RESTORING SHATTERED CHILDHOODS, A DEBT TO HUMANITY:

Learning from the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process for Children in Sierra Leone

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“The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference”

Elie Wiesel, 1990

This thesis is submitted for obtaining the Joint Master’s Degree in International Humanitarian Action. By submitting the thesis, the author certifies that the text is from her own hand, does not include the work of someone else unless clearly indicated, and that the thesis has been produced in accordance with proper academic practices.
Abstract

An attempt to bring together a set of conceptual and theoretical issues related to the programming of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process for child soldiers in Sierra Leone. By questioning if the programmes have considered cultural and contextual specificities, this is a qualitative case study based in the text analysis of secondary data from a number of different researchers and practitioners from the field. The latter will be done by correlating conceptual and theoretical dilemmas based in the definition of child soldiers and their navigational skills, and will be analyzed under four topics chosen to present the cultural and contextual specificities of this case. Conclusions and recommendations will leave in evidence the fact that in the case of Sierra Leone, the DDR programme for children did not prioritize a cross-cultural approach and deliberately ignored navigational skills from former child soldiers, it delegitimized local initiatives for reintegration, failed in promoting a gender-sensitive component in the programme, and demonstrates a lack of cooperation between humanitarian and development agencies, which have been insistently westernized. The case of Sierra Leone is an interesting experience from which much can be learned, but mostly because it highlights the fact that each case is different and the urgency of considering the improvement of aid in a more individualized perspective.
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Writing this thesis has been a long and challenging process. The use of child soldiers in war has been for many years a special concern for me, and the possibility to be able to contribute to provide healing services for children who’s childhood has been shattered, has been my main driver of interest in the field of humanitarian action. As Mats said it, it is clear how I feel sorry for the weak, which has probably led me to not be completely neutral in my argumentation. His strict and pushy supervision has provided me with important tools to be critical with my very own views regarding this subject. One recommendation was to tone down the strong perception I have against the abhorrent use of child soldiers in conflicts, as it might not always be as bad as it sounds, and his experience in this matter is a strong incentive for me to one day be able to do that. However, my lack of field experience and close relation to former child soldiers impedes me to be able to succeed in presenting this thesis with a more neutral tone. I very much appreciate his time and dedication in my thesis, and hope I can continue learning from him in the years to come, as I am sure it will make me be a better professional. Thank you for being, in your own words, a “pain in the neck”. Lars, your constant support, availability and words of encouragement have empowered me in the most difficult moments of this research process. For that I am very thankful.

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To that one child that I might be able to give a hand to one day, I might not be able restore deprived childhoods, but I will dedicate my professional life to try and stick as much pieces as possible back together. You are my inspiration and my debt to humanity.
List of Abbreviations

AFRC – Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child
CDF – Civil Defense Forces
CPN – Child Protection Network
CWC – Child Welfare Committee
CREPS – Complementary Rapid Education for primary Schools
CEIP – Community Education Investment Programme
DDR – Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ECHO – European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Office
ECOMOG – Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
GBV – Gender Based Violence
GBR – Human Rights Law
IHL – International Humanitarian Law
IDDRS – Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
ICCs – Interim Care Centres
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
NCDDR – National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PKO – Peacekeeping Operations
RUF – Revolutionary United Front
RSLMF – Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces
SLA – Sierra Leonean Army
STDs – Sexually Transmitted Diseases
TSA – Transitional Safety-net Allowance
TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Sierra Leone
UNAMSIL – United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. i

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................................. ii

List of Abbreviations ........................................................................................................................... iii

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 1

1. Research Process ............................................................................................................................. 3
   1.1. Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 3
   1.2. Aim and objectives ................................................................................................................... 4
   1.3. Relevance to the field of Humanitarian Action ....................................................................... 4
   1.4. Methodology, method for analysis and limitations ................................................................. 8

2. Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1. Ethical and normative dilemmas regarding child soldiers ....................................................... 9
   2.2. The Victim Paradigm on child soldiers ................................................................................... 11
   2.3. Child Soldiers in this research ............................................................................................... 13
   2.4. Theoretical Framework .......................................................................................................... 14
   2.5. Social navigation and power .................................................................................................. 14

3. Background to the research ............................................................................................................ 17
   3.1. DDR general description/debates ......................................................................................... 17
   3.2. The case of Sierra Leone ....................................................................................................... 20

4. Research Analysis ........................................................................................................................... 25
   4.1. Factors enabling/inhibiting children to cope with the socio-cultural and political situation of the country, and its effects in the DDR process. ...................... 26
      4.1.1. Contextual specificities related to the socio-political and economical situation for the children .......................................................................................................................... 26
      4.1.2. Gender specificities related to the socio-political and economical context 29
      4.1.3. Cultural specificities related to the socio-cultural and structural factors 31
      4.1.4. Cultural specificities related to the socio-cultural and structural factors in terms of gender relations .................................................................32
   4.2. The role of the local communities in DDR programme .......................................................... 35
4.2.1. Contextual Specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme .............................................................. 35
4.2.2. Contextual specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme under a gender perspective ......................... 37
4.2.3. Cultural specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme ........................................................................... 37
4.2.4. Cultural specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme under a gender perspective .............................. 40
4.3. Child participation in DDR programme .................................................. 41
4.3.1. Contextual Specificities regarding child participation in the DDR programme .................................................................................. 41
4.3.2. Contextual specificities regarding child participation in the DDR programmes under a gender-sensitive perception.......................... 43
4.3.3. Cultural Specificities regarding participation of children in the DDR programme ............................................................................. 44
4.4. Exit strategy from the DDR programme .................................................. 45
4.4.1. Contextual Specificities kept in mind for the programme’s exit strategy from the country ........................................................................ 46
4.4.2. Contextual specificities regarding the programme’s exit strategy from the country under a gender-sensitive perception ...................... 48
4.4.3. Peacekeeping personnel as a threat for women and girls .................. 49
4.4.4. Cultural Specificities related to the programme’s exit strategy from the country .................................................................................. 50
4.4.5. Cultural specificities related to the exit strategy from the programme, from a gender perspective .......................................................... 51
5. Discussion/comparison ............................................................................ 53
5.1. General comments on the DDR programme ........................................... 53
5.2. Gender-sensitive approach ..................................................................... 54
5.3. Social navigation, how to cope with realities after the war and DDR ended ......................................................................................... 56
5.4. Community and family approach .......................................................... 57
5.5. In relation to the exit strategy designed for the programme ................. 58
5.6. Lessons learned and the problem with international standards .......... 59
Conclusions ...........................................................................................................................................60

6. Challenges and Recommendations .................................................................................................62
   6.1. Acknowledging contextual and cultural specificities when programming DDR for children. .................................................................................................................................62
   6.2. Allowing communities to be as involved as possible in the programming of the DDR, and encouraging child participation in them........63
   6.3. Further promoting and encouraging the cooperation between humanitarian settings and developmental strategies .........................................................63
   6.4. Acknowledging gender-sensitivity as a fundamental driver for constructing a more complete DDR .................................................................................................................64
   6.5. Acknowledging and identifying the risks posed by humanitarian interventions towards the population .............................................................................................................64

Annex #1: Stages of the DDR process in Sierra Leone .................................................................68
Annex #2: Diagrams on Disarmament and Demobilization Stages ............................................69
Annex #2: Total disarmed and demobilized by age group in districts, by NCDDR .........................70
Annex #3, Weapons and ammunition collected in all districts, by NCDDR ......70
INTRODUCTION

According to the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Office, there are 1 billion children living in conflict-affected areas around the world, 7 million children are refugees, worldwide up to 13.7 million children have been displaced from their countries, 28.5 million children that have been affected from conflict were unable to attend primary school in 2013, and there were 250,000 child combatants in 20013 (Echo 2014). Children are deployed in 75% of all armed conflicts around the world. Out of them, 80% are children under 15 years old (War Child 2007). This research can only focus on a small amount of children affected by armed conflicts in the world, which is why the focus will be on child combatants and the ways the humanitarian agencies handle their Disarmament, Demobilization, Reinsertion, and Reintegration – DDR processes into society.

A more specific explanation of the DDR programmes will be given throughout the research analysis, and it is important to have in mind these four concepts in matters of understanding the scope of the research. Based on the definition of the international community, this research will understand each of the elements as following: Disarmament means collecting, documenting, and supervising the disposal of the weapons used in armed conflicts, including the creation of programmes in charge of responsible arms management. Demobilization refers to the process for combatants of formally exiting the armed group or force they were taking part of in the conflict. In the first stage of demobilization, former combatants might need to be aided by providing them with temporary camps specially designated for this process. After this stage has been covered, a package called reinsertion is usually handed over to the former combatants. Reinsertion is basically the material immediate assistance given to the former combatants; it is used to cover basic and immediate needs, and has been used as a bridge between Demobilization and Reintegration, which is why it won’t be specifically mentioned as a stage. On the other hand, Reintegration refers to a long-term process “by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status (...) is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily
taking place in communities at the local level” (Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR 2006, p.25).

As the relation between emergency response activities and development plans becomes crucial and in this case regarding DDR programmes for children, is absolutely necessary, humanitarian agencies face the responsibility of assisting governments in designing and implementing programmes in the countries in need. Depending on the government’s capacity to implement them, the agencies will have a different role to play in each case. However, it becomes fundamental to include cultural and contextual specificities into the programmes in order to build an even more appropriate assistance and avoid doing more harm than good to the population receiving the aid, which is a growing concern in the humanitarian spectrum. One way to make the latter possible is to emphasize and include local initiatives, which may be based in traditional ways to face the consequences of war for children. Also, it is important to recognize the specific contexts where war is taking or took place. “Local society and culture offers a vast pool of tools and resources that can be used by external actors in order to make development and emergency projects efficient. However cultural resources are often ignored and at times even shunned” (Utas, 2009, p 6).

Programmes of DDR have been used as a tool to achieve peace and bring former combatants into civilian life. Nevertheless, this technical solution to organized violence should also be treated as a complex and long-term challenge. Among other issues, “it remains largely unclear what it means to be successfully reintegrated in a post-conflict context (…) it is critical to examine the wider socio-economic and political context into which young people reintegrate” Denov (2011, pp.194). It is crucial to bear in mind different structural factors that could actually make a difference in the way DDR programmes could be approached to, as well as to question how universally applicable, effective and appropriate it is to implement international standards in different settings.
CHAPTER ONE

“Some of the world’s most important research has been done by those who persevered in the face of indifference or even hostility, because they never lost faith in their vision” (Booth et al. 2008, p.15)

1. Research Process
The first chapter of this research will give an overview of the research process, by drawing up first the research questions that will be answered throughout the text, which must be kept in mind for understanding the structure of chapter four and the analysis in chapter five. Secondly, the aim and objectives of the research will be presented. The third part of the chapter will be dedicated to present how this research is relevant for the humanitarian action field, in matters of practice by linking it to the challenges of humanitarian action, child protection and DDR programmes’ design, implementation and monitoring, and by providing a link to the learning outcomes of this master. After presenting the latter, the method and methodology chosen for this research will be presented along with the limitations found in this regard, also providing links to the discussion about the relevance of the research in humanitarian action. The final part of the chapter will provide a thesis outline, where the structure of the research will be drawn up.

1.1. Research Questions
Based on what has been said in the introduction, this research aims to answer the following question: How have cultural and contextual specificities been thought of in the DDR programme for children in Sierra Leone? In order to answer it, qualitative research of the local traditions and specific contextual situation of the country in the years where the conflict took place is needed, in order to draw up conclusions on how the experience of Sierra Leone might share interesting insights regarding future planning of DDR programmes for children in different countries. The latter will be divided into the following sub questions:
To what extent did the DDR programme in the country use cultural and contextual specificities in order to include child combatants in the process?

Were local initiatives included in the DDR programme?

In matters of child participation in the programme, how was their agency promoted, based on their experience in the armed forces/groups?

How could a cross-cultural and contextual perspective contribute to the agencies’ designed exit strategy, by acknowledging the complexities of the social world of the beneficiaries?

And related to the latter, how can the local knowledge and culture be instrumentalised in the work of the agencies on a general level beyond the case of Sierra Leone?

1.2. Aim and objectives
This research’s aim is to study whether cultural and contextual specificities in Sierra Leone have been thought of in the DDR set-ups for children after the 11-year conflict in the country. This with the objective to consider what contributions can be highlighted for future approaches to DDR programmes in other countries. Specifically important for this research, will be how children managed to cope with a socio-cultural and political environment from which they were excluded when being child combatants and how humanitarian agencies involved in the DDR process managed to deal with them; to highlight the role played by local communities and if their own traditions or initiatives were thought of and included in the formal programmes; to study whether children were able to participate and how their agency was promoted by these programmes; and finally, to recognize the different complexities faced by societies from a cross-cultural and contextual perspective, and how the latter was faced in the exit strategy designed by humanitarian agencies for Sierra Leone.

1.3. Relevance to the field of Humanitarian Action
The preamble of the declaration of the Rights of the Child, states that “mankind owes to the child the best it has to give”, it is a human duty to put the child as the first to receive aid in times of disaster. “Long before the modern codification of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law (HRL), the child hence held a position of priority in the advocacy and practice of human action,
of humanity” (Mujezinovi et al. 2012, p.149). From a humanitarian point of view, child protection should be on top of the list of priorities since the Geneva Conventions (1949) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) came to be in the center of the humanitarian discourse. However, the existence of child soldiers per se, came to be seen as a real issue more or less after Graça Machel submitted her report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in 1996, where she states that “some children feel obliged to become soldiers for their own protection. Faced with violence and chaos all around, they decide they are safer with guns in their hands” (Machel 1996, p. 17). Up to then, no peace process had taken them into account by recognizing the existence of this phenomenon. It is then a humanitarian duty, to take part in efforts to provide protection for children. Since then, international and academic concern about child soldiers is increasing but has been subject to contrasting points of view.

Years later, and along with the end of the war in Sierra Leone, came into the international agenda the “Responsibility to Protect” as a call for sovereign states to be responsible to protect their citizens from mainly avoidable emergencies. And with it, came into discussion how far could humanitarian interventions actually be involved in aiding populations after a disaster or a war. However, this new concept has been subject to criticism for its close link to “the right to intervene” by giving to much justification for it, or on the contrary, for being too restrictive about it. Though this is not going to be the debate in this research, it is appropriate to reference to the term in order to highlight how important it is for humanitarian agencies to cooperate along with the governments they are assisting, but in this specific case, to recognize the sovereignty owned by the very own societies to empower themselves in matters that pertain to them. In this sense, the notion of nation-building and self-sufficiency will be present in this research, as “those who are planning intervention must begin to assess the levels of existing capacity and to provisionally allocate appropriate tasks, roles and phases for the international and the domestic actors in advance (…) give priority to the afflicted society’s early responsibility for solving its own problems” (Moore 2007, p.190).
In this same line of action, the humanitarian system constructed a set of international standards and mechanisms for accountability in order to maximize and streamline assistance, in a world were emergencies are happening by the minute. However, there has been a major critique over the implementation of these standards, mainly by the fact that a crisis is unique in its causes and therefore in its solution. “Standards on their own are not enough, even if your work force is well trained and follows them. What the computer and auto industry learned was that context is everything” (Walker & Maxwell 2009). An important challenge for the humanitarian community is to be able to be accountable to donors, but also to tailor each intervention in the best possible way and to provide elements for coping with the changing environment. “The humanitarian agencies of the future need to be far more nimble, far more aware of the constant need to readjust their structures and tactics to fight today’s battles, not the textbook battles of yesterday” (Walker & Maxwell 2009, p.152).

 Appropriately, as stated in one of the first books read in this master’s programme, “we live in multiple communities that have varying claims on us. When humanitarians intervene to reduce suffering, they often pursue those reforms that they believe will enable individuals to achieve their humanity. Because we live in a world of diverse communities, we also live in a world of diverse humanitarianisms.” (Barnett 2011, p. 223). It is in this sense that this research prioritized the study of cultural and contextual specificities in order to challenge the idea of the need for general international standards for action in response to an emergency. It is not a matter of protecting children affected by armed conflict under a western-oriented approach, but rather finding a way to protect them under cross-cultural and context-sensitive perspectives.

In relation to the culture and context sensitivity perspectives, there has been growing concern regarding women and girls in the humanitarian field, and how traditional practices might be harmful from a western oriented point of view. It is certainly a topic of concern between what effects can traditional methods have on the health of women and girls. Apart from that, there is the problem of Gender Based Violence (GBV) immediately related to the latter. Though GBV is not going to be the main subject in this study, it must certainly be taken into
account, and will therefore have a special consideration along the research. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 regarding to Women, Peace and Security states for the first time, that the UN “encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants” (United Nations Security Council 2000, p.3). Disregarding this legal instrument, most DDR processes in Africa and Latin America, at least, have not had an inclusive approach towards girls and women who are to be considered as former combatants and benefit from the programmes under the same conditions as men and boys do. The programmes “often fail to address the appropriate needs of young women and in a variety of ways ‘prevent’ them from participating” (Utas 2008, p.5). This topic is of great concern in the humanitarian field, as the involvement of girls in armed groups, implies that they will also have to assume positions of “wives” for the combatants, and will most certainly be subjected to sexual violence in a disproportionally higher range than boys and men will. These factors will pose a perfect path for prostitution as a last resource for former combatant girls to economically survive, and the rise in public health issues such as Fistula and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), like HIV, and others. Besides this, and related to sexual violence and abuse of power, “in International Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) some individuals are involved in sexual exploitation and abuse of the host country’s population, buying of sexual services and trafficking of prostitutes” (Rudén & Utas 2009, p.1). Humanitarianism is certainly at risk when it fails so greatly to protect population in danger, but our work as humanitarian actors and the institution itself, abysmally fails the minute it becomes a threat to those who should be the subjects of our protection.

Finally, as one of the challenges in the humanitarian sphere is the cooperation with developmental agencies, this research will emphasize on a long term-sustainability for the DDR programmes that is reinforced by a bottom-up approach in the planning and implementation of the programmes that relates to the involvement of the communities, which “offers a greater chance for self-sufficiency and, in the bringing together of people through reintegration
activities, may initiate new opportunities which pave the way for fighting factions to co-operate together in achieving common goals” (Özerdem 2002, p. 973).

1.4. Methodology, method for analysis and limitations

In order to be able to describe the “range of approaches used (...) to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction” (Cohen et al. 2007, p.47); the method chosen for this research will be text analysis of secondary data and the methodology is going to be qualitative, in order to describe the approaches used and to understand as broadly as possible, as was raised by Cohen et al, the writing process of this research. This is going to be a case study guided as following: the first part of the research will be mainly descriptive, and it is where the information collected for Sierra Leone is going to be organized in themes to be analyzed in the discussion. After describing the information collected, there will be a discussion based on the findings of the data collection, in order to strengthen the analysis and draw up conclusions.

It is relevant to mention one important limitation for this research. The first proposal was to find and describe the background information of primary data by establishing contact with professionals who were able to provide me first hand information – since a field visit was not going to be possible in the available time-frame. However, after months of establishing contact with key agents for the programmes in Sierra Leone, it was not possible to get the relevant data feedback from them, in spite their apparent initial interest in this research. This should be considered as a challenge in the humanitarian field of action, as competition seems to be one of the main drivers in the field of action, not only between agencies and between humanitarian and developmental activities, but also between humanitarian workers with experience and those new professionals who might need a hand in order to start their carriers as humanitarians. How would it be possible not only to freshen up what we already know with new perspectives, but also to assist population in aid in the best possible way, if the findings, the information and the experience is apprehensively kept on the inside?
This chapter will be dedicated to introduce the reader first to the main conceptual debates and ethical dilemmas regarding child soldiers, in order to set the ground for the analysis of the DDR programme in Sierra Leone. And secondly, to provide the main theory that is going to be used throughout the research. It is important to provide these tools, as a matter of introducing the conceptual and theoretical aspects under which the analysis will take place.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Ethical and normative dilemmas regarding child soldiers

In moral theory, the *jus in bello* “requirement of discrimination holds that while it is impermissible for combatants intentionally to attack noncombatants, all enemy combatants are legitimate targets, irrespective of whether they have a just cause for fighting and irrespective if they can be held morally responsible for their action” (McMahan 2010, p.28). In an attempt to limit the destruction of war, the Geneva Conventions grant the rule for all combatants to be able to attack specific targets without being held responsible for them, and assuring a good treatment in case they are captured. In this same line, the measures taken to diminish the causalities of war also prohibit a set of targets and behaviors, and distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, this is understood as the international humanitarian law, which basically regulates war and tries to limit its effects (ICRC 1949). However, the just war theory, “grounds the significance of the distinction between combatants and non combatants in a certain conception of the right of self-defense. In this view, when a person poses a threat to another, he thereby makes himself liable to defensive attack” (McMahan 2010, p.28). According to this argument, a child soldier would pose a threat in the same way as an adult would, therefore he or she would become
legitimate targets, and “whether they are morally responsible for the threat they pose is irrelevant, as is the fact that they are children. It is permissible to fight against them in exactly the same way one would fight against adult combatants” (McMahan 2010, p.28). However, and according to McMahan, it is a matter of whether the threat is just or unjust and how morally responsible children can be when carrying a gun and fighting a war, that it is certainly not theirs.

Following the latter, it is important to know that the conceptual debate regarding child soldiers raises several philosophical and normative discussions that need to be kept in mind in order to clarify the scope of this research and understand the theoretical discourse. Sukanya Podder argues that there are two competing approaches on children in armed conflicts, “the more entrenched and normatively influential humanitarian discourse on children and armed conflict enunciates that although there are culturally specified notions of adulthood, the 18-year norm is the internationally accepted bench-mark around which demarcation between children and adults has come to be consecrated in the language of law, and accepted as a global norm” (Podder 2011, p.143). This notion, says Podder, derives from the assumption that children are immature, incompetent and irrational. She argues it to be a Western-oriented conception on innocence, vulnerability and the incapacity of children to make decisions. On the other hand, she describes the second approach as the cultural relativist school, which argues that childhood “is essentially a social construction, its role as a heuristic device stems from the interpretive frame if offers for contextualizing the early years of human life (...) categories like ‘child’, ‘youth’, and ‘adult’ are situationally defined and context specific” (Podder 2011, p.143).

The concept of child soldiers and/or child combatants is complex and it is not used in international law, because there is no definition for someone who is both a child and a combatant. Rather, in an attempt to protect children used in conflicts, the international community uses the definition of Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF), which refers to a person under the age of 18 years old who has been recruited in armed forces or groups, either to fight, cook, porter, as messengers, spies or sexual slaves. This definition is used, because under international law, a combatant is not a protected civilian and has a right to participate in hostilities, according to the Geneva Conventions. In this case,
when a child wields a weapon, becomes a legitimate target. On the other hand “soldier generally refers to men and women who are skilled warriors” (Podder 2011, p.144).

Podder’s suggestion based on the cultural relativist approach that states that the category of child would depend on situations and contextual specificities is an interesting approach. However, she states that “children have historically been intrinsic to warscapes; there is nothing new or abhorrent about child soldiering. Child soldiering is always a choice amidst structural compulsions, for others it’s an exercise in tactical agency and a tool for survival” (Podder 2011, p.150). And the latter will be put in discussion in this research, firstly because there is a lot of “new” in regards to child soldiering, in different contexts and different situations; because the use of child soldiers is in fact the mere representation of what is abhorrent in war (amongst other acts, of course); and because the fact that it might be an exercise in tactical agency and a tool for survival, doesn’t mean that it is not the only available option for them between life and death. As said, it is not that children do not have capacity for being responsible agents, it is more that that capacity is still in construction; “it is not that child soldiers are non-responsible threats but simply that they are children – that is, individuals who have hardly had a chance at life yet and who, in this case, have already been terribly victimized” (McMahan 2010, p.36). So, based on their experience in life, a child soldier could also be fighting a war and not be a morally responsible agent, since most of them are acting as moral agents under pressure.

2.2. The Victim Paradigm on child soldiers

Related to the latter is the victim paradigm, which Podder defines as the fact that “all children, by virtue of incomplete development, are coerced into conflict, and this dictates that they be rescued, protected from adult manipulation and reintegrated in their families and communities” (Podder 2011, p.145). She questions if children in Africa, Asia and Latin America have one same childhood experience. Podder argues that even if violence is a major source of establishing control over people, children are actors in this space responding apparently as any adult would in a context of war. Besides this, she exposes what she calls another stereotype on child soldiers, regarding manipulation and
drugging of agents who are then sent to fight. “They kill, they maim, but they also cry and repent. This is not only traumatic – it is also a renegotiation of self, of identity, of how war changes a person’s life. (...) They (children) are completely aware of these subjective experiences. (...) It is their willingness to embrace the worst as best possible under extreme difficulty which is the key to understanding agency issues” (Podder 2011, pp.145–146). Finally, she argues that children are then all grouped as “victims” because they lack of social and political agency, and some sort of physical and mental competence. But then she states that in a way, war victimizes everyone.

Following on the victim paradigm, it is important to mention what Utas refers to as victimcy in relation to the social navigation as a tactic used by child soldiers for responding to their current economical, political and social environment. He argues that forced recruitment in Africa is less common than popular ideas state, and that this results in children playing war in front of the cameras of the international journalists documenting for the western world. According to Utas, “it should be highlighted that child soldiers are more frequently victims of social and military structures, and structural/systemic violence than of direct force” (Utas 2011, p.218). In his text, he exposes the stories of some boys he met while being in the field, and how they managed to understand how to get the attention of the international press, by “playing war” in front of the cameras and telling fake stories about their experience as child soldiers. It is heartbreaking how the effects of war can be so devastating for children, and they can be so absolutely left alone, that they have to resort to own and master lifetime stories of other children in order to be visible for the aid community. Based on one of the child’s testimonies, Utas highlighted the fact that “his stories conformed to stories of the child victim and the navigatory aspect of it was both to get some instant cash and had the intention of finding a sponsor that could help him with education and resources for personal development” (Utas 2011, p.219). This concept will be further explored in this research, and will me mentioned as well in the revision of the debates of the DDR, as an effect for excluded child soldiers, as well as those who were not participating in hostilities, but were somehow structurally affected by the war.
2.3. Child Soldiers in this research

The debate is way more complex and it could be a subject for one whole thesis. However, this research is not about discussing theoretical and ethical dilemmas. I will use the term of child soldier, by bringing important and valid insights of the cultural relativist approach, as it is the fact that defining childhood should be contextual and culturally allowed, but highlighting the fact that there is indeed a need for a generally defined age of adulthood in order to implement much needed normative instruments, though it must not become the rule. A child is neither incompetent nor irrational, and they most certainly have the capacity to be morally aware for their actions. However, this does not mean that they are to be responsible for them in the same way an adult is.

Children are innocent and vulnerable, and the fact that there are individuals who develop their life skills sooner than others, and are more aware of realities than others, does not mean that they are not to be considered children, and are not to be protected. If the international community has the capacity and the normative spectrum to pose some sort of protection veil on top of those human beings under the age of 18, why shouldn’t it take all possible measures as to try and diminish the horrors of war? Of course, in this case the end does not justify the means, and this is why a differential approach highlighting contextual and cultural differences is needed, in order to use this normative advantage in an appropriate way, not by doing more harm than good. Also, it is important to question to what extend the international community actually provides protection to those persons under 18 years old they claim to be protecting by setting international generalized standards.

A child is not considered a legitimate target in this research, though they become skilled soldiers after intensive training, their moral responsibility is breached by a non-responsible threat they pose, and that makes them not responsible for an action they committed either by being drugged, or blinded by the pressure of having to choose between life and death – even if they are in a level aware of the fact that killing someone is wrong. “Rights can be violated only through morally responsible agency. Neither a falling rock nor a charging trigger can violate a right; neither, therefore, can an individual whose capacity for voluntary agency has been eliminated by a drug” (McMahan 2010, p.31).
Children do not respond as any adult would do in war, most of the times they have to be drugged or forcibly coerced into participating in the war, other times they just don’t see other option and they join the war as a way to protect themselves (what makes them capable of making decisions, of course), but it does not mean that they are not victims of a damaged system that has failed in providing them with protection and means to develop their agency as they develop their physical bodies.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

2.5. Social navigation and power

According to the aim and objective of this research, and the discussion regarding the conceptual debates, in order to study if contextual and cultural specificities where thought of in the DDR programmes for children in the case of Sierra Leone, it is convenient to reference the theory used by Myriam Denov in her study about social navigation and power in post-conflict in Sierra Leone, because it draws up important insights to understanding experiences of former child combatants in this country, and it would be interesting to analyze the DDR programmes under this point of view, having in mind cultural and contextual situations and changes during and after the war, regarding former child combatants. As stated in her research, “it took impressive navigational skills to survive the post-conflict context, requiring innovation, thoughtful planning and tactical maneuvering” (Denov 2011, p. 207). Besides this, reference will also be made to victimcy as social navigation, as has been said before when this was explained in the victim paradigm section.

In order to try to capture the complexities faced by young ex combatants in a post conflict situation, the theory of social navigation is going to be used in this research, to try to understand the way young former combatants assesses the changes in their newly acquired socio-political environment and how the latter could affect their personal life, suitably, to “show how child soldiers use these ideas as part of a tactic response to their social environment, or as social tools in their quest to navigate the delicate social landscape of post-war” (Utas 2011, p.215). According to Henrik Vigh, “social navigation means simultaneously navigating the immediate obstacles in front of you, plotting and getting ready to
navigate the next and keeping an eye on one’s imagined trajectory (…) is the tactical movement of agents within a moving element. It is motion within motion” (Denov 2011, p. 191). For former child combatants, who encounter themselves with the challenge to reintegrate into a society from which they had been isolated for a long time and who are usually targeted as “unwanted” by their own communities, to actualize and adapt their strategies to assure their survival in the new socio-political environment. The latter will be assimilated by them with anxiety and uncertainty, because they are “faced with the need to be reintegrated into norms and institutions from which they had been isolated, often for years” (Denov 2011, p. 192).

In addition, power structures play a significant role in terms of analyzing former child combatant’s social navigation. The significance of power and status for them is determinant to the ways they will be able to reintegrate into their communities, because some of them had acquired a certain status of power in the armed groups, were they were respected as commanders and leaders with authority. Nevertheless, “in the aftermath of war, however, some of these young people may return to a society where they may find themselves marginalized for their wartime affiliations” (Denov 2011, p.192).

The theory of social navigation challenges generalized frameworks of victimhood and takes into account individual agency and broader structures, to explain, in this case, how former child combatants navigate the terrains of war and postwar, and how they manage to cope with their new context. And how, according to Galtung, “child soldiers are more frequently victims of social and military structures, and structural/systemic violence” (Utas 2011, p.218). All of this, in line with how to deal with the challenge of accomplishing a successful DDR programme, having in mind that a countries’ context is constantly changing, and how one’s culture specificities may have a huge impact in how agents such as child soldiers, face life. Vigh states that “agents seek to draw and actualize their life trajectories in order to increase their social possibilities and life chances in a shifting a volatile social environment… they navigate an unstable political landscape where the shifts, tows and underlying dangers require strategy and tactics to be constantly tuned to the movement of the
immediate socio-political environment as well as to its future unfolding.” (Denov 2011, p. 191).
CHAPTER THREE

“Power was sought by the many among the oppressed who had been contaminated by their oppressors and unconsciously strove to identify with them” (Levi 2004, p.87)

3. Background to the research
Under the panorama that has been drawn up in the former chapter, the present one will be a description of the background for this research in order locate the reader in its context and scope. This chapter will further explain what a DDR process is, and what kind of issues and debates are currently going on in relation to this subject. The section on DDR is not a part of the former theoretical chapter, even though it has a conceptual explanation, it will be used in terms of reference to what a DDR process entails as a humanitarian programme and not as a theoretical approach or a conceptual debate. A case study of the DDR programme during and after the conflict in Sierra Leone and the effect it had on children, will also be drawn up at the end of this chapter, as an intent to inform the reader before going into detail with the analysis of the variables that have been chosen for the analysis.

3.1. DDR general description/debates
A brief description of what DDR encompasses has been given in the introduction of this research. However, it is way more complex than it seems to be, and there are some deep and broad issues that need to be taken care of. Related specifically to DDR for children, there are in general several aspects that have been objects of study. Children are found themselves excluded from the programmes in different ways. On one hand, DDR programmes usually require evidence from the participants to show that they have been participating in hostilities, and as it was the case in Sierra Leone, it is required for them to provide physical evidence with surrendering a weapon in the disarmament. However, not all the children have been participating in the conflict directly with a weapon, as they may have also been serving as spies, engaged in support roles like cooking for example, used as sex slaves; or sometimes even if they
have been using a weapon, some may not have it with them at the moment the disarmament takes place.

On the other hand, gender-sensitivity still needs to become a principal area in the programmes, because even if girls have been used as soldiers in the same way as boys have, they usually have other roles that do not necessarily include fighting directly in hostilities, they are usually used as sex slaves and are prone to become life partners of the commanders, some of them might be pregnant or may have a child – and this requires a different kind of assistance for them. Another group of children who are usually excluded from the programmes are those children who managed to demobilize on their own, or the ones that have been released by the armed groups or forces, before the DDR started. According to Podder, “self-demobilized children are often not provided with psycho-social healing, although their need is as urgent as those who undergo formal demobilization” (Podder 2011, p.147). However, this is not only the case for children, and it is up to discussion if the DDR programmes actually qualify as psychosocial healing. Lastly but not least, there is also a growing concern about children who were not taking part in the hostilities at all, but had been excluded in the postwar. It is an issue the fact that these specific humanitarian programmes for child soldiers, exclude children who had been affected by war in a different way, children who were not child soldiers, and are not to be taken into account in the educational or vocation-oriented initiatives coming with the DDR processes. It is clear that DDR programmes are destined for children who participated in the conflict; but growing coordination between aid agencies is highly needed in order to try to cover all necessities and to avoid leaving a group of children out (which in reality might be just an illusion). However, it is important in this research, because often, these children find themselves aidless in a fragile post-war context, and are not eligible for any programme. This can result in what Utas refers to as victimcy – alluding to children who take ownership on war stories that are not theirs, in order to be able to survive in a given context. This concept will be further discussed in the next chapter.

In relation to the design and the programming of the DDR, there is a gap that needs to be taken into account. Although the programmes are designed by drawing up on lessons learned from previous experiences, each case is
different and there is a great need to be context and culturally-sensitive, as the solution for one case might not be the solution for another one, or what didn’t worked in a specific country, might built the path for a solution in another country. “So far DDR of child soldiers has focused on trauma healing, catering to educational needs, family tracing and reunification, short stay in interim care centres (ICCs) or with foster families, vocational training and small amounts of cash and in-kind reinsertion assistance paid to the family or host family to ease the process of return” (Podder 2011, p.147). However, there has been some criticism regarding the cash payments, as it might become an incentive for demobilization. In the case of children, there should not be any cash remuneration for them; nevertheless some children joined the DDR programme expecting to be remunerated. In this same line, there has been studies demonstrating the need to prioritize a differential-approach to the design and implementation of the programmes, starting by separating children from adults in the base camps, or simply providing female personnel to assist the girls in the very first stages of the programme – as they might need special sanitation kits, or the separation from the commanders might be more difficult for them. It is needed to “highlight the fact that the issue of child soldier DDR overlaps with diverse yet interconnected fields of psychology, sociology, political and security thinking” (Podder 2011, p.147).

Another important aspect is the relevance of family and community in reintegration efforts. “Recent international agency programming emphasized centrality of the family and community, along with culture-specific social reintegration, as complementary to vocational training and indigenous healing and psychosocial rehabilitation” (Podder 2011, p.148). This is important because family and community focus and participation can make the difference and play a big role in all stages of the DDR, either by helping out with the design, by cooperating with the tracing and reunification and resilience of children, as well as serving as monitors for the long-term reintegration process. Some approaches even highlight “the family and community as the specific site for developing youths’ capacities, and crafting a positive role and image (…) however argue that conflict destabilizes the social set-up, hence the ideal-typical pre-war community does not exist when ex-combatant, child soldiers
return home" (Podder 2011, p.149). Therefore, cooperation of humanitarian agencies with developmental ones is crucial in order to help resilience of children to their homes, and communities to be able to restructure their broken social fabric through participation, empowerment and collective action.

The last theme that is going to be mentioned is the one regarding international standards for DDR. The Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration was published in 2006 in order to provide direction and guidance for the programming of DDR processes, based in the United Nations Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS). While it is an interesting base guide for what a DDR programme could include, it lacks of an appropriate culture and contextual sensitivity approach. The IDDRS were created as a way to overcome practical issues arising from past experiences of DDR. It is stated in the guide, that “each new DDR initiative had to be developed almost from scratch, relying mostly on the knowledge and experience of DDR programme staff (…) however, guidance could be only interfered, was not always clear and often became difficult to translate into practice” (Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR 2006, p.13). In this sense, it is important to highlight the fact that a DDR programme is way more complex and cannot be undertaken by following guidelines that are to be used as a policy. It is stated that these standards “will of course need to be adapted to local and regional circumstances, and field realities” (Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR 2006, p.15); but there is no specific section that explains what kind of circumstances they are referring to, or a section explaining the importance of considering cultural and contextual specificities into the programmes, it is more oriented towards following policies for stabilization based in a western-oriented point of view. This debate will take a deeper form later in the research, when concrete examples can be brought into the discussion.

3.2. The case of Sierra Leone
The name of Sierra Leone comes from the Portuguese language and its meaning is mountains with lions. This is a country rich in natural resources, mainly diamonds, rubies, gemstones, rubies, oil and bauxite. In 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, who was a former
member of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces, invaded the country and later with close collaboration with the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council performed a coup d’état in 1997. They counted with significant support from Liberia, whose president Charles Taylor supported economically in exchange for diamonds.

The Sierra Leonean civil war lasted for 11 years, from 1991 until 2002 when the Government declared that the war was officially over. There was a failed attempt for peace in 1999 with the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement, which was broken by the RUF when attacking civilians and peacekeepers of the recently formed UNAMSIL. Two years later, a new peace attempt was signed, the Abuja Agreement took place in 2001, and “the UN finally took leadership role in disarming the armed groups and the war was declared to be officially over. At this moment, the international community paved its way into the conflict by providing what has been said by an OCHA Official to be “the best practice example throughout the world of a successful disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programme” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.5).

One of the causes of the conflict was a result of poor internal and international dynamics. Internally, the country suffered from inefficient central government control over economic and political aspects, which paved the way for exclusion, marginalization and over-centralizing of resources. The political elites ruled the political system, and youth have been the main victims of this. As an effect, these marginalized groups played a central role in the initiation and the fueling of the armed conflict. Internationally, Sierra Leone had big foreign debts, “worsening terms of trade for the country’s limited export commodities, and misguided economic policies” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.6).

The “fight for Sierra Leone during the decade-long conflict blurred any clear line of demarcation between the categories of government allies, rebel, collaborator, regional and international actors. It became a regional war with global connections” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.6). The main rebel group in the country was the RUF, which received support by the alliance (of convenience) with the AFRC who were renegade members of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF); they were politically, militarily and economically supported by Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Libya. On the other hand,
the government contracted private military companies like the Gurkha Security Guards (GSG) Ltd, the Executive Outcomes (EO) and Sandline International, in order to provide security and train the militias. The Civil Defense Forces (CDF) and the RSLMF were also fighting on the side of the government. ECOMOG was mainly Nigerian-led, and was formed in 1990 to establish peace in the neighboring country Liberia. They were given mandate to intervene in Sierra Leone and were strongly aligned with the government, supported the civil militias, and received military assistance of the United Kingdom and the United States (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.6).

Apart from the extreme violence against civilians, the recruitment of children into the armed groups was a characteristic of this war. It was very difficult to calculate the exact number of children involved in the armed forces in this conflict. Nevertheless, the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) estimated a number of “45,000 combatants to disarm. Of these, 12% or 5400 were forecast to be children. By the end of the process in January 2002 a total of 72,500 combatants had been demobilized, of which 6,845 were children” (Unicef 2005, p.x). Accord estimates that there were in total 71,000 combatants, from which 7,000 were children (Accord 2012, p.56). But then again, these are only numbers based on those adults and children who actually got to be demobilized and who participated in the DDR programme, the numbers should be much higher than those.

The DDR process in Sierra Leone was conducted in three phases and it was coordinated and implemented by the UN and the NCDDR (see Annexes #1 and #2 for more information, it has been the only two graphics found for the actual DDR stages, however it is only based in the general DDR, not the one for children). The first phase started in August 1998 and lasted until June 1999, and it ended with the remobilization and rearmament of the armed factions, and hostilities arose. According to Unicef, this first attempt, provided children with a cash Transitional Safety-net Allowance (TSA) as a benefit for reintegrating. They were placed in centres for foster care available close to their aimed reintegration areas. This phase ended with the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999, and it was when UNAMSIL succeeded ECOMOG with the mandate. Evidencing a lack of deep knowledge and definitive information on the
subject, it is said that it was in this stage where transitional safety allowances of US $300 were handed to the combatants in two payments. Among other limitations, this phase was undermined by the fact that there was limited funding and poorly-equipped, the disarmament started even before the demobilization centres were functioning, and the registration of the participants was poorly organized and monitored. By May 2000, the peace process was broken, and until 2001 the DDR process entered an interim phase, until a more comprehensive one took place. The third phase of the DDR was possible after the signing of the Abuja accord, and so it “became a national process and under the guidance of the NCDDR, a Tripartite Commission comprising UNAMSIL, the GoSL and the RUF were responsible for overall planning and implementation” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.10).

The disarmament and demobilization process was aimed at disarming all armed groups and collecting all arms and weapons used in the war. For now, no information has been found on what was done with the collected weapons and ammunition (apart from the symbolic burning of almost 3,000 weapons on the 18th of January at Lungi Town, ceremony that marked the end of the war), and also, there are some interesting insights regarding the data and information in numbers, about the total demobilized combatants, and the total number of weapons collected, considering the fact that each combatant had to surrender a weapon in order to be able to enter the DDR programme. An analysis of this features will be made in the chapter of the research analysis.

UNICEF and UNAMSIL made an arrangement with the RUF and the Kamajors, in which children, who were participating in the armed forces, were going to be released. UNAMSIL handed them over to the different child protection agencies. They were “first housed in camps or interim care centre’s while efforts were made to reunite them with families. In the meantime, they received training in carpentry, masonry, pottery, fishing, tailoring, and auto mechanics” (Tafirenyika 2001, p.17). Funds were provided by the Child Protection Network, and children under their care, were to stay with them for a maximum of six months - unless the child needed a more specific medical treatment, or the family tracing was not successful. Children who had return their weapons were taken by Caritas, to interim care centres in Kabala, Koinadugu, Port Loko and
Lungi for registration, family tracing and reunification. “Those whose families cannot be traced are placed into foster care or group homes where they are provided with formal education, skills training and psychosocial trauma counseling pending reintegration into society” (Tafirenyika 2001, p.17). However, most children did not get access to the benefits and had to find their own ways back home, were left to feed themselves in the streets or were taken care of by friendly strangers.

Gender issues were widely ignored in the DDR in Sierra Leone as show in the report made by Coulter, Persson and Utas. And women and girls have been the worst affected by the implementation of the programmes. The processes exposed the girls to risks and did not properly promote their economic and social interests. They were used in the conflict as wives for the commanders, and in the DDR process they were not separated from them, “they were also exposed to risk in transit to camps, within the camps, and on leaving them and returning to communities. When they reached communities they were also vulnerable to being rejected as well as being abused and attacked” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.20). Apart from the risks they faced during the DD process, there were huge consequences for them in the Reintegration and long-term development, mainly because they were not properly integrated in the whole DDR programme.
CHAPTER FOUR

“The incorporation of a bottom-up approach in the planning and implementation of DDR programmes will perhaps be there most important imperative for their sustainability” (Özerdem 2002, p.972)

“In the late twentieth century, women who have been mobilized to serve the military’s needs are still vulnerable to stereotype of camp follower – dispensable, disreputable – no matter how professional their formal position is in the military (Enloe 2000)” (Utas 2008, p.22)

4. Research Analysis

This chapter will be as descriptive as it is analytic and it will be divided into four main variables based in the research questions provided. It is important to highlight that the data and information provided for each of them is going be categorized under contextual and cultural aspects, in order to be thorough on their specificities, there will also be a special section for gender issues at the end of each category. The information and analysis of each of the thematic sections will be further discussed in the next chapter, by highlighting the main findings of the case analysis.

The first theme is going to be a study of the political, social, economical, cultural, structural factors directly affecting the children before, during and after the conflict, in order to revise if these played a role in the design of the DDR programmes, and if they have in any way affected the implementation of it. The second variable will focus on the role played by local communities and if these had been in any way included in the DDR process. The third variable will analyze to what extend were children allowed to participate in the DDR, and it will go trough their social navigation regarding their experiences in the armed groups, in order to conclude whether their agency was promoted or not, and how. The fourth and final variable will focus on the programme’s exit strategy from the country, mainly by bringing elements from the children’s reintegration, in order to analyze to what extent the complexities of the post-war were acknowledged and thought of in the design and the monitoring of the DDR programme.
4.1. Factors enabling/inhibiting children to cope with the socio-cultural and political situation of the country, and its effects in the DDR process.

4.1.1. Contextual specificities related to the socio-political and economical situation for the children

The political climate since the independence in Sierra Leone offered limited opportunities for involvement, and mainly for the youth, as has been said before. The latter was an important cause for the conflict, as those marginalized young people were the ones who started arming themselves in the beginning. The government was involved in the DDR by the creation of the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDDR). The Executive Secretariat reporting to NCDDDR was responsible for the whole planning and implementation of the DDR programme. However, ECOMOG was responsible to register combatants and collect weapons, but there was no control from the Government in the process, according to UNICEF. There were serious concerns regarding the lack of security and logistics in the process. And “when the time came for ECOMOG to hand over to UNAMSIL in December, the transition was riddled with accusations and tensions in the leadership structures (…) it led to allegations, after May 2000, that the same weapons that had disarmed the combatants had re-armed them” (Unicef 2005, p.5). The rising of violence in 2000 halted the formal demobilization system, but there were still some demobilizations. The final stage of the demobilization process was the more complete one, where the NCDDDR was responsible for all the logistics concerning the demobilization camps, and UNAMSIL was responsible for managing the disarmament camps.

In Sierra Leone, “politics and violence are intimately tied together and elections have typically been times of heightened and sometimes violent tension” (Christensen & Utas 2008, p.517). The frustration of youth regarding their lack of political and economical participation, made them go to neighboring countries and enter new fighting forces. Which evidences the lack of perceived possibilities of inclusion in the political arena of the country after the war. Some
of these young people have decided to join political parties in Liberia and Sierra Leone, to basically handle the security of the parties and intimidate voters and break up opposition rallies. They are promised to have benefits in case the political party in question wins the election. However, it is unlikely that they will receive these benefits and that they end up being used by the politicians until they need them again: “They used me and my friends in 2007 after which we never heard from them again. (...) If they want young people to stand up for them and intimidate the other parties, let them send out their own children (Foday Kallon, youth engaged in Sierra Leonean ‘task forces’)” (Bangura & Specht 2011, p.56).

In terms of education, the rate of literacy in people over fifteen years-old denotes a high rate of discrimination as “only 20 percent of females are literate compared to 40 percent of males” (Human Rights Watch 2003, p.21). A reestablishment of schools and systems of education took place in the country when the war was over. One good example of this is the “Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools (CREPS), a programme enabling young people to complete primary school equivalency within a three-year period” (Denov 2011, p.196). International aid agencies, faith-based organizations and national non-governmental organizations were active in establishing community schools and providing materials. Nevertheless, there were still some limitations related to the education system. According to a report released by the World Bank in 2007, “25-30 per cent of primary school-aged children are currently out of school and girls, children living in rural areas, children living in the poorest households and those from the Northern region continue to be particularly disadvantaged” (Denov 2011, p.196). In this sense, the provision of uniforms, school materials and fees, created resentment feelings amongst children not participating in the DDR programmes, and parents and other children were not into having former child combatants enrolling in their schools.

Based in this problem, UNICEF and the NCDDR joined in order to ease the tensions, by creating the Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP), focused on children being able to attend school without having to pay any fees or supplies for the school. The programme gave “families a year to absorb the child back into the family budget without having to pay for school supplies. In
addition it helped schools deal with their desperate need for supplies and it provided some educational assistance” (Unicef 2005, p.38). Until December 2002, it covered 348 primary and secondary schools and assisted 6,049 teachers and almost 250,000 children, according to UNICEF. Only 42% of Sierra Leone’s primary school-age children were in school when the DDR process was in its stronger phase.

Economically, Sierra Leone has been an AID-dependent state, characterized by “poor economy, inequality, and corruption” (Denov 2011, p.195). The latter has a huge impact for former child soldiers, as now there seems to be even more jobless young people on the streets than before the war, which makes it appealing for them to come back to war-related activities in order to manage their economic situation. The lack of job opportunities, as Denov states based in a report made by the United Nations Development Program in 2008, states that approximately 70 per cent of young people are unemployed or underemployed. According to the World Bank, “Sierra Leonean youth assert that jobs are awarded through connections, rather than skills and this is borne out by evidence that demonstrates that adults have higher employment levels even if they have the same level of education as youth” (Denov 2011, p.195).

In the DDR process, orientation on skills training and income generation were developed by the ICCs, but they “suffered from a lack of foresight in linking children with activities that would be relevant in their communities for reintegration” (UNICEF, 2005, p. 39). An important issue in this sense was that many of the former child combatants had a limited educational background, which made it very difficult for them to formally and effectively cope with the sector. It was very hard for them to find employment in the urban formal sector, because there were not many available. On the other hand “rural reintegration was hampered by two main factors: lack of skills and depressed labor market” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.15). Former combatants were looking for support to help them establish their own business and engage in different initiatives for agricultural production, but the NCDDR was unable and unwilling to help out in this sense. Also, reintegration assistance was provided for a period of six months, which was not enough for providing an in-depth training for entering a competitive economy.
Besides this, “marginalization and exclusion from society led many youth to take up arms. In many TRC hearings, children who took up arms testified to the Commission that their dissatisfaction with their social and economic conditions led them to join the RUF” (The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2004, p. 243). The latter relates to the problem of informal economy and how many former combatants were used to extorting money and resources from civilians, which was a huge challenge to overcome with the DDR programme, as labour in agriculture was not a very attractive option for them. This creates an unattended challenge for the reintegration phase, because the informal economy will persist due to the lack of job offerings.

4.1.2. Gender specificities related to the socio-political and economical context

In the formal employment sector, women constitute the 40 percent of the staff working in offices, and 8 percent of managerial staff. In the informal sector, excluding agriculture, “women are mainly involved in petty trading, soap making and tie-dying. Given the lack of opportunities for remunerated work, women tend to be heavily dependent on their husbands” (Human Rights Watch 2003, p.22). They are discriminated from the educational system as stated before, as well as in the political arena, they were not granted the right to vote until after the independence in 1961.

From the beginning of the DDR process, women and girls have been excluded. “When weapons are used as a condition to get access to a DDR programme, and when access to the programmes also means access to money, women and junior soldiers are often tricked out of their weapons by senior, predominantly male, commanders” (Utas 2008, p.23). Many of them finally choose not to take part in the DDR programmes, because they are afraid and feel that they have nothing to gain in them. It has a lot to do with security aspects in the camps, as “the facilities in Sierra Leone, for instance, were perceived to be dangerous for women and girls, because of the large numbers of men and inadequate protection” (Utas 2008, p.26).
Economically, women and girls also face discrimination because they are not able to access credits, own their own land, or get a proper formal job. The latter will have some of them resort to prostitution in order to survive. Since many of them had to abandon school during the conflict, and during the DDR processes they were excluded, they had little prospects of returning to school or improving their economical situation the same way as men and boys (even tough for them had been precarious as well). Unfortunately, the last resource for them has been to “stay with their husbands or abductors in the hope of receiving some economic support, although some have developed emotional attachments to them” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.22).

Besides the latter, during and in the aftermath of the war women and girls “suffered wide ranging gender-based violence (GBV) in many forms including rape, sexual slavery, and exploitation. It impacted on their physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being, with problems such as repetitive episodes of sexually transmitter diseases (STDs), HIV, multiple unwanted pregnancies, chronic abdominal pain, substance abuse and mental illness” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.22).

According to the research findings in the study made by Solomon and Ginifer, “there were discussions around infanticide and similar issues: girl mothers that have killed their children intentionally; girls that have left children behind while fleeing, thus rendering the children vulnerable” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.24). Tough it was not always the case for all young mothers, accepting a child that was born as a result of a wartime rape, is very complex and led some of them to reject these children. Apart from this, most female exfighters witnessed abuse of family members, or other women and girls. Some of them, after witnessing this or being abused themselves, were forced to remain with their rapers, and naturally, they developed bonds with them: “well I’ve been raped twice during the war and I have been witnessing how they raped a girl and an old woman. Later a Sergeant picked me as wife. He had plenty women and was beating me. Even now I am living with this man – I like him (21-year-old woman, who was twelve at the time of first being raped)” (Utas 2009, p.16). Sometimes, rebels used to search for virgin young girls and raped them, some testimonies have confirmed that there were female rebel women who inspected the girls in
order to see if they were virgins or not. “we were hiding in the mosque when two rebels dressed in civilian clothing entered. It was dark but they shone their flashlights looking ofr girls and said, we are coming for young girls … for virgins, even if they tie their heads like old grandmothers, we will find them. They also said that if people did not hand over the young girls, they would open fire on all of us” (Human Rights Watch 2003, p.28). Of course the rape of a virgin has brutal consequences for her health, even more than for a female who is not a virgin, as they can develop fistulas both vasico and rectal, which can lead to not being able to control the bladder because they end up being completely torn or even death if not treated. “They told me to undress. I was raped by ten rebels, one after the other. They lined up, waiting for their turn and watched while I was being raped vaginally and in my anus. One of the child combatants was about twelve years. The three other child soldiers were about fifteen. The rebels threatened to kill me if I cried” (Human Rights Watch 2003, p.28).

4.1.3. Cultural specificities related to the socio-cultural and structural factors

In Sierra Leone, “there are still huge cultural barriers to women assuming political leadership roles (…) ethnic minorities also experience exclusion from electoral processes and politics” (Accord 2012, p.27). However, according to Utas there are and have been quite a few female and male ministers from minority groups. In the country’s history there may even be an over-representation of minorities, especially Limba and Kono.

In their communities, children are given domestic responsibilities that include cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundry tasks, water collection and helping out with younger children. These traditional duties are seen as “doing one’s bit to assist family and community, thus contributing to the total functioning of the family. (…) The roles and responsibilities of children in African societies help to entrench a sense of family and community rather than individualism” (TRC 2004). Nevertheless, the weak economy in the country resulted in extreme poverty for families who see no choice but to compell children to work, not as a part of family dynamics, but as a necessity – which in this case may be seen as “exploitative”. However, The Employers and Employment Act Chapter 212 of
the Laws of Sierra Leone of 1960 determines the minimum age children are
allowed to have to be able to be employed. It “prohibits the employment of
children who appear to be under the age of 12 years, except where they have
been employed by a family member and approved by a competent authority”

Traditionally, children have been regarded as a source for future security for
older family members, and have been indicators of family wealth. However, the
war destroyed the sense of community and belonging to a family, and their own
communities rejected children, which is one of the worst experiences one could
have in Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, like in many other countries, children’s decisions are made by
their parents, and not by them; “an explanation often offered is that is borne of a
desire to protect children and to guide them into adulthood rather than to injure
them of take away their rights” (TRC 2004, p.241). According to the TRC,
youths where usually punished by the chiefs of their communities, which in
testimonies received by the Commission, it was clear how some of those
children were discontented enough as to fled their villages, which was
manifested as well in acts of revenge against the chiefs when they were
combatants.

4.1.4. Cultural specificities related to the socio-cultural and
structural factors in terms of gender relations

The country’s traditions regarding education, exclude girls from the education
system – which is specifically prevalent in the north and east of the country;
“coupled with the practice of early marriages for girls and the practice of female
genital mutilation” (TRC 2004, p.241).

Women and girls faced stigma and discrimination as the so called “bush wives”.
This was mostly because “they lived for long periods, sometimes eight years,
with their husbands in the bush. They are accused of benefiting materially from
the associations with their husbands and received booty seized from looting
sprees. Others, it is alleged, became trained fighters and went on missions with
their husbands” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.22). Girls often tried to remain anonymous in order to avoid the stigma, which resulted in them bypassing the formal DDR systems. After experiencing years of a military life where gender roles where different from the ones they were sued to experience, many girls found it difficult to accept and reintegrate into traditional family roles again. This is mainly because of the stigma they face and because they are usually seen as an embarrassment as they are believed to bring shame for their families and/or communities. Culturally, it seems like the stigma is embeeded into the community, as an elder states that “when the husband will learn about it, he will often divorce her” (Soweh mammy in Freetown) (Utas 2009, p.19).

The rebels tried to dominate by sexually assaulting women and girls in many ways. But mostly, they intended to assailing cultural norms in order to hurt not only the females but also their families and communities. For example, they forced victims to commit incest, which is one big taboo in the Sierra Leonean society. Sometimes, “fathers were forced to rape their daughters. Fathers were forced to dance naked in front of their daughters and viceversa. (...) child combatants also raped women who could have been their mothers or in some instances even their grandmothers. Many rapes were commited in full view of other rebels and civilians. Victims were also raped in mosques, churches, and sacred places of initiation” (Human Rights Watch 2003, p.35).

Many of the victims of GBV violence still re-live their experiences in a psychological way that might be referred to as trauma, and post-traumatic stress. However, in Sierra Leone, the behavior of a woman or girl who has traumatic expressions of being psychologically touched after being a victim of sexual violence, is considered to be a mental illness and she is said to have evil spirits “called “djina (or jinn), bush devils or demons according to the particular religious belief” (Utas 2009, p.26). The latter will influence in the way they cope with the reintegration, and should be an aspect to be treated in the DDR. However they state the importance of finding support in traditional healers, herbalists or prayers of imams and pastors. GBV also refers to violence against men and boys, in the case of Sierra Leone, might be treated as a huge stigma. As Utas notes, “in some places they state that ‘rebel women’ raped young boys, but talking about rape of men by men seems taboo. (...) Yes, because
the rebels force them to have sex with their sister or mother. But I did not see rebels rape men, only women. (Soweh mammy, Freetown)” (Utas 2009, p.17). It might also come as a family dynamic, as sometimes they try to avoid the social stigma of sexual abuse by keeping it as a family secret, this might only be the case of those who actually make it to live with their families, as a Muslim teacher in Freetown Karamoko states: “if living with the extended family the sexually abused is often bad treated” (Utas 2009, p.18).

Traditional healers play an important role on how woman cope with their situation after being victims of sexual violence. Apart from the psychological aspects, they will need to be taken care of immediately after the abuse. “We use leaves from the bush. We boiled them and put them in a big bowl. I sat down over it so that it healed the sore in my vagina (20-year-old woman in Kenema District)” (Utas 2009, p.33) There is also a medicine to make the family re-accept the girl who has suffered from sexual abuse. “I can cure the bleeding of a raped person. You can try it either our way of the English way. Some try it in a different way but later come here. I give them medicine to drink and rice flour… There is also a medicine for people with mental problems. They drink it and then you make rope (Sebe) with it. To make the heart go cold (leave psychological problems behind) there is also a medicine (Herbalist in Makeni)” (Utas 2009, p.35)

However, sexual violence is a generalized accepted behavior in domestic relations, as a 19-year-old woman in Freetown states: “Because he is the provider and he is stronger. If he does not love you he does not beat you” (...) and a 21-year-old woman in Kono District who states that “it is right for a man to beat his wife if she disobeys him” (Utas 2009, pp.24–25). Rape is not considered within a marriage, as it seems to be acceptable that the husband has the right to have sexual relations with his wife whenever he wants to. The notion of rape is widely believed to be possible if the girl is a virgin, which in some communities is called “virginate”.
4.2. The role of the local communities in DDR programme

It is important to mention the fact that it was very difficult to find information related to local initiatives or proposals in the DDR. Either there were almost no initiatives or they were not kept in mind in the DDR.

4.2.1. Contextual Specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme

Emmanuel Bombande is the co-founder and the Director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), created in 1998 and worked with some civil society organizations in Sierra Leone in order to develop capacities to respond to the rising violence. He states that the formal approaches to reconciliation were not connected to what the people needed and wanted. According to him, the TRC for example, was too structured and not connected at all with emerging challenges on the ground; “in communities like Voinjama or Gbarnga the social humiliation of a family home where women were violated and abducted stretched beyond even the extended family to include the whole clan” (Accord 2012, p.23). He states the importance of having informal conversations with the victims, because it makes them feel confident to expose their hearts. This is only one perspective of the matter, it is clear how the DDR did not make an effort in including the local communities who had been working for a long time in the country in order to prevent the rising violence. The fact that there were no consultations with the people for the design and implementation, resulted in a poorly monitored DDR process, because the communities were not involved as main actors in the programmes.

There was no information found on the role of the communities during the disarmament and demobilization stages at all, there were studies related to their role in the reintegration phase. One persistent problem found, was the lack of local partners who were able to help out in delivering long-term reintegration activities, “particularly in places such as Kailahun District in the east, where cross border security threats imposed limitations on working with ex-combatants” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.14).

With regards to the role of communities in the whole process, it is important to highlight the fact that there was no representative of the people of Sierra Leone
in the executive secretariat of the NCDDR. The secretariat operated with the following members: “representative of the donor community; Minister of Information and Broadcasting; Minister of Finance; Deputy Minister of Defense; Special Representative of the UN; UN Military Force Commander (UNAMSIL); and head of the RUF” (Thusi & Meek 2003, p.24). The agency representing child soldiers was UNICEF.

It is then absurd that the DDR process in Sierra Leone was said to have a community-oriented dimension, but it failed in implementing a community participatory approach for them to be prime beneficiaries of the programmes. “The lack of community-informed perspectives and participation in some of its programming as they were rolled out had significant negative impacts” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.39). Communities were not often consulted, and it would have been important in order to have information about how to direct the support in the most needed areas for them. An added element regarding to the lack of communication with the communities, resulted in the failure of pursuing the acceptance of former child soldiers back into the communities, as they saw their reintegration with great suspicion.

The following will be further discussed in the next variable, but there was an attempt to include the children in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and therefore were to be involved in the justice systems that were supposed to be at their disposition after the war ended. However, young people ended up perceiving the justice system after the war, as a hostile one. Hassan Konneh described his own experience in a local court in Pujehum as following: “young people were given fines that did not correspond to crimes committed and in most cases the court system was used to intimidate them” (Accord 2012, p.55).

John Caulker played a leading role in the calling for a TRC, based in his experience in the South African case. In an article published by him, he states that his main objective was to avoid an elitist-, top-down approach, and instead wanted to “involve the people in the rural communities and called for grassroots ‘mini-commissions’ which would feed into the official Commission, stressing the importance of local dialogue and ownership. But the idea was dismissed by the TRC” (Accord 2012, p.52). According to him, the TRC was more about following
United Nations instructions, rather than being a country’s initiative. It focused more on bringing people to give testimonies on their experiences, than on providing help for the victims, which resumed to a limited national accountability.

According to UNICEF, there was “little meaningful dialogue with communities about how they felt about the combatants’ return. And there was certainly no co-ordination between NGO’s, CBOs and other members of civil society with NCDDR. It was clear that the information strategy relied too heavily on a vertical flow of information from Government to communities and was therefore ineffective” (Unicef 2005, p.7). Reintegration of children was more welcomed than adults, however some communities, “particularly in the CDF-controlled south of the country, which regarded the reintegration of ex-RUF child combatants with great suspicion. Such was their mistrust of the process that they would not even register for tracing their own children who had been separated from them in the conflict” (Unicef 2005, p.7). According to UNICEF, the main mechanism of support is the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). With assistance from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and the Child Protection Network; tribal and religious leaders, teachers, parents and children, formed the Child Welfare Committees in order to bring children back to communities and help them enroll into school again. However no further information has been found about this.

4.2.2. Contextual specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme under a gender perspective

Unfortunately, there was no information related to this point and available as secondary data.

4.2.3. Cultural specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme

According to UNICEF, communities found to be resistant to children’s return. “Some children were rejected outright by parents and communities who failed to see a child they had before the conflict as the one returning to them. (…) Whilst
traditions existed, they were less in evidence than before due to the death and displacement of community elders who had orchestrated the ceremonies” (Unicef 2005, p.40). Children in Sierra Leone can “expect to spend their childhood in the care of a number of different adults. The practice of “fosterage” or “child circulation” is the means by which parents will place their children in the care of relatives or associates on either a long or short-term basis. (...) According to the circumstance, a child can be perceived as an asset or a burden” (Unicef 2005, p.31). Children are expected to assume household responsibilities to promote their interdependence within a household and the relations within the community. This is seen as a value of communal cooperation, and is vital for their coexistence within a community. Nevertheless, the child protection agencies “propagated models of fostering that were adult-centered and over-influenced by Western notions of family structures” (Unicef 2005, p.31).

There is an adage in a local dialect in Sierra Leone, that states: “there is no bad bush to throw away a bad child” (Accord 2012, p.53). Which emphasizes on the fact that one of the most important things is reconciliation and rehabilitation within the community (but there are also opposite expression that state that if a person has been bad, he or she will always be). A culture that is built on conversations and centered in storytelling, based in the belief of talking to ancestors in order to get advice and avoid bad luck, according to Caulker. But the latter takes a lot of time and training, as people need to be comfortable in order to share their stories with their communities. “Once you are in that sacred space, you feel empowered, because you know the community is behind you. It is the same for offenders” (Accord 2012, p.53). These cleansing and purifying ceremonies are crucial for them; as they can discuss the facts, dialogue, and if necessary apologize to the victims. Everybody has a story to tell, a feeling to share, and everybody is equally listened to.

“April last year we had a ceremony back in my village for the people who died in the war. We are planning another one in December, Back in the villages; people do ceremonies for separated villagers to return. It is made to show unity and shows relatives that whatever they have done they are forgiven (Mori-man in Kenema)” (Utas 2009, p.42). This is a way for showing ancestors that they are
represented in the community and they are trying to keep them content as they are the only ones deciding whether young ex combatants or victims of sexual violence are to be reaccepted in the communities. However these are rare cases and very difficult to find, as stated in Utas’ study, where he says that there is insufficient material at hand to make any suggestions regarding this subject.

Apart from his limited participation in the TRC, John Caulker is the executive director in Fambul Tok International, which is a local organization in Sierra Leone, that has been dedicated to promote a community led and owned reconciliation process that aims at not being imposed from the outside, by stating that communities have resources within them that can greatly contribute to their own healing and to their post-conflict. One of the main statements from this initiative is that the people have the power to reconstruct their own communities and to awaken cultural practices of forgiveness and apology. But highlights that “the people most impacted by war are often the least consulted by the international community in post-war rebuilding efforts. (…) We recognize the transformative power of what is often overlooked – the courage and grace of ordinary people, the communal impulse to be whole again and to move past the ravages of the war; the cultural wealth of traditions and practices of reconciliation” (Fambul Tok 2014). Tough this initiative has not been taken into account in the formal reintegration process of as a legitimate justice system, it was in fact very successful within the communities who had been excluded from the TRC, as the majority of the hearings were all in Freetown and not all the victims were able to travel to the capital of the country. The initiative functions by community “family circles” around a bonfire, where victims stand up and tell their stories, usually facing their own perpetrators. They talked about it for as long as was necessary, everyone had the chance to speak, and in the end they made an effort to forgive or reconcile, face by face in the presence of the entire community. No legal instruments or prisons involved. It was a moving act of collective actions towards the reconciliation in the country, and can be said that it has been a success, as its influences are starting to be known worldwide.
4.2.4. Cultural specificities related to the role of local communities in the DDR programme under a gender perspective

In matters of sexual violence related to the war, where there might be shame, stigma and fear of rejection from the women and girls reintegrating to their communities, there is a cultural aspect to take into account. Traditional healers might make a huge difference in the way former female combatants deal with this process. In a study made by Utas, he states that “83% of the sample group stated that they were initially treated with traditional medicine and only 12% by Western medicine” (Utas 2009, pp.14–15).

As Utas states in his study, there is no single way of knowing or describing how young girls are treated or accepted in their communities, or who they could turn to them for advice and support, as there has been many different answers from the girls interviewed in his study. Some might be able to find support in their families and communities, like this 20-year-old woman in Bombali: “I felt it was necessary for me to speak about it to my family members and also to friends. Because they all knew I was victimized. They always gave me words of courage and encourage me to put the past behind me” (Utas 2009, p.20). Others might feel insecure and will find empathy in other young girls who have also been victimized, also because they fear of being rejected and stigmatized, like this 21-year-old woman in Freetown who states that “we do not talk about rape openly but we will talk about it to each other – the others who have been raped” (Utas 2009, p.20).

Some communities might have their own ways of dealing with the perpetrators of the sexual abuse, not only with the victims, as it is the case of the expression of “cleansing the bush”, that refers to a communal activity as a way of social cleansing in a ceremony within the secret communities. “We take the perpetrators to the police, but we are also asking the perpetrators to clean the bush by bringing a goat, palm oil, rice, a fowl and kola nuts to perform a ritual to the gods. Later he will go to jail (Soweh mammy in Kenema District)” (Utas 2009, p.41). However these practices are often denied, as they are a secret.
4.3. Child participation in DDR programme

4.3.1. Contextual Specificities regarding child participation in the DDR programme

Children did not directly participate in the design and implementation of the formal DDR process, neither in the monitoring or the evaluation of it. After the disarmament, children under 17 years, were sent to the ICCs and were given the chance to choose whether to enter on skills trainings or educational programmes they preferred” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.11), but in reality only a fraction of them received any kind of training. According to the NCDDR, seven ICCs were established and managed by five Child Protection Agencies. Most of the children have been reunified with their families and provided with reintegration support. However that same report states that the major critical observation in regards to former child soldiers was that there was a big problem in tracking the children who signed up for adult programmes.

Children needed to show a weapon as a proof that they had been indeed been enrolled as child combatants. “When the war came to an end, the DDR programme was on, but it was unfortunate for me that my gun was with my brother when he was killed, so I couldn’t go through the DDR process” (Denov 2011, p.198). It is interesting to see that in a formal report from the NCDDR, they state that “child combatants do not require weapons to join the DDR Programme” (National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration 2002, p.23). Too often, too many children are left outside the DDR process, which implies that they won’t be included in services provided for them, even if their need is as urgent as those children who get to undergo formal demobilization processes, according to Podder. Specially, women and girls were primarily excluded from even joining the DDR process, as most of the times they did not possess a weapon, either because their function in the group was not of a combatant fighting in hostilities, or because their guns had been taken away by older commanders.

At the beginning of the DDR programme in the Interim Phase, children expected to receive $300 TSA, enrolment in school, vocational training, and/or employment opportunities. But when they arrived to the camps, they felt
betrayed, as their expectations were not fulfilled. The latter made them perceive the process as “weakening their manpower with nothing in return” (Unicef 2005, p.7).

Sierra Leonean children formed the Children’s Forum Network, which is run by the children and supported by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, UNICEF, UNAMSIL and Plan Sierra Leone. Children also created the Voice of Children, which is a radio station, “with the help of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, UNAMSIL and UNICEF. They have brought together the first Children’s National Assembly of Sierra Leone, with representatives from all over the country” (TRC 2004, p.29). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission supported them in the request for publishing a Child-friendly Report in which children would actively participate. But this seems to be the only significant accomplishment of the network.

Regarding the definition of what a child is, in Sierra Leone, based in the common law adopted from English colonial rule has been maintained until today the age majority as 21 years old. A person who is 18 years old is allowed to have voting rights. Criminal responsibility (as stated in the TRC) starts when the child is 10 years old. And Sierra Leonean laws define a child as any person under the age of 14 years old as a child, and any person under 17 years old until 14 years old, as a young person. (Prohibited to recruit a child who is below 17 and a half, unless the parents or competent authority gives its consent).

In relation to power structures, according to what is presented in Denov’s study, “power and status hold important and complicated meanings for former child soldiers. Many young people may go from a relatively marginal status prior to war, to take up powerful leadership positions within armed groups (…) in the aftermath of war, however, some of these young people may return to a society where they may find themselves marginalized for their wartime affiliations (Denov 2011, p.192). The ways former young combatants navigate to gain, maintain, use and lose the power they acquired in war, its determinant to their status in the post-conflict time.
4.3.2. Contextual specificities regarding child participation in the DDR programmes under a gender-sensitive perception

The DDR process in Sierra Leone has not been characterized for being gender-sensitive, as women and girls who actually register in the programmes are very few and do not represent the actual number of female fighters. “In DDR programmes in Sierra Leone only 6.5 percent of all registered adults were women, and only 7.4 percent of all child soldiers were girls, despite estimates of the number of female fighters being up to 30 percent” (Utas 2008, p.20). As stated before, in the process in Sierra Leone, the requirement for entry into the DDR was the possession of a weapon, which mainly affected women and girls as their duties as combatants did not necessarily included the management of a weapon, and as was the case for children, at the moment of the disarmament, adult combatants used to collect weapons in order to be able to be included in the DDR programmes. According to Mazurana and Carlson, “46 percent of the female ex-fighters who did not go through DDR in Sierra Leone stated that the reason for this was their lack of a weapon” (Utas 2008, p.23).

The problem of the discrepancy between child soldiers and those children, who got to participate in the DDR, was mostly notable because of the focus on fighting forces. The camps did not involved women as administrators or staff, and men running the camps did not had knowledge of gender issues. Specific needs of women and girls were not taken into account, for example “women and girls did not receive proper sanitation materials, including feminine hygiene products. They were told by some DDR officials to use leaves as they used to do it in the bush” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.14). Separation from commanders was not done, and this was also a problem for girls, as they might have been sentimentally involved with their superiors, which would make the process even more difficult.

Not much is known of “children who bypass formal systems of demobilization – especially girls who have been sexually abused and might have a child to consider as a result of a rape. (…) A DDR programme that focuses too sharply on disarmament as the most viable entry point can overshadow advocacy efforts for the release of abducted and children in support roles, especially girls” (Unicef 2005, p.14).
4.3.3. Cultural Specificities regarding participation of children in the DDR programme

How children are viewed in their communities is important because it will determine how they will be treated during and after the DDR process. In terms of customary law, the age of majority varies and depends on the purpose and from one ethnic group to another. Traditional initiation ceremonies are commonly performed on boys who have reached puberty, and they mark their entry into adulthood and the male society. “However a girl child who has reached puberty and has been initiated into the female society does not attain the status of full adulthood, as she is always under the guardianship of the male members of her family while unmarried, or of her husband when married” (TRC 2004, 249).

Self-perspectives have an important role in regards to child participation in the programmes, because it defines the way children will be receptive to the programmes, which are being offered to them. Perhaps, the strength they attributed to a “mystical power” (understood in this research as some sort of a magical power) some of them acquired during the war, will make it difficult for them to adapt to the programmes, or maybe even that same mystical force would enable them to actively participate in the programmes by being leaders to new proposals. On the other hand, the practices that enabled them to feel that mystical power might be aggressive in themselves, so it might be difficult for them to abandon as a “source of power”. “During the war, the CDF/Kamajors were revered for their invincibility and mysticism (…) Through the use of native herbs, charms, sacred attire and prohibitions such as particular foods, having contact with a woman while in battle dress, looting villages and committing rape, Kamajors were said to be protected and impervious to bullets” (Denov 2011, p.206). The latter gives the former combatant a sense of power that has been given to him by the means of the war he fought, which would be very difficult to abandon, since it represents some sort of a “super power” for them. “Before the war, I was an ordinary man. Now, since being initiated into the Kamajors, I am much more powerful and no man can conquer me (…) I have strong mystical powers, so many important men try to know me and try to find out where I am” (Denov 2011, p.207).
Identity of children is a crucial aspect to have in mind regarding the different meanings for demobilization perceived by both the children and the communities who receive them. It might have been a lifestyle choice to give up the gun, or even a ticket to entail different benefits. “Evidence from Sierra Leone indicated that children’s key motivation to demobilize was to return to their families with the added security of having something to show they have been trough a process that had changed them. At this early stage of their rehabilitation it was less significant for their perception of themselves than for how they wished others to perceive them” (Unicef 2005, p.14).

The atrocities children faced, have had an effect of caution and control in the centres of DDR and evidently “allowed little room for children’s expression. Added to this was a cultural resistance to children making decisions about their life” (Unicef 2005, p.22). Apart from the latter, to come from a commanding position when they were involved in the fighting forces, to be a civilian, could have been perceived by them as humiliating, because they were being “commanded” by civilians. In this case, a strategy used to promote children’s participation in the programmes was to focus on their rights and responsibilities, since “most children in Sierra Leone take on some responsibility for the welfare of the family from a young age” (Unicef 2005, p.22). The idea was to take advantage of the great potential from their experiences of leadership and strategic planning, among others, that could be re-used in their newly acquired civilian lives, where they could feel comfortable and not humiliated.

4.4. Exit strategy from the DDR programme

After a war, there is an obvious need to bring immediate assistance to the victims and perpetrators of the conflicts. However, “it might be true that in the short term the most efficient way (in terms of time and money) is to bring in well-established healing methods from the outside. However, there will be an urgent need to ‘localize’ such healing methods in order to have a long-term positive outcome in a country like Sierra Leone” (Utas 2009, p.6).
4.4.1. Contextual Specificities kept in mind for the programme’s exit strategy from the country

The provision of monetary assistance for the demobilized former combatants created resentment across communities and it gave them the impression that they were being provided with a special treatment. By not finding effective ways to socially reintegrate former combatants into communities, and the fact that reconciliation efforts have not covered the whole geographical spectrum of the country, results in a situation where there are no social distinctions between civilians and former combatants. If we combine the latter with the high degree trauma over the whole population, it can potentially lead to worsen the post-conflict and drive to a relapse into conflict. Building a social capital was not a priority for the DDR process.

Reintegration initiatives were seen as week. Programmes were poorly resourced and did not actually gave much employment opportunities. Today Fofana, a former member of the West Side Boys, describes his experience in the reintegration programme as if his expectations were not met or managed in an appropriate way. He states that the caseworkers told them that they could be anything they want in life; “I wanted to become a computer hardware technician, I was put in a computer school where there were only two computers with 50 of us in my class. By the time I got to touch a computer the programme had ended. I was left angry and frustrated, as the knowledge promised was never gained. We were given sweet words.” (Accord 2012, p.56).

Combatant’s families, including children, “many of whom were internally displaced persons (IDPs), were excluded from the DDR process, They received no services from NCDDR” (Solomon & Ginifer 2008, p.23). This has huge impacts in the way the communities will reintegrate the former child combatants when they could resent them from being able to participate in programmes specifically designed for them, and their families and communities were left as IDPs. “Forced displacement in Sierra Leone during the conflict period was not a one-off occurrence, but rather became a way of life for many victims” (TRC 2004, p.266).

Regarding prevention strategies, it is important to highlight that the DDR process in Sierra Leone has left many young former combatants “jobless,
alienated and mentally mobilized. Reintegration is a long-term process encompassing reconciliation and community-wide peacebuilding” (Accord 2012, p.58). Agencies were set to maintain internal reviews of each child in their centre, every six weeks. “The review demanded multi-disciplinary assessments on each child to chart his/her progress in core areas like health, education, and family tracing” (Unicef 2005, p.25). UNICEF funded several programmes for promoting “community sensitization” but there was no capacity to evaluate the impact or consolidate approaches between different agencies. The challenge was then, to ensure that “the welcome home was connected to long term community-based programmes to support reintegration” (Unicef 2005, p.7).

Regarding judicial systems, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Court were formed. “The main weakness in the system has been the inconsistent or late reporting by child protection agencies and a lack of continuity due to a high turnover of international staff” (Unicef 2005). The TRC were to address violations that were committed during the conflict, and it was supposed to create a historical record that could promote healing and reconciliation within Sierra Leone. While the Special Court was to prosecute those individuals who were bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity. According to the TRC, “laws relating to children were outdated, uninformed and grossly inadequate to guarantee the protection and promotion of their rights. Crimes against children including rape and sexual violence generally went unpunished, further contributing to the culture of silence and impunity that prevailed” (TRC 2004, p.244).

In order to further on what has been already mentioned about this, Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the help from UNICEF, created a child-friendly version of the report, in order to allow participation of children. It was convened in June 2001, in a technical meeting on Children and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Sierra Leone. Two years later, the “Children’s Forum Network (CFN) prepared a submission to the Commission (…) to be used by teachers and children, including children’s organizations such as the CFN, to disseminate the findings and recommendations of the Commission to the young and unborn generations of Sierra Leone, as a measure to prevent recurrence of what happened” (TRC 2004). The last
chapter of the report is a list of activities designed by children, aiming to highlight their role in appropriating and disseminating the contents and recommendations of the Commission. In addition, the report includes a simplified explanation of the causes of the war, the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the specific consequences for the children, and a future vision for children.

4.4.2. Contextual specificities regarding the programme’s exit strategy from the country under a gender-sensitive perception

Sexual violence is often ignored in the war and the post-war settings around the world. The DDR process has completely overlooked the needs of the population in this sense, “little to no funding was allocated to the protection of needs of abducted women and children and only a small number of programs that provide education, skills and counseling were established for them” (Human Rights Watch 2003, p.69), and of course, traditional initiatives were not taken into account, as has been demonstrated before in this text.

A post-conflict setting can bring windows of opportunities for a society who has been given a chance to reconstruct their social fabric, including gender dynamics. However, the management of an appropriate exit strategy from the DDR programme has a huge impact on what the post conflict can signify for a whole country. An this is the case for female ex combatants, challenging enscribed gender roles. As it is the case for boy soldiers, female fighters acquire a number of skills that could actually be seen and promoted as an added value for the post conflict. However, as stated by Mazurana and Carlson “when women and girls are treated as passive victims or ‘dependants’, with no acknowledgement of the skills and resources they have attained, female exfighters are again stripped of control over their lives and a sense of dignity. DDR programmes thereby also risk losing tremendous social capital that could be of importance for post-conflict reconstruction” (Utas 2008, p.33). In this same line, the exclusion of girls from the DDR programmes implies that they would also be denied with possibilities for participating in the provided education system. Many young exfighters have expressed their desire to participate in the
education system for various reasons, but mostly it represents a new opportunity for them to regain control over their lives.

Many consequences arise from the involvement of women and girls in an armed group. Specifically important and an immediate consequence from the sexual violence they are exposed to in their condition as female fighters, has to do with health issues arising from GBV practices. In matters of access, the study made by Mazurana and Carlson found that “in Uganda and Sierra Leone, for example, the few girls who were tested and found to be infected with HIV have not had any access to treatment other than supportive counseling” (Utas 2008, p.34).

Returning to their communities is generally perceived by female ex-combatants as a shameful thing to do, as they are usually seen with suspicion for participating in the fighting forces for such a long time, and for perpetrating violence against civilians. “Feelings of shame originated from being called a rebel or having a rebel child. In this and many other cases the issue is less a sense of personal guilt than a social shame” (Utas 2008, p.35). In this sense, they were worried about their prospective marriages, as they assured that no man would want them as a wife as they had been scared with the war and had been sexually active. The latter was confirmed by men themselves in Utas’ research as well. This will evidently lead to deeper issues, for example, regarding to prostitution as a survival strategy. Not only as the best economical available option, but also as a last means of somehow “reintegrating” into the new socio-economical system.

4.4.3. Peacekeeping personnel as a threat for women and girls
The latter relates with the post-war environment they have to face. Not only they are to be rejected by their own communities, but they are also facing the presence of large humanitarian and developmental agencies. The latter, sadly, leads to the rise of corruption of aid, and “it has been reported that girls and women have had sex with peacekeepers in exchange for a piece of fruit or some food; it cannot be excluded that some of these girls may have been exfighters” (Utas 2008, p.39). This means that structural violence is present in the post-war settings and will therefore be a ground rule in the beginning of the reconstruction of the broken social fabric. This category has been highlighted as
it is an evidence for the corruption of humanitarian aid, the one that leads to the losing of trust from the population receiving the aid. This is a grave violation of human rights, and it is being promoted by those who are sent to guard the people who’s rights have been dramatically violated. The question is whether this inflicted harm will remain and be accepted as an economical strategy in the post-conflict of the country.

4.4.4. Cultural Specificities related to the programme’s exit strategy from the country

The political and social environment is critical in a child’s cognitive development. As has been said before, children are prone to be manipulated because they lack of a broad life experience that will allow them to respond and think critically in contexts where they have had little or no experience in. “It is likely that a child who grows up in a politically fragile environment requiring her or him to negotiate serious threats on a daily basis will develop the competence to grasp issues around the use of military power, the morality of such usage and its consequences at a younger age than a child in a more stable socio-political setting” (Peters 2011, p.77). However, the reintegration phase of the programme did not seem to have a special emphasis on the latter by creating a window of opportunity in order to take advantage of those new competences, and it was actually characterized by not promoting the job industry in the best way possible. Many children and young adults have complained about this and have said that the programmes for skills development did not fulfill their expectatives. The RUF, for example, had a specific socialization process for young integrants, the movement became a micro-society, because for a number of years the group was based in isolated camps in the jungle, and were distanced from the society. According to Peters, the group was based in meritocratic values, which promoted competition among integrants to be the best fighters in order to gain a quicker promotion. The latter was attractive to most young combatants who joined the group because of marginalization issues, but was again, not addressed properly in the DDR programme.
4.4.5. Cultural specificities related to the exit strategy from the programme, from a gender perspective

In many African communities, there are traditional healers who can contribute to the physical and psychological reintegration of former combatants, but mostly women who have been victims of GBV. “Young women tend to turn to these healers and are aided in their post-trauma recoveries. Churches and other religious institutions are also successful in aiding young women with dealing with trauma” (Utas 2008, p.35). However, and as stated in Utas’ study, there might be a big risk that people won’t talk about sexual abuse after the war, and that crimes related to GBV would remain in impunity, which would be a factor that contributes to women and girls to remain silent about it. The community plays an important role in this sense, some might choose to perform rituals in order to treat the psychological trauma in their own ways, such as the Karamokos: “if people have respect for you in the community – even if you are guilty – the people will not let you appear in court, and as for the person, he will not go to jail (Karamoko in Freetown)” (Utas 2009, p.23) or the Mori-man who says “it is a big sin, but if the perpetrator, or his parents bring money and kola nuts (signaling that that they are prepared to take responsibility for the girl/woman) and the girls’ parents agree then they will let love intervene (Mori-man in Makeni)” (Utas 2009, p.23), and love in this case refers only to the legal and economical aspects of a marriage. The matter is finally to settle the issue with the perpetrator and the victim according to Muslim law, in this case.

As for the health consequences for girls who are victims of GBV, local herbalists treat STDs with traditional methods involving herbs and some communities such as Makeni use medicine that can remake a woman into a virgin again. However, little attention is paid to the psychological consequences of sexual violence, and they actually think of the behavior of a person who is experiencing psychological trauma, as someone who is going mad, as related to a mental illness. Many of the people involved in traditional healing are working in secrecy. The latter means that there is a risk of prevalence of the sexual violent behaviors, as there did not seem to be any consequences in terms of their own traditional dynamics. Stigma could have probably be avoided by working with the victims in secret, so that they won’t be noticed, as were their fears, receiving
counseling or medical treatment in a hospital, or by involving legal investigations.
CHAPTER FIVE
“Immersion into the fighter’s world is an important disjuncture in the normal pre-war life of children who become part of armed groups” (Özerdem & Podder 2011, p.3)

5. Discussion/comparison
In this chapter, I will analyze the information collected above. The most significant areas that should be given special attention to, according to the findings of this research, will organize it. The information in the discussion below, will be thought of according to the theoretical and conceptual framework provided at the beginning of this research, and will find support from other examples in different countries that have had DDR programmes for children, in order to strengthen the arguments provided.

It is important to mention that the discussion might seem to be focused on a critical point of view of the DDR process, however it is recognized that there were several good aspects in the DDR in Sierra Leone, but this discussion’s aim is to be able to open the debate on future aspects to be possibly considered in the settlement of DDR programmes for other countries.

5.1. General comments on the DDR programme
After doing an intense revision of it, based on the description in chapter three and the general findings in chapter four, the results make me wonder what kind of standards have been used in order to classify the DDR process as an example of what a successful one looks like. Regarding the inconsistencies on the disarmed and demobilized former combatants and the number of collected weapons there are interesting aspects to consider. According to the UN strategy to support the national recovery and peace-building in Sierra Leone, “the disarmament programme run by UNAMSIL and coordinated by the NCDDR ran from October 1998 to January 2002, demobilizing a total of 72,490 combatants and collecting a total of 42,300 weapons” (Thusi & Meek 2003, p.25). However, according to the annex #3 there were a total of 4,270 children who were disarmed and demobilized and including adults, the grand total was 47,710. According to the annex #4 regarding the weapons and ammunition collected in all the districts, summing up the hand weapons, assault weapons and group
weapons, there were 26,001 weapons collected (parts of guns are not included). What has been done with the other half of the weapons collected, when the end of this strategy was to destroy all available weapons? This draws up in grave inconsistencies of the available data, because the same source (NCDDR) gives different accounts on the same kind of information. In this line, in the report of the NCDDR, they state that the Community Arms Collection and Destruction Programme (CACD) was designed in order to collect arms and ammunitions “in the hands of individuals who did not qualify for the DDR programme” (National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration 2002, p.6). I wonder why there was the need to create a programme to collect weapons from people who were not able to be eligible for the DDR programme, when one of the main requirements was to poses a weapon in order to enter the DDR? In this sense, the latter would just mean that the DDR process was prepared to fail, in a sense. However, this is to be expected, as in formal reports of the NCDDR they state that children did not have to present a weapon in order to enter the programme, though testimonies from the very own children show that this was not true, and that they were in fact left outside of the programme because they did not posses one. The latter directly reflects on the fact that there are children who end up being left out of the programme, which not only is discriminatory, but also contributes to the instability of the country, impeding its development.

5.2. Gender-sensitive approach

As stated throughout the research in a special sub-section in each topic, regarding the lack of a gender-sensitivity approach in the programme, there is another major failure of the programme. And even today, DDR programmes for children usually leave girls out of them, because their roles as combatants are complex and difficult to categorize. In fact, even if there are some attempts to include them in the programmes, these usually reinforce gender stereotypes and harmful traditional practices, instead of using them as a tool for allowing a change. It can be said that the programmes are not girl-friendly, as some of them even chose not to demobilize because they fear being stigmatized, or even seen as former combatants. As stated before, “issues of stigma, safe demobilization, and individual concerns about post-war marriage, health and
education need to be addressed both in a more gendered way, and with an appropriate understanding of young women’s agency in both peace and war” (Utas 2008, p.5). This is an aspect that needs to be considered in the design and implementation of DDR programmes, by having in mind all the cultural and contextual specificities from the countries in order to shape these to meet the requirements of specific communities. A differential approach should also be taken in mind, as related with gender-sensitivity for example, girls need to be assisted by female personnel in order to feel comfortable with sharing experiences that they might only want to share with another woman.

For girls and women it is especially difficult to navigate in the socio-economical and political spectrum of the country. Their lack of opportunities makes it even harder for them to cope with their post war realities, because not only are they facing the contextual situation of a country in crisis, but they are also facing stigma, discrimination in a higher level than boys, rejection, and exposure to grave health issues because their needs have not been appropriately addressed. Another delicate aspect is their relation to senior combatants and the emotional bond they seem to develop with them, it will make it even harder for them to overcome not only contextual difficulties but also psychological problems. For many girls it will be difficult to accept and reintegrate to traditional roles they are supposed to have in their communities and families, for it the community sensitization must be taken into greater account.

Girls who have been victims of sexual violence not only face health consequences, but also stigma and discrimination, as it has been said before. In the case of the DDR programme in Sierra Leone, traditional healers were not even considered as important actors for aiding them to cope with the consequences in the post war settings. Which was a mistake, as most of them would only feel safe when being helped by a traditional healer who, in their perspective, would help them overcome with the consequences mentioned before.
5.3. Social navigation, how to cope with realities after the war and DDR ended.

Even if it is not entirely a responsibility of the DDR programmes themselves, in a post-conflict setting there will be resource scarcity, and some children will have to resort to extreme ways of coping with their reality, as has been shown in the first topic in chapter four. The community-settings that were present before the war won’t be available anymore, as the social fabric will be broken. However, by establishing close contact with the communities and by being context and culturally sensitive, it would be possible to establish priorities in the design of the programmes as to promote the children’s acquired agency, in a way that won’t pose resistance with the coping of their own communities. An example from the case of Sierra Leone is that the exclusion of children has been so huge, that those who have not directly participated as child soldiers would end up resenting those children who once were the perpetrators as they are being provided with “all kinds of help” that the non-combatants are not receiving, even if they have also been affected by war. They will be challenged to find ways of coping with the new socio-economical conditions, which might be represented as victimcy, when children see as their only option to resort to play war in front of international aiders, in order to receive some benefits, because they have been forgotten. This needs to be avoided, and an appropriate way of doing it is by cooperating with other humanitarian agencies in order to be able to equally provide the same opportunities for former child combatants, and children who were not.

The frustration of some youth in Sierra Leone and the disappointment they felt with the promises that were not complied to them, was clearly seen. They were told that they could be anything they wanted in life, but the majority could not even end up accessing the programmes for the development of their skills or continue with their education. Several points are important here, first, in the programme in Sierra Leone there were no specificities on how the educational system was going to be reinserted and adapted to children who have been excluded from it for a long time. The general perceived lack of opportunities for developing in the professional sphere was a major concern, and in fact led many children to end up in informal economies and using their status as former
child combatant as a way to intimidate. Finally, the lack of an appropriate cultural and contextual assessment in the country resulted in the wastage of windows of opportunities that could have been created if the children’s agency would have been promoted. Both boys and girls have acquired many new abilities that could have been better used in the post-conflict, and I am not only talking about military-related activities. Maybe of these former child combatants have leadership characteristics that could have been much better addressed by the DDR programme, and this is just to give an example.

Apart from this, there are several traditional aspects that should have been considered in this case, as children in Sierra Leone are given domestic responsibilities in their early years, which makes them capable of having a greater sense of community rather than being individualistic, and this is of great important in regards to the focus that must be given to the community approach. However, since the war has in some cases destroyed this sense of community, a much greater emphasis must have been given to restructure what they have lost during the conflict.

5.4. Community and family approach
As has been discussed in the second topic analyzed in chapter four, the inclusion of family and communities is crucial and they should definitely be allowed to play a bigger role in the processes. They are the ones who would give and pave the way into what would be a successful cross cultural approach, they are the ones who know what they need, how it should be prioritized, they know their country, they can be a huge help to tracing and reunification of children with their families, they can in the end become a communication bridge between the communities and the humanitarian actors, and this is fundamental in order to succeed in designing, implementing and monitoring these programmes.

As it was the case of Sierra Leone, local initiatives were not included in the programmes, and it is said that the approaches towards reconciliation were not connected to what the people needed and wanted. Communities, who have been working in the country for a long time, were not consulted or kept in mind as important actors for the design or even the implementation or monitoring of
the programmes. The DDR programme for the people of Sierra Leone did not have a community-oriented dimension and failed in putting the beneficiaries in the first place.

The latter evidences the fact that there was no cultural assessment, and the people in charge of the design were not aware that the culture of the country is based in conversations and centered in dialogue and storytelling, which empowers people to take ownership as a member of a community.

5.5. In relation to the exit strategy designed for the programme

As noted in the final section of chapter four, cooperation between humanitarian and development agencies is crucial since the beginning of the programme in order to be consistent with it. It will be crucial for children’s resilience and for communities to be able to fix and rebuild the broken social fabric through participation, by being empowered as a community who is able to act collectively.

In this case, reconciliation efforts were not covered in all aspects. It is true that DDR specific programmes for child soldiers are directed at this specific group of victims of the conflict, but it must be kept in mind how the provisions for them might cause resentment among other children who have not been able to access any programmes for their behalf, but have also been affected by war. A close collaboration between humanitarian agencies in all areas must be highlighted as a determinant of the success in the long-term objectives.

In regards to the justice systems, there was a general feeling from youth that it was a hostile environment for them. Also, since a great majority of TRC audiences took place in Freetown, they left a great majority of the victims outside of them, because they were not able to travel to the capital. However, it is interesting to know how strong the community sense was on the population, that they had the ability and initiative as to develop their own methods of reconciliation based in their own cultural and traditional views. Sadly, these examples are not even mentioned in official documents of the DDR process.
5.6. Lessons learned and the problem with international standards

However great efforts have been made in order to learn from previous experiences, there should be a general understanding that what might have worked for one country might not necessarily work for another. Even if there should definitely be an important focus on considering the lessons learned, it must by no means be considered as an exact science, and this is why it is important to draw up the programmes according to cultural and contextual specificities.

In regards to the international standards for DDR, they are an interesting guide that should be included in the first stage assessment of the programmes and kept as a reference during the programme’s implementation. However there is a global tendency to rely on them too much, which would be a risk of doing more harm than good to the communities, as each case is different and therefore needs its own personalized, context and culturally specific attempt for solution. Leaving a western-oriented point of view aside, and working towards adapting to regional and local, communitarian and field realities, would make much more sense if the objective is set to be a long term solution.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

By highlighting and illustrating the inferences from a number of different researches and field practitioners, this research has attempted to bring together a set of conceptual and theoretical issues related to the programming of the DDR process for child soldiers in Sierra Leone. This was oriented towards comprehending the overview of one of the first and internationally applauded DDR programmes designed for child soldiers, as an attempt to review to what extend it was successful, or not, and what kind of lessons could be learnt for other countries. As has been shown in the research, it is quite interesting to question which kind of standards were used to evaluate this programme and provide it with such high qualifications. In fact, this was done by considering the fact that it has been one of the first DDR processes for child soldiers, and that there was a lack of a general understanding of what it meant to be successful in regards to the topic of reintegrating child soldiers back into civil society. However, by highlighting the lack of a special consideration towards cultural and contextual specificities, it can be argued that this specific programme lacked of a cross-cultural and differential approach, as has been stated before, that could have made an important difference in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration outcomes in the case of child soldiers in Sierra Leone.

A DDR programme for child soldiers, which is based in cultural and contextual specificities, is fundamental in order to contribute to consolidating peace. A cross-cultural and differential perspective could diminish the harm done by a western-oriented set of humanitarian agencies and the valuable work done by them in order to aid a country in the aftermath of war. As it is insistently mentioned in this research, including communities and local initiatives in the design, implementation and monitoring of the DDR programmes, could allow the processes to more adequately adapt to the needs of the children. In the case of Sierra Leone, traditional beliefs, community storytelling, and local initiatives have proven to be an important added value in the reconstruction of
the country’s social fabric. However, as it has been argued in this research, the latter has not been taken into account by the DDR process in this country and has rather been delegitimized.

A theoretical and conceptual discussion was presented in order to deal with more specific aspects related to the definition of child soldiers and the ethical dilemmas involved in it. Its relation with the theoretical part of the research was an attempt to understand and analyze the different ways child soldiers have used to socially navigate the terrains of war and post-war, considering the mentioned victim-agent continuum debate. The latter has opened the floor to questioning key aspects to be further discussed in this field, and intimately relates to cultural and contextual specificities in each case. As it has been stated in the research, child soldiers do have the capacity for being morally responsible agents. But this does not imply that being soldiers is always a choice for them, but rather that this agency is under construction in their early years of life, and their involvement in war either by force or by structural factors that could lead to the ownership of victimization discourses, should be seen as social navigation under pressure. It is disappointing to think that the normalization of violence has come as far as to believe that children are to be guilty for being born in a context where you ought to be skilled for war. They should therefore not been considered as equally responsible as adults, and their status of victims should remain intact.

Acknowledging girls as soldiers was certainly not a feature to be proud of in the DDR process in Sierra Leone. Instead, they have been tremendously discriminated as has been argued in this research. Contextual, but mostly cultural specificities from this case study, show the crucial impact of traditional healing support mechanisms, that were sometimes to be secret regarding the immense degree of stigma and discrimination in the communities towards girls and young women who had any kind of relation with the armed factions, and were in most of the cases been subjects of sexual violence. There was a failure to listen carefully to what the communities and individuals had to say about their own ways of dealing with the consequences of the war in their country. In most cases, empowerment of women greatly depends not only in their overcoming of the traumas of war, but also from the support of their own communities. When
programming DDR, there should be a much better understanding of gender roles and meanings in each case, in order to accordingly set the ground drivers that would take the society to the post-conflict era. Understanding this, would also improve the chances of gaining the release of girls from the fighting factions and actually including them in the attempt for peace in an appropriate way. Gender factors are to be seen as fundamental, not only within the armed groups, but also within the same society, as drivers for social cohesion.

Finally, but not lastly, I cannot finish this thesis without highlighting what I can conclude from my research process, are the main challenges and recommendations regarding this specific topic of programming DDR processes for children, in order to contribute to the field, as a new humanitarian practitioner who’s main interest is the area of child protection.

6. Challenges and Recommendations

6.1. Acknowledging contextual and cultural specificities when programming DDR for children.

-Prioritizing a cross-cultural perspective by diminishing and revising the strong western-oriented centered approach under which the great majority of conflicts are understood by.

- One key challenge is to empower children, who’s past is represented by the reliance in violence as a survival strategy, to be able to transform identities into securing their survival by trusting institutions.

- Focus on previous individual experiences is crucial and cannot be separated from notions of recovery and reintegration in post-war. Their agency plays a fundamental role, and the ways they socially navigate during and after the war will determine the success of the programme.
6.2. Allowing communities to be as involved as possible in the programming of the DDR, and encouraging child participation in them.

- Establishing close contact with the communities, their own needs and initiatives is crucial, as they are the ones who would guarantee the success of a cross-cultural approach implementation.

- Child participation, mostly in the monitoring phase, should be prioritized and encouraged, and it might even support them in their navigational skills and give them the security that they are part of the programmes. Their own experiences matter in terms of building resilience.

- Community based reintegration and reconciliation is fundamental in order not to remarginalize youth all over again.

- Integrating local initiatives for reconciliation might help bring a solution to the inclusion of all the victims in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which might not have the needed coverage; these communities can play an important role as allies for reconciliation.

6.3. Further promoting and encouraging the cooperation between humanitarian settings and developmental strategies.

- Standards for evaluation should be higher, and set accordingly to cultural and contextual specificities.

- Encouraging close cooperation with communities in order to design reconciliation strategies, by prioritizing local initiatives and traditions for reintegration and collective memory building.

- Considering a parallel assistance programme in order to avoid discrimination of children who were not involved in the fighting forces, in matters of services of relief aid, education and vocational skills, to avoid feelings of anger and resentment towards former child soldiers.

- The criteria under which age is defined, has to be central and flexible to change. But should be thought of from a perception of family reunification, the continuation of (catch-up) education and/or vocational training that should
always have an individual focus as each experience is different and expectations and needs varies.

- Considering, especially in long lasting conflicts, that there have been children who joined as children and demobilized as adults, and this has implications for post-war settings and socialization strategies.

- It is recommended to constantly revisit and monitor navigation tactics to ensure better reintegration into socioeconomic context

- Education and information is crucial, but should be directly linked to traditional support and believes.

- Give children and youth a voice.

6.4. Acknowledging gender-sensitivity as a fundamental driver for constructing a more complete DDR

- Improve a component of gender sensitivity in the programmes, and consider the crucial role played by local communities and traditional healers.

- Avoid reinforcing gender-stereotypes and harmful traditional practices, and start to use them as important tools for change.

- Considering stigma and discrimination as issues to be addressed in a more gendered way, and understanding and acknowledging young women’s agency both prior and during the war, in order to help them navigate towards peace.

- Highlighting a differential perspective when thinking about DDR for young woman in order to provide girl-friendly spaces and services.

6.5. Acknowledging and identifying the risks posed by humanitarian interventions towards the population

- Strengthen the training provided to PKO’s in order for them to comply with humanitarian principles, and reinforce the judicial consequences for those who have violated their duty as peacekeepers.

- Question how far can an external intervention actually reconcile war-torn communities if it is not by prioritizing cultural and contextual specificities and
including local and community initiatives, and allowing an active child participation in most stages of the programme.

- Consider the fact that a western-oriented point of view might do more harm than good. We need to start listening to the people and leave our western pretentiousness aside; as there might be more ways of facing and resolving issues that we don’t know about.
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67
### Annex #1: Stages of the DDR process in Sierra Leone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Disarmament (1)</th>
<th>Demobilisation (2)</th>
<th>Help with Reinsertion (3)</th>
<th>Reintegration (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>Disarmament of all groups in order to strengthen security and facilitate return to civilian life and the authority of government</td>
<td>Recognition of former combatants as civilian individuals and the provision of initial assistance for a return to civilian life</td>
<td>Aid to former combatants to cover their basic needs</td>
<td>Provision of opportunities to acquire basic skills in order to find work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help given</strong></td>
<td>Transfer of former combatants and their families to Demobilisation Centres</td>
<td>- Provision of food and utensils - Medical check-up - Psychological orientation - Interviews - Identification</td>
<td>Payment of 300,000 Le (around $150)</td>
<td>Aid package: - Formal education - Vocational training - Public-sector employment - Agriculture - Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timescale</strong></td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Between 3 and 21 days</td>
<td>Basic help for 3 months</td>
<td>Between 3 and 9 months, according to choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place</strong></td>
<td>Disarmament Centre</td>
<td>Demobilisation Centre</td>
<td>Settlement region; Regional Reintegration Offices</td>
<td>Settlement region; Regional Reintegration Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsible body</strong></td>
<td>UNAMSIL, under instruction from NCDDR</td>
<td>NCDDR</td>
<td>NCDDR</td>
<td>NCDDR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Escola de Cultura de Pau 2006, p.5)
Annex #2: Diagrams on Disarmament and Demobilization Stages

(Unicef 2005, p.10)
Annex #3: Total disarmed and demobilized by age group in districts, by NCDDR

Table 11: Total disarmed and demobilised by age group in districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>3,660</td>
<td>3,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombali</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>3,495</td>
<td>4,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonthe</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>1,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Area</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>2,163</td>
<td>2,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kailahun</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>7,019</td>
<td>7,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenema</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>4,431</td>
<td>4,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koinadugu</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>5,395</td>
<td>6,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moyamba</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>2,626</td>
<td>2,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Loko/Kambia</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>6,985</td>
<td>7,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pujeahun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,961</td>
<td>2,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonkolili</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>2,562</td>
<td>2,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,270</strong></td>
<td><strong>43,440</strong></td>
<td><strong>47,710</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: NCDDR, August 2002)

(Thusi & Meek 2003, p.35)

Annex #4, Weapons and ammunition collected in all districts, by NCDDR

Table 2: Weapons and ammunition collected in all districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand weapons</td>
<td>7,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault weapons</td>
<td>17,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group weapons</td>
<td>1,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammunition</td>
<td>935,495</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: NCDDR, August 2002)

(Thusi & Meek 2003, p.29)