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Family Involvement in the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone

A Critical Examination

By Rachel Anderson, University of Aberdeen

Family Involvement in the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone: A Critical Examination

By Rachel Anderson

Since the late 1980s Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have been an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction. This was especially true of Sierra Leone's post-conflict reconstruction which has frequently been hailed a 'multilateral success story' by the international community.¹ Nevertheless, within Western-authored DDR literature there is a widespread but little interrogated assertion that, in post-conflict contexts, resettling former child soldiers with their families is always the best option for social reintegration. Family members, it is argued, are most able to provide the psychosocial support that former child soldiers require in order to successfully make the transition to civilian life in the aftermath of war.²

Drawing on recent empirical research undertaken in Sierra Leone, this chapter seeks to question the universality of this assumption. The chapter will begin with a short synopsis of the conflict and post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone followed by a brief outline of the research methods used in this study. The chapter will then provide a description of family involvement in DDR, before concluding with an examination of family and community involvement in Sierra Leone's Child Soldier DDR process.

Sierra Leone: Background and Research Design

Sierra Leone (literally 'Lion Mountains') is a relatively small country (slightly larger than Ireland) situated on the west coast of Africa. A former British Colony, it has an estimated population of just under 5.5 million. 42% of the population is under fifteen and, at the end of the war in 2002, 63% of the population was under the age of 25.³

Sierra Leone's civil war commenced in March 1991 and officially ended in January 2002. The main armed groups in the war consisted of the rebel forces known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (later joined by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) and the government forces which were comprised of the Sierra Leonean Armed Forces and the Civil Defence Force (CDF)^{1,4} The war was characterised by widespread atrocities and human rights abuses (committed by parties on all sides of the conflict) including mutilation, torture, sexual violence, child abduction, and the use of children as soldiers, sex slaves, domestic servants, porters, messengers, spies and so on.⁵ By January 2000, the war had caused over 50,000 deaths, 2,000,000 people had been internally displaced, thousands of women had been raped or forced into sexual slavery, thousands of children had been made active participants in the struggle, and an estimated 4000 people had suffered the purposeful amputation of limbs.⁶ Child Soldiers were used by factions on all sides of the conflict.

Over the last few years, policy makers and academics alike have highlighted a number of political, economic and social factors which they argue contributed to the commencement and continuance of the war. These factors include poverty; government corruption; competition for resources; poorly trained and poorly motivated armed forces; and spill-over from the Liberian civil war.⁷

Nevertheless, one explanation that has gained increased recognition in recent years is that the war represented a 'crisis of youth' in Sierra Leone brought about by the failure of the patrimonial² state in the 1990s.⁸ According to Richards, the patrimonial system of

¹ The CDF was made up of a collection of 'hunting societies' from villages across Sierra Leone. The societies were known variously as *Kamajors*, *Kapras*, *Tamaboros*, and *Donsos* depending on their location in Sierra Leone (IRIN, 2007).

² Patrimonial state' is understood in terms of Weber's model of patrimonialism where 'traditional domination develops an administration and military force which are purely personal instruments of the master' (Weber, 1978: 231). The master's authority is his personal right which he can use like any other asset. Patrimonialism is

government flourished during the Cold War when African leaders could use geopolitical position or threaten to switch allegiances in order to inveigle more aid resources from the Capitalist or Soviet systems. In the 1990s, however, it faced a double crisis. World recession reduced the price of numerous raw materials, and many of Sierra Leone's 'best sources of minerals' dried up. In addition, the end of the Cold War meant the end of sources of aid. Less money coming in meant less money to redistribute, leading to a shrinkage of the state, and consequently excluding large proportions of Sierra Leone's rural population from the patrimonial largesse that they had previously enjoyed (and that the urban population were continuing to enjoy). The rural youth population, now educated members of a 'modern trans-Atlantic culture', were reluctant to return to the subsistence agrarian existence of colonial times and sought out ways to 'reattach' themselves to the state (and its resources).

Disenchanted with the existing government, the rhetoric of the rebel leaders resonated with the rural youth, encouraging them to take up arms and providing them with justifications for using violence to overthrow the system and replace it with a 'more egalitarian' one.⁹

Criticisms of this explanation largely centre around understandings of the form of the 'state' in Sierra Leone and the extent to which 'western' explanations of the post-colonial state and societal structures of Sierra Leone (and other African states) exoticise (and demonise) aspects of African society which are in fact 'banal' when looked at in the proper historical context, and view other aspects of African society as indigenous when in fact they were created by the colonial powers.¹⁰ For example, Mamdani would argue that the use of the term 'patrimonial' in the above explanation creates a 'history by analogy' which 'privileges the European

based on the patron (master)-staff (administration/military)-subject (rest of population) axis of relations. The master is 'the ultimate patron - i.e. the politician with the most resources to redistribute' and 'government 'big persons' at the apex of political power compete to command some share of the 'national cake' which they then redistribute through their own networks of followers' (Richards, 2004: 35). In patrimonial systems the boundary between private/personal and public/political spheres is blurred (Weber, 1978).

historical experience' neglecting unique aspects of Africa's historical development.¹¹ He also asserts that many of the traditional community structures in Africa, such as chiefdoms, which are perceived to be indigenous were in fact developed by the colonial powers to aid colonial rule. The colonisers controlled the towns and left the 'native authorities' (namely chiefs and elders) to control the rural areas. In places where these tribal structures did not exist, the colonial powers created them. Mamdani goes on to assert that, following independence, civil society in Africa was deracialized but not detribalized. This meant that in post-colonial African states the urban populations, liberated from colonial control, had more freedom to enjoy their newly gained rights than the rural populations who continued to be controlled by the customary law of their 'chiefs'.¹² This, it could be argued, created the tension between urban populations and rural populations which is evident in Richards's explanation of the causes of Sierra Leone civil war.

In terms of acknowledging children's participation in armed conflict, Sierra Leone's post-conflict reconstruction was a pioneering operation as the 1999 Lomé Agreement was the first peace agreement to require that the peace process 'accord particular attention to the issue of child soldiers' and mobilise resources 'to address the special needs of these children in the existing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes'.¹³ Today, Sierra Leone's post-conflict reconstruction has been viewed as a 'multilateral success story' with the UN stating that 'Sierra Leoneans have made remarkable progress on all fronts'.¹⁴

The fact that Sierra Leone hosted the first formal child soldier DDR process and, over a decade after the end of the war, its post-conflict reconstruction has been deemed to be a success means that Sierra Leone is the ideal venue in which to study the long-term effects of child soldier DDR. This research takes a qualitative approach to the study of family

involvement in the reintegration of male former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. The study used a variety of methods of data collection including documentary analysis of DDR policy documents, and ethnographic research in the form of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and visual ethnography. In total, I undertook 17 weeks of ethnographic research across four urban locations in Sierra Leone (all of which had previously hosted Interim Care Centres (ICC) for child soldier DDR and DDR camps for the adult DDR programme)³. I conducted the research in two stages beginning with an initial two week scoping visit to Sierra Leone in November 2011 followed by 15 weeks of ethnographic field research from January to April 2012. Both fieldwork visits were facilitated by Street Child of Sierra Leone (a UK-based NGO working with street children in Sierra Leone) who acted as ‘the gatekeeper’ for my research. In order to gain an understanding of people’s experiences of child soldier DDR I conducted 40 interviews with 41 participants (one group interview with 2 NGO workers). I interviewed 15 former child soldiers, 10 NGO workers, 5 adult ex-combatants, 7 family members of former child soldiers, and 4 other people with miscellaneous roles in the conflict and DDR process (for example, local dignitaries, victims, civilians and so on). The interviews were conducted in Krio or English depending on my participant’s preference. As I am not fluent in Krio, for interviews conducted in Krio my research assistant, who also arranged a number of my interviews, acted as interpreter (except for two occasions in Makeni when two interns from another charity took on this role). Whilst not fluent I had sufficient comprehension of Krio to understand my participants’ responses therefore the interpreters were principally used to interpret my questions from English to Krio for my participants. In terms of the limitations of this study, due to the limited time-frame for my ethnographic research and the lack of female participation in Sierra Leone’s DDR

³ Koidu in the east, Makeni in the north, Freetown in the west (and the capital city) and Bo in the south.

process, this study focuses specifically on male former child soldiers in urban contexts. In addition, the majority of the child soldiers interviewed fought for the RUF (rebel faction). As mentioned previously, the aim of this study was to develop a holistic analysis of the long-term effects of family involvement in child soldier DDR. Yet, what is child soldier DDR? How does it differ from adult DDR?

Family Involvement in Child Soldier DDR: The Basics

One of the key differences between adult DDR and child soldier DDR is the level of family involvement. Family involvement in Child Soldier DDR takes place during the reintegration phase of the programme. Within the reintegration process family involvement is managed by DDR organisations in the following three stages: family tracing; community ‘sensitisation’; and ‘follow up’.¹⁵

During disarmament and demobilisation, former child soldiers are separated from their adult commanders and taken to the nearest ICC where they receive psychosocial support, education, and training designed to aid them in their transition to civilian life. Family tracing begins almost immediately following the former child soldiers’ arrival at the ICC. Once family member(s) have been located, DDR personnel begin to ‘sensitise’ the community for the former child soldiers’ return. Community sensitisation programmes are largely implemented by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and are designed to elicit local community agreement to the return of the former child soldier and facilitate community acceptance of the former child soldier. In the first instance, DDR staff explain to local community members (particularly the village elders and tribal chiefs) that, as a child, the former child soldier cannot be considered to be responsible for his or her actions during the war. The DDR staff aim to educate the community regarding children’s rights and argue that

the child soldiers should not be blamed for any heinous acts and atrocities that they have committed because they were compelled to commit these atrocities by their adult commanders.¹⁶ In addition to lessons on children's rights, traditional ceremonies (organised with the support of NGOs) are often used to facilitate community acceptance of the former child soldier.

In Sierra Leone these ceremonies tended to involve cleansing the child soldier's body in a stream to wash away his or her 'sins'. Park states that 'the purification that resulted from the cleansing represented rebirth, which would allow the community to accept the offender'.¹⁷ After the cleansing the child soldier would return to the community and confess his or her 'sins'. The child soldier's parents would also have to provide offerings to 'appease the gods'. Examples of offerings include money, a chicken, rice, tobacco, and oil. Another traditional reintegration ceremony involved pouring palm wine onto the ground to 'appease the ancestors, the dead, and the gods'.¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that these ceremonies are not unique to Sierra Leone. Honwana has described the enactment of similar ceremonies in Angola and Mozambique.¹⁹

The final stage of child soldier reintegration is 'follow-up care' and, ideally, agencies responsible for child soldier reintegration aim to arrange this care through existing community structures and child welfare systems such as the *catequista* network in Angola, or the Catholic Schools in Liberia.²⁰ The members of these local welfare systems provide psychosocial support for the former child soldiers and their families and support any family mediation needs. In cases where follow-up is undertaken by social workers and other welfare staff, the caseload is often considerably greater than the social workers can reasonably manage. As a result, volunteers are frequently left to do the follow-up visits for children who

are considered ‘low risk’. Work with volunteers, however, is difficult to sustain in the long-term and can lead to inconsistencies in care.²¹

Analysing Family Involvement Child Soldier DDR

DDR programmes for child soldiers have been relatively successful in many cases. For example in Sierra Leone, 5,038 children were demobilised and 98% of these children were reunited with parents or family relatives.²² Nevertheless a number of issues regarding family and community involvement in DDR remain unresolved, particularly with regard to definitions of ‘childhood’ and ‘family’.

Constructing ‘Childhood’

DDR policy currently conceives childhood in terms of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’s (UNCRC) definition of ‘the child’. The UNCRC definition, however, has been strongly criticised for being heavily imbued with Western conceptions of childhood as a time of innocence and play, free from responsibility. Children are regarded as naive, innocent, defenceless, vulnerable, irrational, and lacking any kind of legitimate agency. In short, children are regarded as individuals under 18 years of age. They are considered to be naive, innocent, defenceless, vulnerable, irrational, and lacking any kind of legitimate agency – the comparative negative of adults.²³ As a consequence child soldiers are viewed as victims of armed conflict with children’s participation in armed conflict being classed as one of ‘the worst forms of child labour’.²⁴ Child soldiers are therefore defined as:

Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.²⁵

This definition clashes violently with local conceptions of childhood in a large number of post-conflict societies. For example, in rural Sierra Leone, a person's status as a child or an adult is delineated not by age but by a variety of social indicators and ritual ceremonies (boys become men after 'bush training'; girls become women when they get married, and so on). In addition, children are considered an integral part of the family economy. They have responsibilities and are expected to work. Shepler maintains that 'child labour almost defines childhood in Sierra Leone. A child who does not work is a bad child'.²⁶ Some of the responsibilities allocated to Sierra Leonean children include caring for another child, fetching water, sweeping the house, doing the laundry, chasing birds away from the crops, and selling small items—such as fruit and vegetables, palm wine, and kerosene.²⁷ Moreover, in rural Sierra Leone, children are not seen as defenceless and vulnerable. Instead, they are regarded as powerful, even dangerous, beings due to their intimate connection with the spirit world.²⁸

On a further note, Rosen has highlighted that while some children are indeed forcibly recruited into armed groups, 'the vast majority of child soldiers are not'.²⁹ Many child soldiers view their military experiences as liberating (from traditional structures of dominance) and as an opportunity for social progression.³⁰ The result of this is that DDR's view of children as helpless and innocent could potentially cause child soldiers to resent or discount the DDR process and subsequently harm the prospect of the development of sustainable peace in post-conflict societies.

Forming 'Families' and Finding Alternatives

While social understandings of *childhood* create difficulties for DDR implementation, so do social understandings of *family*. Within the UN, 'family' has been defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as 'the natural and fundamental group unit of society'.³¹ More

recently discussions regarding the need (or not) to make the UN's acknowledgement of the existence of multiple forms of 'the family' in today's world more explicit by using the phrase 'family in its various forms' in official UN documents has sparked a heated debate in the General Assembly.³² DDR policy itself does not have formal definition of 'family.'³³

Nevertheless as the quotes below highlight, family reunification is classed as a key component of child soldier reintegration:

Child-centred reintegration is multi-layered and focuses on family reunification; mobilizing and enabling care systems in the community; medical screening and health care, including reproductive health services; schooling and/or vocational training; psychosocial support; and social, cultural and economic support.³⁴

Family tracing should be started at the earliest possible stage and can be carried out at the same time as other activities. Family reunification will follow after mediation and an assessment of the situation to ensure that it is quick, but thorough enough not to threaten or cause discomfort to the child.³⁵

The care and placement of children should be supervised by national or local welfare services to ensure that these children receive care that meets at least the minimum standards. The most appropriate form of placement must be determined for each child. Family care is likely to be best.³⁶

In this case, the lack of a clear definition of 'family' causes problems for DDR implementation. Bernardes notes that 'the most serious problem for anyone wishing to study family lives is their own closeness to the topic'.³⁷ Without a recognised definition, those undertaking family reunification activities are left to determine what constitutes a family. Moreover, in the absence of any other information, there is a danger that those responsible for family reunification will fall back on, what Bourdieu viewed as sociology's nemesis: common-sense.³⁸ In the case of family definitions, this means the nuclear family because, as Bernardes notes, when asked to define a family, 'the majority will, if pressed, present an

image surprisingly like sociological definitions of ‘the nuclear family.’³⁹ Indeed, this is what has happened in child soldier DDR:

Ideally, reunification will be with one or both parents. If it is not possible to reunite the child with his parents, reunification with other family members is usually the preferred alternative.⁴⁰

With regard to child soldier DDR implementation in Sierra Leone, whilst the idea of a nuclear family matched local understandings of family on a surface level (when asked what they understood family to be, participants talked about blood, children, parents, and so on), DDR’s focus on the nuclear family did not take into account the extended scope of the family in Sierra Leone:

...family actually means – well we have the nuclear family of course, I mean of course I have now an immediate family. Family actually means to have togetherness, we have to come together. Have some role to play in one’s, each and everybody’s life. And we have to be responsible for our younger ones, our ageing parents. Then of course because I mean, living a communal life, I mean, if any other family has a problem, be it good or bad, we normally go to assist. In times of burial or any merrymaking we join them. So actually, we live happily together. [Family member of Former Child Soldier].

Society in Sierra Leone extends beyond the nuclear to include entire communities under a gerontocratic kinship system. As one of my participants stated:

It [family] is important. It is. Because you know singularly, you hardly can do anything by yourself. So you need some support from the family directly. Yeah, there are certain assistance you need from family. There are some family members. There are some other assistance you need from friends or other family members, but you really need a very strong support forum. You need a family really. [Family member of Former Child Soldier].

‘The family’ is intrinsically linked with the social, political, and economic spheres of Sierra Leonean society. People tend to vote along tribal lines (Temne’s vote for the APC, Mende’s vote for the SLPP)⁴, your ability to get a job is often dependent upon your family, and your

⁴ APC is the All People’s Congress; SLPP is the Sierra Leone People’s Party.

social status is determined by your bloodline, your age, and your gender. As a result, children are usually to be found at the bottom of the social chain. They eat last, drink last, and are expected to revere their elders. To give an example, during my fieldwork I attended a party at a local medical clinic which was being held in honour of two members of staff who had recently married. A number of children were present at the party as well as the adults.

Following the speeches toasting the bride and groom, they announced that the food was going to be served. It was a lush banquet of goat, chicken, and salad. The food had already been set out onto plates and as you entered the kitchen, one of the chefs handed you a plate, you collected a drink, and then then went back to the party tent to eat. Not a single child entered the kitchen in search of food or drink until every adult had been served. In the end there were not enough plates to go round so the children shared plates and went searching for leftovers from the adult's plates once they had set them down.

From the above it is clear that there is a divergence between DDR policy understandings and local understandings of 'family' and 'childhood'. Yet, what are the ultimate implications of these conceptual disconnects between DDR policy and local understandings of 'family' and 'childhood'?

DDR's Effects: The 'It is Not Their Fault Paradox'

One of the key implications of the disconnect between DDR policy and local understandings of 'family' and 'childhood' in DDR is best illustrated by what I have termed the 'it is not their fault paradox'. As mentioned, previously, one of the main components of community sensitisation campaigns for child soldier DDR, is going to the communities and informing them that the children cannot be blamed for any of the atrocities that they committed because

they were forced to do these things by ‘evil adults’ and are ‘too young to know any better’.
This meta-narrative is imposed on both the communities and the child soldiers.⁴¹

Initially this approach would appear to have a number of benefits for the former child soldiers. After all, this approach should remove the child soldiers’ fear of reprisals from the local community if they return home. Also, if the communities accept that the former child soldiers cannot be held responsible for their actions, then surely they will easily agree to allow the former child soldiers to return home?

In part, according to two of the NGO workers who facilitated the reintegration of former child soldiers in Northern Sierra Leone, this is true.

R1: We never find any community where they say no we don’t want to see this child any longer. No, no, no, no, that doesn’t happen.

I: Because I am aware that this was common for the adult combatants that the community said: ‘this person cannot come back’ ...

R2: We were not dealing with them...

R1: We were not dealing with this category because they [the adult ex-combatants] went for the training...they did it willingly. We were only there for those who didn’t do it willingly. They [the children] were captured then they were taken away unwillingly. [Two NGO Workers].

For the former child soldiers, however, the benefits come with a cost – namely a loss of the agency they gained during wartime and a return to the pre-war social status quo.

As mentioned previously, many former child soldiers are not forcibly recruited into armed groups, instead they join voluntarily sometimes in a bid to liberate themselves from traditional structures of authority and improve their social standing. Moreover, regardless of how they joined many former child soldiers are proud of their wartime experiences:

I: How do you feel when you explain your experiences to your friends?

R: To my friends...well sometimes I feel, I feel good...because...the only explanation: At least I have done something that they have not...so, I am a man more than them...uh huh...I am a man more than them...I have done something that they could not. [Male Former Child Soldier].

For those child soldiers who are proud of their war experiences, the assertion that they are not responsible for any actions they took during the war is frustrating. Ishmael Beah highlights this in *'A Long Way Gone'* when he recounts telling one of his wartime stories to the nurse at his ICC during the DDR process:

When I finished telling Esther the story, she had tears in her eyes and she couldn't decide whether to rub my head or hug me. In the end she did neither, but said, "None of what happened was your fault. You were just a little boy, and any time you want to tell me anything, I am here to listen." She stared at me, trying to catch my eye so she could assure me of what she had just said. I became angry and regretted that I had told someone, a civilian, about my experience. I hated the "It is not your fault" line that all the staff members said every time anyone spoke about the war.

I got up, and as I started walking out of the hospital, Esther began to speak. [...] I threw the Walkman at her and left, putting my fingers in my ears so I couldn't hear her say "It is not your fault".⁴²

Whilst this may be frustrating for the former child soldiers who wish to take pride in their war experiences, one could still argue that the potential benefits for facilitating community reintegration and removing the child soldiers' fear of community reprisals would outweigh the cost of some hurt pride for a few young individuals. In reality, however, 'it is not their fault' was a very powerful phrase in Sierra Leone because it became a tool which the local elite could use to re-establish the pre-war gerontocracy.

As a volunteer worker for a street child project in Sierra Leone one phrase I regularly heard when we interacted with adult 'authority' figures on behalf of the children was *'child rights must be accompanied by child responsibilities'*. It is this notion of responsibility which

imbued the phrase ‘it is not their fault’ with so much power in the hands of the gerontocratic elite. As it appears to be generally felt in Sierra Leone that ‘rights’ should always be accompanied by ‘responsibilities’, the local elite were able to argue that if the children were too young to be held responsible for their actions during the war, then they were also too young to have a say in how their country should be run and would have to defer to their elders on political and economic matters. This, combined with the international donor-funded Paramount Chief Restoration Program (later the Chiefdom Governance Reform Programme) has led to a reassertion of the gerontocratic pre-war power structures which many scholars argue were a principal cause of Sierra Leone’s war.⁴³ Thus, we arrive at the ‘It is not their fault’ paradox; the phrase which was meant to assist child soldier reintegration has in fact assisted with the reassertion of the pre-war gerontocratic order and ultimately to the re-marginalisation of the youth population in Sierra Leone. According to one NGO worker:

The history of the young people in Sierra Leone has been one of playing major roles in crises but losing at the end, and they are conscious of that. Now elections are coming in September, November...the people you will see active are young people. But the people who will receive the least at the end of the process are the young people.

When there is war they say ‘go defend the land!’ After that they are dumped. So the situation is that the youth are constantly used, abused, misused, and neglected at the end of the process...easy! And who are using them? The older people...always, it’s the older people [...] So they keep saying, every time they say... we cannot be part of the process. We are not educated enough, we are not smart enough, we are not experienced enough for the job. But if the job has to do with fighting, they give it to us. But if the job is of some other form, they don’t give it to us. But yet they don’t give us the scholarships to get the education...and when we get the education they will grant you...they still don’t give us a job, they say we don’t have the experience. But how do we get the experience if we don’t get the job? You see? It’s so tedious. [NGO Worker].

Conclusion

In conclusion, Sierra Leone’s post-conflict reconstruction has been acclaimed as an international peacebuilding success story.⁴⁴ Yet child soldier DDR policy’s lack of

understanding of local family dynamics in Sierra Leone has contributed to the re-marginalisation of Sierra Leone's youth population and facilitated the gerontocratic elite's return to power. On this basis, given that youth dissatisfaction with the pre-war governance structures has regularly been cited as a key cause of Sierra Leone's civil war, one has to question the long-term sustainability of peace in Sierra Leone. Surely the reintroduction of these gerontocratic structures in post-conflict Sierra Leone has the potential to reignite conflict between the youths and the elders in the future?

From the argument above, it is clear that whilst the policy of swift family reunification in child soldier DDR has some benefits in terms of facilitating community acceptance of former child soldiers, DDR policy's lack of attention to local family dynamics can result in unintended and counterproductive consequences both during implementation and in the long term. It is furthermore evident that, to facilitate the DDR process, some boundaries for 'family' and 'childhood' need to be drawn within child soldier DDR policy, however, there is a clear need for these boundaries to take local factors (both the positive and the negative ones) into account. In the context of peacebuilding, it is important to remember that 'local' does not automatically mean 'better'. As we have seen above, some local structures and understandings disadvantage and marginalise key sections of the local populations (such as young people) and are therefore more likely to hinder than help the development of sustainable peace in post-conflict societies. I would therefore argue that in order to promote sustainable peace in post-conflict contexts, Child Soldier DDR programmes should, at times, seek to challenge rather than accommodate some local social dynamics.

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