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Project report

MACS390, “Media, war and peace”

Autumn session, 2011

Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS390_11outline.pdf

Elizabeth Lathlean prepared (1) an information pack in the form of brochure and (2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project. The brochure starts on the next page, followed by the dialogue.

- This document is located at http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS390_11tops/.

Ten FACTS you should know about the Democratic Republic of the Congo and child soldiers

11. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been engaged in conflict for over a decade. This constant fighting 'is the war the world has largely forgotten.'¹
12. Ongoing conflict in DRC is between the government and various rebel groups. The rebel groups fight largely amongst themselves for shares in the country's gold, diamonds, copper, timber and other resources.²
13. The conflict has transformed many of DRC's children into refugees and internally displaced people. Constantly on the move, they are robbed of education, health care, and the chance for a stable childhood. Many children are also caught up in the conflict as child soldiers.³
14. Nine groups in DRC have been identified by the United Nations (UN) as parties that recruit or use child soldiers in armed conflict.⁴
15. DRC is thought to have the world's largest numbers of child soldiers.⁵
16. Children as young as eight have been recruited for service.⁶
17. Recruitment methods vary from voluntary service based on pay, to national or tribal motivations, coercion and abduction. Children are often forced into armed conflict by extreme poverty, homelessness, and abandonment.⁷
18. Children are used as soldiers, spies, porters and sex slaves. It is estimated that 30 to 40 per cent of children in the armed forces are girls, who are often used as sex slaves for extended periods.⁸
19. A series of resolutions have been issued by the UN Security Council condemning the use of child soldiers and proposing measures to stop child recruitment.⁹
20. The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) has been working in the country since November 1999, assisting in ceasefires, the transition to national elections and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of those involved in the conflict.¹⁰



“When they came to my village, they asked my older brother whether he was ready to join the militia. He was just 17 and he said no; they shot him in the head. Then they asked me if I was ready to sign, so what could I do – **I didn't want to die.**”

– Boy, aged 13²⁰

“All the children forcibly recruited in armed forces and groups, and especially young girls, are traumatized by their experience and need special attention. **It is essential that they all live the life of a child.**”

– Pierrette Vu Thi, UNICEF Representative in DRC²¹

CONGO'S CHILDREN

victims of war and peace

REINTEGRATION: hope for the future and a new life after war



DDR Defined¹⁹

Disarmament involves the collection of weapons, ammunition and explosives from both soldiers and ordinary citizens in a country. All items collected are documented and stored, or thrown away. It also involves developing programs so that the country can be responsible in managing its weapons.

Demobilization is the formal and controlled release of combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage involves processing individual people in temporary centres and gathering troops in special camps. The second stage of demobilization is about providing support for the soldiers when they first go back into the community. This can mean providing money or things that they need, and can last for up to one year.

Reintegration is the process by which former soldiers become normal citizens. They receive employment and start earning money. Reintegration involves social and economic issues. It normally takes place 'locally', within the communities that former soldiers belong to. It does not occur within a set time-frame. Overall, reintegration is part of the development of a country and its sense of national responsibility for what has happened. This means that to properly reintegrate people requires long-term support.

Understanding DDR

The demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process aims to contribute to the stability and security of a post-conflict environment. It seeks to deal with the problems that arise when ex-combatants, such as former child soldiers, are left without support networks or livelihoods. It allows them to actively participate in the peace process, and builds the nation's capacity for long-term peace and security.¹¹ Lack of funding and resources mean these programs are not as effective as they should be. Girls are often excluded from DDR programs. As well as being involved in combat, girl soldiers are often subject to rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Such treatment often sees them stigmatized by their communities when they seek to return.¹²

Change is Possible

More progress needs to be made if children in DRC are to regain their childhood, and a hope for a future outside the life of a child soldier. Greater support for disarmed child soldiers is needed to allow for effective reintegration and acceptance by communities. When faced with choosing between destitution at home or paid military service, many former child soldiers re-enlist.¹⁷ If children are not given access to education or skills training, many will continue to return to the bush and the only life they know – the life of a soldier.

The existence of child soldiers is a clear contravention of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁸ No child should be taken away from their family and denied the fundamental freedoms that we take for granted.

DDR in the DRC

MONUC, which includes DDR in its mandate, is a peacekeeping operation established by the UN Security Council in 1999.¹³ In early 2004, the transitional government adopted a national policy for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children in armed groups. This reinforced the commitment that those under 18 should not be recruited into or present in any armed forces.¹⁴ Since the launching of the DDR program, 36,000 child soldiers have been released from service.¹⁵ Despite the tireless work of MONUC and various NGOs in DRC thousands of children remain in the armed forces and groups. Recruitment is no longer systematic but it still continues.¹⁶

Act now. Get informed. Speak up. Be their voice.

MACS390 Project Report

**Reintegration of Congolese Child
Soldiers**

Dialogue and Reference List

Student Number: 3274688

Tutor: Brian Martin

Dialogue

Discussion between two university students. Pseudonyms have been used.

Rachel: Do you ever watch the news and find yourself wondering how much of what we're seeing is truth and how much is just a sanitised, Western version of the truth?

Adam: Or wonder what they aren't telling us at all? I do that all the time. There are so many tragic things going on in our world that we just never hear about. Why do you ask?

Rachel: I've just finished making a brochure to inform people about child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. DRC has the highest number of child soldiers in the world,¹ and we don't even hear about it.² Did you know there are about 300,000 child soldiers worldwide, and 8,000 of them are in the eastern part of DRC?³ We're happy to spend money debating whether or not Australia should have a bill of rights.⁴ Why not actually take that money and use it to help kids who have no rights? We've ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵ but we are happy to let other countries ignore it.

¹ Amnesty International 2003, *Democratic republic of the Congo: Children at War*, accessed 1/5/2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR62/034/2003/en>

² According to Bell (2006) '[t]he conflict in DRC no longer makes waves or headlines. Perhaps because the war has gone on so long, or because the situation has at times seemed so hopeless, it is the war the world has largely forgotten.' (Bell, M 2006, 'Child Alert: Democratic Republic of Congo', *UNICEF*, p.2.)

³ Pauletto, E and Patel, P 2010, 'Challenging Child Soldier DDR Processes and Policies in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, vol.16, p.36.

⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission 2010, *National Human Rights Consultation*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/letstalkaboutrights/index.html>.

⁵ United Nations 2011, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', *United Nations Treaty Collection*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en

Adam: Well, Australia cannot actually enforce international law.⁶ But didn't you tell me the other day that DRC have made a renewed commitment that children shouldn't be present in armed forces?⁷

Rachel: Yes, but that was in 2004! I was shocked when I found out that DRC ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990,⁸ and they ratified the optional protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2001.⁹ Why haven't we seen more change?

Adam: I can tell you feel quite passionately about this. Can I look at the brochure? If we're going to discuss this, I probably need to be a bit more informed.

Rachel: Sure.

Rachel passes brochure to Adam, and scrutinises him closely as he reads.

Adam: I can see what you were getting at before about the media keeping us in the dark. I had no idea things were so bad in DRC. Good work! Where did you manage to find all the information?

⁶ Blay, S, Piotrowicz, R and Tsamenyi, M (eds.) 2005, *Public International Law: An Australian Perspective* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press, Australia.

⁷ United Nations General Assembly and Security Council 2005, *Child and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary General*, p.5.

⁸ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CROC) defines 'child' as any person under 18 years. The recruitment and use of child soldiers is in clear contravention to a number of the articles in the convention. These include a child's right to education, family life, accurate birth records, safety, and protection from abuse and neglect. The minimum age for military recruitment is set at 15 years. (Hughes, L 2010, 'Can International Law Protect Child Soldiers', *Peace Review*, vol.12, no.3, p.401.)

United Nations 2011, 'Convention on the Rights of the Child', *United Nations Treaty Collection*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en

⁹ The Optional Protocol raises the minimum age for military recruitment to 18 years. (Hughes, L 2010, 'Can International Law Protect Child Soldiers', *Peace Review*, vol.12, no.3, p.401.)
United Nations 2011, 'Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict', *United Nations Treaty Collection*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&lang=en

Rachel: Mainly on the internet and in journal articles. The UN has heaps of great websites that were really useful for getting factual, up-to-date information.¹⁰ The one thing I couldn't find was a positive story about a former Congolese child soldier who had been reintegrated and now had a definite sense of hope for the future. I guess that just shows I'm onto a topic that is actually really important.

Adam: That's amazing, and so sad. I certainly think the brochure is fine without an uplifting anecdote though. I found your 'ten facts' section really helpful.¹¹ It set the scene about what was going on in the Congo before I started learning about reintegration and DDR.

Rachel: Thanks. I actually tried to break the brochure down using one of de Bono's techniques.

Adam: Is he the coloured hats man?

Rachel: That's him. The brochure relates to his six thinking hats technique.¹² Can I talk you through what I've done to see if it makes sense?

Adam: I'm don't really know anything about it, but I'm happy to listen.

Rachel: That's ok. So, in the 'ten facts' section I wanted people to get an overall understanding of the information. That is the facts white hat.¹³ Then the images of the

¹⁰ See for example, UNICEF: unite for children 2010, *Forced Recruitment of Child Soldiers in DRC*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_52762.html; United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre 2009, *What is DDR?*, accessed 1/5/2011, <http://www.unddr.org/whatisddr.php>; United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre 2009, *Country Programme: Democratic Republic of the Congo*, accessed 1/5/2011, <http://www.unddr.org/countryprogrammes.php?c=25>

¹¹ Comments made by Adam about the brochure are reflective of the view expressed by those who were asked to provide feedback on it.

¹² de Bono Consulting 2009, *Six Thinking Hats From Edward de Bono*, accessed 4/5/2011, http://www.debonoconsulting.com/Six_Thinking_Hats.asp

¹³ de Bono Consulting 2009, *White Hat Thinking from Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.debonoconsulting.com/white-hat-thinking.asp>

Congolese children generate feelings and emotion, which is the red hat.¹⁴ The ‘DDR in the DRC’ section links to the black hat, which is about being cautious.¹⁵ Here the readers have their attention drawn to the enormity of the task of reintegration in DRC. The inside heading and the quote from the UNICEF representative create the sense that reintegration is achievable, which reflects the positive yellow hat.¹⁶ In suggesting that ‘change is possible’ I start to throw around some green hat new ideas.¹⁷ The little line at the bottom: ‘Act now. Get informed. Speak up. Be their voice’ is my big picture, blue hat message.¹⁸ Hopefully the reader will be wondering: ‘Where to from here?’ I suggest an answer.

Adam: I’m not too familiar with all the colours, but you certainly had me thinking in a whole heap of different ways. I’m just still not quite sure what you mean by the title: ‘victims of war and peace’? How can they be victims of peace? I thought peace is what they are aiming for.

Rachel: Peace is good, but it needs to be sustainable. I had hoped to create an information pack about how people could get involved in the reintegration process. However, I realised that people aren’t likely to support an issue they don’t know about. The media rarely report on child soldiers in the Congo. We occasionally hear the stories of hope, especially from former Ugandan child soldiers, but we don’t really hear about their ongoing struggles.

Adam: Yeah, I guess that is true. I recently saw a Watoto show about former child soldiers from Gulu in Uganda.¹⁹ If that kind of thing is still happening in the Congo why

¹⁴ de Bono Consulting 2009, *Red Hat Thinking from Edward de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.debonoconsulting.com/red-hat-thinking.asp>

¹⁵ de Bono Consulting 2009, *Black Hat Thinking from Edward de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.debonoconsulting.com/black-hat-thinking.asp>

¹⁶ de Bono Consulting 2009, *Yellow Hat Thinking from Edward de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.debonoconsulting.com/yellow-hat-thinking.asp>

¹⁷ de Bono Consulting 2009, *Green Hat Thinking from Edward de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.debonoconsulting.com/green-hat-thinking.asp>

¹⁸ de Bono Consulting 2009, *Blue Hat Thinking from Edward de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats*, accessed 4/5/2011, <http://www.debonoconsulting.com/blue-hat-thinking.asp>

¹⁹ Watoto 2011, *Restore Tour*, accessed 5/6/2011, <http://www.watoto.com/restoretour/>

aren't we hearing about it more? The 'Invisible Children'²⁰ movement was quite big a while ago, but it seems these children are still invisible.

Rachel: Which is why I'm trying to make them visible once more. The invisible children now have faces.

Adam: Well you certainly chose good pictures to represent Congo's children. In fact, I love the whole layout you have used for the brochure. It is really effective in drawing the reader in. The picture of the boy...²¹ his eyes keep staring at me. They're empty. There is no life in those eyes.

Rachel: A lot of people have said that. I wanted the pictures to be the face of such a hard hitting topic. They are Congo's victims. What did you think of the language used in the brochure?

Adam: I didn't really notice the language, which I guess means it was good. It wasn't overly technical. I felt like I was learning about big and complex issues, but the learning wasn't hard.

Rachel: That's good to hear. Initially the language I used was a lot more complex. When that was pointed out to me I simplified it a lot so that it would be more accessible to a wider audience. There is no point talking about the need to support DDR if no one understands what it is.

Adam: That's true. I'm impressed that you've gone to such lengths to get feedback on the brochure. Do you actually believe it, though? I mean, what do you think about DDR as a reintegration method? Does it work?

Rachel: I haven't made my mind up yet. On the plus side, the three stage approach is likely to be more successful than reintegration in isolation. It also helps that DDR

²⁰ Sifty & Sifty 2011, *Invisible Children*, accessed 5/6/2011, <http://www.invisiblechildren.com/>

²¹ Time Photos 2007, *Congo's Child Soldiers*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1673770_1469077,00.html

acknowledges the need for national and community involvement.²² However, that is also a negative. DRC is a prime example of the challenges of implementing DDR when there is still ongoing conflict.²³ There isn't enough widespread support to make it work. MONUC has been in the country since 1999.²⁴ They have made some difference,²⁵ but overall DDR just doesn't seem to be working, especially for child soldiers. I do find it interesting that it is the method most favoured by the UN, and has featured prominently in their mandates for over twenty years.^{26 27}

Adam: You said it is the 'most favoured' method. Are there other ways of reintegrating child soldiers?

Rachel: Yeah, I've found a couple. They aren't as widely used as DDR. There is a method called 'Rebuilding Hope' being used by an NGO in Mozambique to promote psychological assistance and community reintegration after sixteen years of war. They focus on using a mixture of community leaders, local healers and Western-trained psychologists.²⁸

Adam: That sounds like a more grass-roots approach. But it would still rely a lot on community support.

²² United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2010, *DDR in peace operations: a retrospective*, p.4.

²³ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2010, *DDR in peace operations: a retrospective*, p.8-9.

²⁴ MONUC: Public Information Division 2009, *Briefing Materials*.

²⁵ MONUC (United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) is a peacekeeping operation established by the UN Security Council in 1999. MONUC has assisted in ceasefires, the transition to national elections, and the implementation of DDR, which is included in its mandate. (MONUC: Public Information Division 2009, *Briefing Materials*.)

²⁶ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2010, *DDR in peace operations: a retrospective*, p.2.

²⁷ This analysis uses de Bono's PMI thinking method. PMI stands for 'Plus/Minus/Interesting' and is a useful method for weighing the pros, cons and implications of a decision or course action. (de Bono, E 1992, *Serious Creativity: using the power of lateral thinking to create new ideas*, Harper Collins, London.)

²⁸ Human Rights Education Association, *Crimes of War – Educator's Guide: Child Soldiers*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=128

Rachel: That's true. I also found the Companion Recovery model, which seems a lot more stringent. It actually has nine 'modules' that focus on the profound catastrophic trauma experienced by child soldiers.²⁹

Adam: It actually has modules? What are they?

Rachel: I've got them here if you want to look.

Adam: (*reading*) 'Overwhelming events, encapsulation, somatisation, recognition, release, resilience, integration, new-self, rebuilding'.³⁰ Sounds very... structured.

Rachel: My thoughts exactly. I don't think it has been used very widely yet.³¹ It will be interesting to see what level of success they have. I suppose anything that works in creating a better life for former child soldiers is a good thing.

Adam: After reading your brochure I certainly agree with that!

²⁹ Gregory, J and Embery, D 2009, 'Reducing the Effects of Profound Catastrophic Trauma for Former Child Soldiers: Companion Recovery Model', *Traumatology*, vol.15, no.1, p. 52.

³⁰ Gregory, J and Embery, D 2009, 'Reducing the Effects of Profound Catastrophic Trauma for Former Child Soldiers: Companion Recovery Model', *Traumatology*, vol.15, no.1, p. 56.

³¹ Gregory, J and Embery, D 2009, 'Reducing the Effects of Profound Catastrophic Trauma for Former Child Soldiers: Companion Recovery Model', *Traumatology*, vol.15, no.1, p. 52.

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Images

- **Group of Congolese boys:** Time Photos 2007, *Congo's Child Soldiers*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1673770_1469083,00.html
- **Congolese boy at fence:** Time Photos 2007, *Congo's Child Soldiers*, accessed 1/5/2011, http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1673770_1469077,00.html
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