furthermore, the Report states that more than 120 children were deprived of liberty by the national government based on their alleged cooperation with armed groups.¹³²

¹³² “Children and Armed Conflict – Report of the Secretary-General.” United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 18, 2020. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E.

All in all, 169 children have lost their lives due to murder or maiming in 2018. Almost one-fifth of the casualties lost their lives because of the government force actions in the eastern DRC. The rest of the deaths was caused by the other active armed groups or by explosive remnants of war. Abductions of children were also an issue in the North and South Kivu and Kasai regions. Almost four hundred children were abducted mostly for recruitment, and the FARDC abducted eight of the children for sexual exploitation. Sexual violence against children also continues to be a problem in the DRC. In 2018, almost three hundred girls were subject to sexual violence, and government forces were responsible for 50 percent of the cases. Other perpetrators were the Mai-Mai and other armed groups. Furthermore, the number of attacks on schools and hospitals is decreasing when compared to previous years, but is still unacceptably high, mainly since some of these attacks can be directly attributed to the FARDC. Connected to the hospitals is the issue of denial of humanitarian access, which happened at least four times and affected more than five thousand children directly.¹³³

When examining the current situation regarding the child soldiers, it is also essential to examine their recruiters and their pathways to recruitment. MONUSCO report from January 2019 explores the child recruitment in the DRC in the period between 2014 and 2017. The MONUSCO report identifies 49 different armed groups as responsible for the recruitment of children. In the period the MONUSCO report covers, various armed structures recruited over 4,000 children into their ranks, and 72% of these children were recruited by only 10 of the groups. Two of the most prominent recruiters are the FDLR and the Mai-Mai Mazembe.¹³⁴ These two groups provide an excellent example of the type of armed groups that are currently active in the DRC.

The FDLR and the Mai-Mai militias are the most notorious recruiters of child soldiers in the DRC. The FDLR is one of the most influential groups active in the DRC and originated in 1994. The group is responsible for more than a quarter of the total recruitments between 2014 and 2017. The group uses forced recruitment as their primary means of recruitment (in about 44% of cases) and voluntary (in about 10% of cases) recruitment as secondary.

¹³³ "Children and Armed Conflict – Report of the Secretary-General." United Nations. United Nations. Accessed April 18, 2020. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E.

¹³⁴ MONUSCO. "Report on the Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Groups in the DRC (2014-2017)." MONUSCO, October 16, 2019. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/190128_monusco_our_strength_is_in_our_youth_child_recruitment_and_use_by_armed_groups_in_the_drc_2014-2017_final_english_0.pdf.pp.24

Forced recruitment occurs mostly through family members based on the expectation of tribal loyalty or through being born into the group. The main two reasons for forced recruitment are the inexpensiveness of child labor and the punishment of families that refused to follow the FDLR rules. On the other hand, the pull factors for voluntary recruitment include family and peer pressure, the possibility of revenge against other communities, financial support, and protection against the threat of physical violence. The recruited children usually become combatants or receive a support role once they are recruited. All of the children receive military training after entering the group, and about one-fifth of them become combatants. The girls were almost exclusively used in supportive roles – as cooks, babysitters, or commander’s wives – together with the rest of the boys who mostly had to take care of the group’s logistics.¹³⁵

The Mai-Mai self-defense militias are most known for their fight against the FDLR in North Kivu. In the discussed period, the Mai-Mai group was responsible for the recruitment of over 450 children. As opposed to the previous group, almost half of the children join the group willingly, and 21% are forced to join. The pull factors are, same as in the FDLR case, the expectation of tribal loyalty and the will to fight for the community. However, the main factor for the Mai-Mai forced recruitment of children is their magical powers. According to the Mai-Mai, children possess protective and healing powers. Furthermore, the Mai-Mai militias usually force the children to endure initiation rituals that supposedly enhance these powers. These rituals often include tattooing or drinking magical water, which is believed to make the child bulletproof. The main reasons for volunteering into the group include the prospect of revenge and the possibility of protection of the child’s family and community. Also, community pressure, the possibility of economic gains, and the protection from a physical threat are common reasons for voluntary recruitment. The roles of the children are, again, a combatant or a supporter. The children are divided into combat and support roles almost equally. Half of the children, mostly boys, assumed the role of combatants and fully participated in the conflict and the group’s military hierarchy. The other half of the children

¹³⁵ MONUSCO. “Report on the Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Groups in the DRC (2014-2017).” MONUSCO, October 16, 2019. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/190128_monusco_our_strength_is_in_our_youth_child_recruitment_and_use_by_armed_groups_in_the_drc_2014-2017_final_english_0.pdf. pp.52-65.

had traditional supportive roles, such as cooks or tax collectors. The one exception to this was the *kadogo dawa*, the medicine child, which provided magical power to its group.¹³⁶

Upon closer examination, the groups have a very similar *modus operandi*. They recruit children mostly for the same reasons. The push factors and the pull factors are virtually identical for all of the groups in the DRC. The pull factors are mostly loyalty to a tribe, an ethnic group, or a community, and the inexpensiveness of child labor. The push factors are also very similar. Mainly it is the desire for revenge or the loyalty to a community, which leads to voluntary recruitment. This noble reason is immediately followed by the more pragmatic reasons to join – economic gains and protection from threats.

Moreover, in all of the armed groups, the children are divided between the roles of combatants and supporters. The division ratios may vary, but the roles and the genders assigned to them are very consistent. The older and male children usually assume the roles of combatants, while the younger and female children assume the roles of supporters.

Apart from going through trauma of recruitment, voluntary or involuntary, and the trauma of living in a conflict zone, the children are usually brutally abused and faced with the possibility of death in their everyday lives. Sexual violence, as seen from the UN Secretary-General reports mentioned before, is commonly associated with all of the armed groups. The most common forms of sexual violence against children is rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. According to the MONUSCO, almost 60% of girls recruited since 2014 told of experiencing sexual violence at the hands of their fellow fighters or commanders. A small number of boys also disclosed being affected by sexual violence. In the case of boys, it is much harder to estimate the real number as their culture and gender norms prevent them from revealing such facts.¹³⁷

Furthermore, the children risk losing their lives every day as a part of any armed group. Since 2014, almost 1,500 children verifiably lost their lives or were maimed due to their

¹³⁶ MONUSCO. “Report on the Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Groups in the DRC (2014-2017).” MONUSCO, October 16, 2019. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/190128_monusco_our_strength_is_in_our_youth_child_recruitment_and_use_by_armed_groups_in_the_drc_2014-2017_final_english_0.pdf. pp.110-125.

¹³⁷ MONUSCO. “Report on the Recruitment and Use of Children in Armed Groups in the DRC (2014-2017).” MONUSCO, October 16, 2019. https://monusco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/190128_monusco_our_strength_is_in_our_youth_child_recruitment_and_use_by_armed_groups_in_the_drc_2014-2017_final_english_0.pdf. pp.41.

participation in an armed group. Almost one-third of the killing and maiming can be attributed to the FARDC and the national police. The actual number of child victims of killing, maiming, and sexual violence is estimated to be much higher than the official numbers. However, the complexity of the situation in the DRC and the stigma placed on the surviving victims make it impossible to obtain exact data. The stigmatization of sexual violence also leads to dangerously high levels of impunity of the perpetrators.¹³⁸

4.2. Challenges of Child DDR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The problems created by the recruitment of children into armed groups are very similar in every part of the world. Thousands of children are forced to lose their childhood by participating in armed structures every day. Children should not be forced by their society to die in armed conflicts, and the survivors of the torture, maiming, and sexual violence should be able to receive help once they leave the armed structures. When children decide to exit the violent structures or when the violent structure which is using children ends, they have one of two options. Either the children can escape and self-demobilize, or they can exit through the official demobilization process.

However, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes are quite flawed and often incapable of providing efficient help to the children in need of demobilization. The theoretical part of this work dedicated to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration laid out the most notorious challenges which DDR programs worldwide have to face. Most of these challenges appear in the case of the DRC as well. This subchapter connects the challenges present in the DRC to the challenges laid out in the subchapter on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

Massimo Fusato defines five preconditions to successful launch and completion of the DDR programs.¹³⁹ First of the preconditions is a secure environment in which all parties to the conflict believe in and uphold the ceasefire agreement. In the case of the DRC, full security has never been fully achieved. When looking at the history of the conflict, it is visible that

¹³⁸ United Nations Security Council. "Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." S/2018/502–E–S/2018/502. United Nations, May 25, 2018. <https://undocs.org/s/2018/502>.

¹³⁹ Massimo Fusato. "Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants." *Beyond Intractability*, July 13, 2016. <https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/demobilization>.

this precondition could never have been fulfilled. Since the beginning of its history, the DRC has not been entirely at peace, and none of the ceasefire agreements were upheld. The current situation in the DRC, especially in the eastern part of the country, is highly volatile, and de-escalation of the current conflict will probably not be achieved soon. As long as the root causes of the conflict not adequately addressed, the country will not be able to achieve sustainable peace. The main causes of the conflict are ethnicity and power struggle over the mineral riches. The government lacks power and will to resolve the root causes of the conflict and to establish control over the eastern region.

Furthermore, the FARDC and the national police are amongst the perpetrators of the violent acts, which clearly shows the incapability of the government to control its units and its country.¹⁴⁰ The nation-wide insecurity prevents the combatants from trusting the DDR processes and prevents any DDR program from being successfully implemented.

The second precondition is the inclusion of all warring parties at the same level of the DDR at the same time. Historically, neither of the two previous phases of the DDR succeeded in including all the parties to the conflict. The lack of inclusion stems particularly from the constant fragmentation of the armed groups and the incapability of the government to implement the provisions of all the past ceasefire agreements. In the case of the third phase of the DDR, universal inclusion is impossible. Due to the security situation and the ongoing conflict, all of the warring parties cannot be included in the DDR process at the same time.

Moreover, most of the currently active combatants do not wish to demobilize and prefer life in the armed groups because of the protection and economic gains such life provides. The DRC is currently employing the second-generation DDR framework and implementing the CVR programs as its integral part. The CVR programs are taking place instead of the DDR programs in conflict contexts, such as the DRC. However, the CVR is not designed to replace a nation-wide DDR strategy and only targets small communities. Thus, the inclusion of all warring parties cannot be achieved in the DRC, which poses another challenge to the success of the DDR processes.

¹⁴⁰ Donatien Nduwimana. *Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: Challenges and Prospects*. Karen, Kenya: International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC), 2013. pp.18

The third and fourth preconditions to successful DDR processes are political agreement and a comprehensive approach. These criteria have been successfully fulfilled in the past in the DRC. The political agreements clearly defined the overseeing institutions, the eligibility criteria, timeframes, and goals of the past DDR programs. The Goma Agreement served as the main basis for the creation of the second phase of DDR. The DRC also succeeded in the field of comprehensiveness. After the initial stumble with the CONADER, the DRC was able to establish the UEPNDDR as the central national organization which plans, implements, and oversees the DDR initiatives. Furthermore, the MONUSCO is capable of providing guidance and support in the process of implementation of DDR on the national and local levels as well. Thus, these preconditions were addressed adequately in every stage of the process.

The last precondition for success is proper funding. Funding is one of the most painful problems of the DDR in the DRC. The international community, mostly the World Bank, has been one of the biggest contributors to the DDR in the DRC historically. Through MDRP, the World Bank has funded the programs in the DRC between 2002 and 2009. However, due to corruption, embezzlement, and improper management, the World Bank funds were not adequately allocated most of the time. Furthermore, after MDRP ended, most of the funding responsibilities were left to other international partners, such as the UN. The funding of the child DDR was left mainly to the UNICEF. The UNICEF has repeatedly pointed out the sharp decline in funding, which threatens its ability to respond to children in crisis and especially to those in need of DDR.¹⁴¹

Moreover, even with the help of numerous international partners, the latest phase of the DDR has faced difficulties since its very beginning. First of all, the beginning of the program had to be postponed due to a lack of funding.¹⁴² The donors were initially reluctant to support the last phase due to the previous mismanagements of the programs and the history of corruption and embezzlement. The funding of the DDR programs has been and is an issue in the DRC. Underfunding poses a great challenge to the proper implementation of all three

¹⁴¹ UNICEF, Evaluation Office. "Evaluation of UNICEF Programmes to Protect Children in Emergencies, Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Case Study." *Evaluation of UNICEF Programmes to Protect Children in Emergencies, Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Case Study*, August 2013. https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/CPiE_Evaluation_DRC_country_case_study_final.pdf.

¹⁴² Christoph Vogel, and Josaphat Musamba. "Recycling Rebels? Demobilization in the Congo." RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE PSRP BRIEFING PAPER 11 MARCH 2016. Rift Valley Institute, March 2016. <http://riftvalley.net/publication/recycling-rebels-demobilization-congo#.VxfGnvmLSU1>.

components of DDR, which creates massive problems, especially in the case of child reintegration.

All in all, the DRC has not been able to fulfill the necessary preconditions for successful implementation and completion. The third attempt at successful DDR, which is currently taking place, has a meager chance of success due to the ongoing conflict and the lack of political will to reform the security sector and the country overall. The national politicians first focus on their gains and lack the will to end the conflict and finalize the DDR once and for all.¹⁴³

With the main challenges to the implementation and successful completion of all the DDR programs identified, it is essential to address the main challenges the child DDR programs are facing. To draw on the problem of funding mentioned previously, one of the main challenges to the child DDR is usually the duration of the programs. The effectiveness of funding cannot yet be assessed in the third phase of DDR in the DRC. However, the previous two phases did not fulfill their duty to children and did not last as long as necessary. The child ex-combatants who participated in the first two phases of child DDR had mostly negative feelings about the duration of the programs. The duration of assistance during the period of disarmament and demobilization was usually satisfactory, but during the reintegration period, it was not. Most of the children pointed out the insufficient resources they were given by the organizations managing the DDR. The opportunities for skill training were limited, and not all of the children had a chance to participate. Furthermore, the aid the children received was usually given to a group of children who were supposed to manage that aid collectively. This collective aid was usually stolen or sold by one of the people in the group for personal gains. Also, the material aid that was given to the children received was usually of poor quality or did not match the needs of the individual children – for example, a child with woodworker training received a broken sewing machine. Moreover, most of this help was only short-term, and the children would have appreciated receiving

¹⁴³ Henri Boshoff. “Completing the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration Process of Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Link to Security Sector Reform of FARDC. Mission Difficult!” *Completing the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration Process of Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Link to Security Sector Reform of FARDC. Mission Difficult!*, November 23, 2010. <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/23Nov2010.pdf>.

skills training and education rather than material aid that they were, in most cases, forced to sell to survive.¹⁴⁴

The second part of the reintegration challenge is social reintegration. Based on the experiences of the children formerly associated with armed groups, a longer duration of the DDR support would have been very helpful. The children usually spoke of three main problems they had to face upon coming back to their community. They were the shortness of resources to continue with education, work scarcity, and stigmatization. Stigmatized and lacking resources, the children were usually not able to finish their education and were forced to look for employment opportunities. However, eastern Congo faces perhaps the worst unemployment situation in the country and finding work without education or proper training is close to impossible, especially with the stigma of being a former child soldier. The former child soldiers are usually forced to accept dangerous and exploitative work, such as mining.¹⁴⁵ The mismanagement of reintegration and the deficiency in resources create a very dangerous environment for the former child soldiers and can often lead the child ex-combatants to consider re-entering the armed structures. The mismanagement of reintegration and the deficiency in resources create a hazardous environment for the former child soldiers and can often lead the child ex-combatants to consider reentering the armed structures.

The next major problem of the child DDR is the eligibility for the programs. The first problem regarding DDR eligibility is the age of the ex-combatants. While all of the child programs are accessible to all of the children with no age restriction, many of them decided to join adult programs because of the demobilization package adults are entitled to receive during this phase of DDR. This deliberate entering of children into adult programs happened mostly the case of the first phase of DDR. The first phase of DDR disarmed and demobilized 30,000 children, and the CONADER was not able to manage the allocation of support to the children properly. The child ex-combatants were aware that upon entering and adult

¹⁴⁴ Eastern Congo Initiative and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. “‘We Came Back with Empty Hands’: Understanding the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, January 1, 2013. <https://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/we-came-back-with-empty-hands.pdf>.pp86-89.

¹⁴⁵ Eastern Congo Initiative and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. “‘We Came Back with Empty Hands’: Understanding the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, January 1, 2013. <https://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/we-came-back-with-empty-hands.pdf>.pp. 89-99.

program, they would be able to receive material support, training, and other assistance, and therefore they often lied about their age.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, to be eligible for entering the second or the third phase of the DDR in the DRC, the children had to prove membership in an armed group and had to be armed or had to have a certificate of disarmament. These rules led to a decrease in chances for children to obtain a place in a DDR program, as many of their former commanders lied about recruiting them out of fear of prosecution. Alternatively, contrary to that, some of the commanders and community leaders falsified the certificates of disarmament to make children who were not associated with armed groups eligible to enjoy the benefits of DDR programs. Moreover, the "one weapon one combatant" rule created obstacles for the children as not all of them were active combatants and thus did not possess any weapons.¹⁴⁷ This rule directly disrespects the very definition of children associated with armed forces and armed groups as defined by the UNICEF and takes away the chance for ex-combatants to benefit from DDR programs.

Another frequent obstacle the children had to face when seeking out the help of DDR programs was gender-related. The girls who were associated with the armed groups assumed the supportive roles of cooks and wives in most of the cases and did not carry a weapon. Thus, they were not allowed to enter the programs because they were not able to prove their association with the armed groups and were not able to turn in a weapon. Also, the girls formerly involved with the armed structures were often faced with stigmatization upon return to their communities. The communities the girls returned to consider them to have lost their value as women due to the experienced sexual abuse and multiple sexual partners they were often forced to have while living with the armed groups.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the children of the child ex-combatants are often seen as troubled and incapable of fitting into the society, because their lives began in a conflict, their mothers are seen as promiscuous, diseased, and incapable of raising the children properly, and the communities often feel like

¹⁴⁶ *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2008*. London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008.– pp.109-110.

¹⁴⁷ Arpita Mitra. "CHILD SOLDIERS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: REVISITING 'REINTEGRATION' THROUGH A PSYCHO-SOCIAL FRAMEWORK." *Allons-y* 3 (January 2019): 49–64. <https://www.childsoldiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AllonsY-Vol3-web-min.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ Arpita Mitra. "CHILD SOLDIERS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: REVISITING 'REINTEGRATION' THROUGH A PSYCHO-SOCIAL FRAMEWORK." *Allons-y* 3 (January 2019): 49–64. <https://www.childsoldiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AllonsY-Vol3-web-min.pdf>

the child must inherit the personal traits of its father who was a savage killer. The marginalization of the children born to former child soldier mothers is very obvious, and the community members usually express their discontent with such children living amongst them.¹⁴⁹

The overarching challenge of the DDR programs in DRC is their effectivity, which is closely connected to the previously mentioned problems. This problem is twofold, the DDR programs in the DRC do not provide stable support, material and psychological, to former combatants in the reintegration phase, and they often overlook the social and economic situation of the community. The stigma of being a former child soldier makes it difficult for the children to return and to reintegrate into their society. As seen from the previous paragraphs, the current DDR programs are incapable of providing long-term support to the children, which eventually leads the former child soldiers to regret their decision to demobilize. Moreover, former child soldiers are often marginalized in their respective societies, which forces them to accept exploitative jobs or to reenter the armed structures.

The economic challenges the DRC is currently facing are the second part of this problem. Due to the duration of the conflict and poor governance, the DRC has one of the worst Human Development Index Rankings – the DRC ranks 179 in the latest report. Seventy-four percent of the population are forced to live in poverty.¹⁵⁰ Poverty is also one of the main reasons why children join armed groups in the DRC. The DDR programs should give the child ex-combatants guidance and support to escape poverty through obtaining education and life skills. However, the DDR programs in the DRC often fail to address the complexity of the conflict and fail to assess the community needs before starting the DDR programs. The failure in the assessment of community needs presents one of the gravest challenges to the DDR programs as the children are poorly prepared to reenter the society and unable to provide for themselves.

¹⁴⁹ Eastern Congo Initiative and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. “‘We Came Back with Empty Hands’: Understanding the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.” Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, January 1, 2013. <https://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/we-came-back-with-empty-hands.pdf>. pp. 93-94.

¹⁵⁰ “Human Development Reports.” - Human Development Reports. Accessed May 6, 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/COD>.

4.3. Recommendations for Future Improvement of the DDR

The child DDR programs implemented by the DRC in all three phases of the process were quite flawed and faced many different challenges. The child ex-combatants who participated in the programs were often left without any support in the reintegration phase. The reintegration component is the most important of the three components of the DDR because a well-executed reintegration is the most crucial component of peacebuilding. This is especially true in the case of children, as they are the future leaders of their communities. If the existing challenges to the DDR are appropriately addressed, the future DDR can become more efficient and lead to the future prevention of conflict.

The recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups in the DRC poses a grave threat to the future of the country. The recent trends show a slow decline in the recruitment and re-recruitment of children in most of the country. However, the situation in the Eastern DRC remains worrisome. The ongoing violence, displacement, the outbreaks of various diseases, and the lack of national and international funding are the most critical challenges to child protection. Moreover, the stigmatization of children formerly associated with the armed groups within their communities of origin remains an issue that needs to be addressed through the future DDR programs.

Apart from that, there have been some successes in the process of the child DDR in the past. Some of the children who participated in the DDR programs were successfully reintegrated into the civil society and managed to turn their lives for the better. The national government was finally able to stop recruiting child soldiers into its ranks and tries to keep its commitments to the Action Plan signed in 2012. Moreover, the government is fighting against the impunity through identifying and sentencing the individuals connected to armed groups, and even the members of its security forces for the atrocious crimes they have committed against civilians.¹⁵¹ Together with the work of the ICC, which is currently running investigations focused on alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the DRC, the government has a strong chance to stop the recruitment of child soldiers forever.

The international community is helping to stabilize the situation in the DRC as well. First and foremost, the MONUSCO is continuously working with all the parties to the conflict

¹⁵¹ OHCHR. "A Victory against Impunity in DR Congo." OHCHR, October 15, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/AvictoryagainstimpunityinDR Congo.aspx>

and the national government towards the establishment of peace and protects civilians and humanitarian workers throughout the country. The other international organizations which work in the DRC, such as the UNICEF or the ICRC, help the most vulnerable members of the Congolese society and use advocacy for fundraising for the implementation of solutions in the region as well as to bring attention to the most painful problems the country is facing.

After analyzing the case study of the DRC and the challenges of the child DDR programs, it is evident that the challenges need to be addressed in order to establish a functioning child DDR programs. The following section provides recommendations for changes that would positively affect the future functionality of the child DDR in the future.

The first set of recommendations is meant for the Congolese government. The government of the DRC has been failing to address the root causes of the conflict for almost thirty years now. Thus, the government needs to work towards the resolution of the current conflict and towards a comprehensive and inclusive peace agreement that would address the underlying causes. A peace agreement could potentially stabilize the regions of Eastern Congo. Also, a comprehensive peace agreement could establish zones of control over the mineral-riches in the East, to bring a stable financial income to the government, and to prevent future conflict. In addition to that, a new peace agreement would present a new opportunity for the establishment of a functioning DDR. A change in the conflict-resolution strategy is especially possible since a new ruling coalition had been established in August 2019. The Tshisekedi-Kabila coalition makes the reconciliation of the country its top priority. Furthermore, the new government of the DRC must finally undertake a security sector reform, which would entail a comprehensive security plan for the protection of vulnerable communities in Eastern Congo.

To prevent the perpetuation of the conflict, the national government also needs to focus on the creation of peace education programs for the whole Congolese population. Such programs could help with the increase of tolerance among the numerous ethnic groups and the eventual resolution of one of the underlying causes of the conflict. Also, the peace education would help to encourage the Congolese nationals to resolve their differences peacefully rather than with weapons and would encourage more tolerance for the ex-combatants within the communities.

Concerning the children in the DRC, the government needs to continue working towards the establishment of a protective environment for children. In cooperation with the international agencies, the government must ensure a thorough monitoring and reporting of all the crimes against children, so that the perpetrators of these crimes could be punished. Moreover, the government needs to work towards the prevention of the recruitment and abuse of children. This prevention can be done by developing and upholding a new, perhaps a more detailed, Action Plan. Also, to ensure the proper treatment of children, the DRC must release all of its under-aged prisoners as they cannot be held criminally responsible for their actions in the time of conflict under the Congolese law.

The last recommendation for the government of the DRC is to continue the prosecution of all individuals responsible for the abuse, recruitment, and other violations of children. The impunity of the perpetrators of heinous crimes against children must end as soon as possible. The rightful prosecution can be achieved through the national court rulings or cooperation with the ICC and their investigations. Not only the prosecution of these individuals helps to end impunity, but it also serves as a deterrent to the ones that are considering perpetrating such crimes themselves.

The second set of recommendations is meant for the United Nations and the humanitarian agencies which are active in the DRC. First of all, the UN must, through the MONUSCO, continue to support the establishment and consolidation of peace in the country. Furthermore, the MONUSCO is capable of negotiating with the armed groups within the country, and therefore it must continue in its negotiations. During the negotiations, it must demand that the armed groups follow the international and national law and quit recruiting and abducting children for their cause. Also, the MONUSCO must continue its current efforts in the field of child DDR and support national policies targeted at the protection of children.

The other international organizations involved in the child DDR need to ensure a proper implementation of the DDR programs they are running. Firstly, they must address the funding issues the majority of programs are facing. They must raise awareness about the topic of child soldiers and the importance of their demobilization and reintegration. Moreover, the international organizations in charge of the implementation of the child DDR must plan their programs accordingly to the funding and they must allocate the resources to

each component of the programs accordingly. The improper allocation of funds can be prevented through the creation of comprehensive DDR plans with clearly set goals, deadlines, and funding prospects.

Secondly, the international organizations must guarantee the universal inclusivity for all of the children who require the demobilization and reintegration. The "one weapon one combatant" policy must be canceled in the case of children because as can be seen from the statistics about child soldiers in the DRC, at least one half of the children associated with the armed groups obtain a supporting role within the armed group and does not have any access to weapons. Furthermore, the child DDR programs must be prepared to include the female ex-combatants, because the female ex-combatants tend to be more vulnerable and in need of long-term assistance.

Most important of all, the international actors who design and support the reintegration processes need to tailor the programs according to the needs of the local communities. The case of the DRC presents an excellent example of the importance of the tailored child DDR programs. The children who participated in the Congolese child DDR were ill-prepared for the return to their communities, because they received an improper vocational training and because of the improper allocation of resources. The reception of the improper training later forced the children to accept exploitative work offers or to consider reentering into the armed structures. This problem can be readily resolved by researching the requirements of the community into which the children are reintegrated. By conducting research and community assessment before the reintegration phase, the organizations could provide a more suitable vocational training and material aid to the returnees. Thus, the former child soldiers would be able to sustain themselves financially and to contribute to the community, which could also increase the community trust in the children.

The last recommendation is connected to the stigmatization and marginalization of the children. The international organizations need to dedicate more time and resources to the reintegration component to avoid the negative feelings towards the children. In the DRC, most of the communities did not fully accept the returnees due to the widespread superstitions about the former child soldiers. The superstitions can be overturned by a higher inclusion of the community and family into the reintegration process. If the families of the ex-combatants, the community leaders, and educators were more included in and supportive

of the reintegration process, the irrational fears would eventually disappear from the communities.

Conclusion

Children in conflict zones all over the world are struggling to live their lives to the fullest due to their firsthand experiences with most abominable crimes. The children with such experiences are mostly the children that are or formerly were associated with armed groups. Their only chance to escape the lives in the armed groups and to leave the despicable experience behind is their reintegration into the civil society. The reintegration of these children can be done through the implementation of carefully considered and carefully planned DDR programs. However, as the analysis of the DDR efforts in the DRC above indicates, it is not always possible to achieve a successful reintegration through the participation in the DDR programs, especially in the case of former child soldiers. At the same time, some new policies and decision-making procedures could change the child DDR for the better, and thousands of children worldwide could benefit from such change.

The case study of the DRC presents a practical example of the DDR process due to many reasons. The DRC is one of the most notorious countries due to its extremely insecure environment and due to the long history of the recruitment of child soldiers. The DDR in the DRC has now been running more than twenty years and encountered most of the challenges possible.

To come back to the literature on the subject of child soldiers, the case study of child soldiers in the DRC connects to them perfectly. When taking a look at motivations for the recruitment of children in the DRC, they are very similar to what Bloom and Horgan and Kyiala describe in their research. The push and pull factors for children to become involved with the military structures are globally consistent. All in all, all of the literature dedicated to the phenomenon of child soldiers depicts very similar circumstances under which the children who later experienced life with armed groups grew up. The circumstances usually include violence, economic difficulties, and other structural and cultural flaws. This kind of environment creates a perfect basis for the recruitment or abduction of children, and the DRC, especially in its Eastern regions, is a sad example of that. The second part of the literature focuses on the DDR programs and their challenges. Most of the challenges and the lessons which need to be learned from these challenges can be seen in the case of the DRC as well.

The main lesson to be learned from the Congolese case is that even after a remarkably long period of the DDR implementation, peace will not be achieved if the process is not done

correctly. Of course, the analysis of the case of the DRC is not enough to generalize about all of the challenges of the DDR programs. However, some of the challenges found in the case of the DRC are consistent with the research on the subject.

The main challenge to the DDR programs overall is the incapability of the actors, which implement them to fulfill the essential preconditions for their successful implementation. Understandably, a country might find itself in a political impasse, which makes the creation of an inclusive and comprehensive peace agreement close to impossible. Nonetheless, even without a political agreement, the government of any given country should be able to provide security for its citizens. This is not the case of the DRC. In the DRC, the poor governance and the lack of security sector reforms caused the country and its security forces to spiral out of control. Furthermore, due to the still-ongoing conflict over the country's natural riches and the incapability of the government to make a change, the international donors are increasingly reluctant to fund new attempts at peace processes.

The child DDR processes suffer due to the insecure environment and the lack of funding as well. However, what the case study of the DRC showed as the most challenging is the reintegration of children into their communities of origin. Disarmament and demobilization can usually be managed, but when it comes to the reintegration and protection of the child ex-combatants, the DRC and its partners fail spectacularly. All the while, the reintegration process should be the most important of the three because when it is not executed correctly, it leads the children into poverty or back to the arms of the armed groups.

The challenges the DDR is facing can be resolved through the implementation of new policies by both the national and international actors. The lessons learned from the past DDR can be used to improve the process in the future. Thus, the recommendations above aim at the realization of some necessary changes on the national level and the level of international organizations. The recommendations for the government of the DRC include the establishment of a secure environment in the whole country, the founding of the nation-wide peace education programs, and the recommendation to continue to work on the creation of a society safe for children. The recommendations for the international partners mainly call for better planning of the programs, the transparency of funding, and, most importantly, for actually connecting the former child soldiers to their communities during the reintegration phase of the DDR. The recommendations are based on the case study of the DRC. However,

the literature on the subject of child DDR suggests that most of the countries where such programs are or were implemented face very similar challenges as the DRC.

The child DDR programs in-country contexts such as the DRC are crucial for the future of the children and of the country. They can be improved through a stronger political will to protect the most vulnerable members of the population and through implementing reforms that will assure the creation of an environment that is safe for children.

The DDR programs for the child ex-combatants in the DRC can be improved through the establishment of a functional link between the organizations and communities of origin. A simple research and community assessment that would be done before the reintegration can yield tremendous benefits in the future. The former child soldiers would be able to economically sustain themselves, maybe even able to escape poverty, which led them to join the armed groups in the first place. Furthermore, the inclusion of the community and family of the child ex-combatants can not only strengthen the bonds between the families and avoid marginalization of the former combatants, but it can also subsequently help to eliminate the superstitions connected to the former child soldiers and their children in the future.

The main improvement that needs to be made in the DRC and globally to improve the child DDR is the realization that children are the future, and if they are forced to grow up under assault and witnessing atrocities, the chance that they can break the vicious circle of violence is rather slim.

List of Acronyms

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFDL	Alliance for Democratic Liberation
CNDP	National Congress for the Defence of the People
CONADER	<i>Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion</i>
CPRs	Reintegration Preparatory Centers
CPS	Child Protection Section
CVR	Community Violence Reduction
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DDRRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FARDC	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
FDLR	Federation for the Liberation of Rwanda
FNL	National Liberation Forces
ICC	International Criminal Court
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
M23	March 23 Movement
MDRP	Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program
MONUC	United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MSF	<i>Médecins sans Frontières</i>
PNDDR	National Program of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reinsertion
POC	Protection of Civilians
RCD	Congolese Rally for Democracy
STAREC	<i>Programme de Stabilisation et de Reconstruction des Zones sortant des conflits Armés</i>

TDRP	Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program
UEPNDR	<i>Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réintégration</i>
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPC	Union of Congolese Patriots

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