

## **RIGHTS, ROOT CAUSES AND RECRUITMENT**

### **The youth factor in Africa's armed conflicts**

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Children are defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child as people under the age of 18. Youth, although commonly used to describe the age group between 15–25, is not a term recognized in legislation designed to protect children. It has, however, become a concept employed by regimes and rebels alike to mobilize Africa's young population for political and military ends. African youth are caught in the chasm between childhood and the unattainable social, political and economic status that would define them as adults. Deprived of educational opportunities and livelihoods, youth are actively mobilized by politicians and armed groups alike, who recognize that their alliance is valuable and their enmity dangerous. The militarization of disaffected young people, of which the problem of child soldiers is only a small part, originates with the idea that youth constitute "potential": a commodity that can and has been plundered alongside natural resources and public funds to serve the agendas of warfare.

### **Introduction**

Where would war makers be without youth? The co-option of the energy and devotion of young people for the personal advancement of a few military elites in situations of personal insecurity is the single greatest reason for the pejorative connotations associated with the category of 'youth' in Africa today.<sup>1</sup>

Youth refers to a somewhat ambiguous category of people and is a term whose fluid definition lends itself to different projects: the nation's 'future potential', agitators and challengers of authority and order. The term youth can include children as well, who are defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child as people under the age of 18. Youth has commonly come to describe people of 15 to 25 years in age, although the upper limits of this definition can be pushed where the need arises and more 'youth' are required to fill the ranks of armies, freedom fighters or political movements. They are also stretched where the economic and social status required for adulthood is unattainable to young adults.

For legal purposes, the term "youth" is not particularly useful, as it refers to an age group that straddles the limits of who should be afforded the special protection called for under international standards. The grey area of international law, political significance and popular perceptions occupied by 'youth' is, however, central to understanding their role in armed conflicts.

By default, youth can be defined by the common strategies employed by power brokers to use them for political, military and economic ends. These are strategies applied in ways that appeal to the developmental, social and economic needs of the particular group, and may cut across different socio-economic strata and ethnic, linguistic or geographical identities. The provision of incentives (that are not always positive nor in the best interests of young people) by recruiters lie at the core of mobilization strategies. These can range from the fight-or-die ultimatum offered in forced recruitment, to the more sophisticated mechanisms of political, social and economic inclusion or exclusion.

While the specific age definition might be fluid and 'youth' has been constructed in similar ways by

legitimate regimes and rebels alike, usually as a prescriptive role for young people. This prescription is usually expressed in political dogma and mobilization campaigns aimed at promoting change or reinforcing existing orders. This in turn, influences broader perceptions of young people and the roles they play.

This essay is a brief exploration of the ways in which youth are mobilized to support political and military agendas, and how the construct of youth has been employed for political change. It suggests that a clearer understanding of these dynamics is necessary if peace-building interventions such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and post conflict recovery efforts are to be sustainable. It also recommends that demobilization (or more accurately demilitarisation), in effect, needs to refer back to mobilization and specifically to the structural conditions that turn young populations into seemingly bottomless recruitment pools. The conclusion is that youth have been perceived as a commodity for plunder, and that the only way for this problem of 'instrumentalization' to be corrected is to both guarantee children's rights and ensure meaningful participation of children and youth in decision-making.

## Approaches to young people

On a recent visit to Sierra Leone, the United Nations special representative to the secretary-general on children in armed conflict, Olara Otunnu, commented:

The youth...represent a tremendous resource for the future of the country. However, many missed out on education due to the war and suffer from a lack of employment opportunities. How to make them peace-builders, instead of potential spoilers of the newly won peace...is a major challenge. Every effort must be made to harness their potential and to engage them actively and constructively in the reconstruction process, including the speedy adoption and concerted implementation of a national youth policy, as well as programmes targeting and benefiting young adults.<sup>2</sup>

Most striking about this observation is that it brings into remarkable parallel the situation of Sierra Leonean youth today with the situation of youth before the 10-year armed conflict. The roles of youth in Sierra Leone's civil war were the result of the employment of a broad spectrum of mobilization tactics by different actors: from the rallying of discontented students and marginalized Freetown youth in the early days; to the press-ganging of young people into government forces; the use of 'traditional' cultural constructs such as hunting societies by the Civil Defence Forces; to the coerced recruitment for which the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) gained notoriety. The success of each of these campaigns was not accidental, rather it was due to calculated predation on the social, political and economic vulnerabilities of young people.<sup>3</sup>

Special Representative Otunnu's observation might prompt us to challenge current thinking about exclusion; that it occurs along clear socio-economic or ethnic lines. The youth in question here share no common language, racial characteristics or social stratum. The processes leading to the uprising in Sierra Leone are thought by some to be one of generational exclusion, which continues today to manifest itself in a lack of livelihood and educational opportunities and a near total absence of forums for the peaceful participation of young people in decision and policymaking<sup>4</sup>. The perception of youth as potential spoilers derives from both their own sense of exclusion as well as from inclusion in organizations that have, in the past, challenged the order, most notably the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an organization rooted in pre-war radical student politics that later gained notoriety for its forcible recruitment of young people.

Children and youth are recognized as a force for change in and of themselves. However, without rights, guidance and political voices, this group has almost universally become the target of political and military predation. The recent examples of forcible child recruitment in Sierra Leone, while receiving much media attention and the condemnation of child rights advocates, are a rather small distillation of what is the most pervasive root cause of conflict in Africa today and one that reproduces itself ad-infinitum: the failure to guarantee the rights of young people, i.e. both children and youth.

Children's rights are the subject of one of the most comprehensive and least implemented bodies of international legislation in existence, which includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, ratified by the whole of Africa with the exception of Somalia, and the home-grown African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.<sup>5</sup> The failure to implement these potentially powerful frameworks for safeguarding the rights of Africa's majority is paralleled by a lack of recognition within contemporary security analysis of the consequences for political stability of the disenfranchisement and/or exploitation of children and youth.

The dominant perspective on young people in armed conflict has focused on the impact of war on children and interventions on behalf of child soldiers aim at the rehabilitation of victims. Recently, sanctions against the recruiters of children have come into effect in Sierra Leone, where convictions under the Special Court have been handed down to those most responsible for the use of children as soldiers. Article 4 of the Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, regarding violations of international humanitarian law other than crimes against humanity and violations of the Geneva Conventions, states, *inter alia*, that

the Special Court shall have the power to prosecute persons...conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities.

Foday Sankoh, the former leader of the Revolutionary United Front, faces charges on 17 counts, including "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into their groups or using them to participate in hostilities, enslavement, pillage, intentionally directing attacks against humanitarian personnel or peacekeepers, unlawful killings, abductions and hostage-taking."<sup>6</sup>

This is indeed a landmark in the struggle to end impunity for the misuse of young people. But the ease with which young people are abused in the pursuit of political, economic and military goals is not the work of a few reprehensible human rights abusers. It is the result of widespread structural problems; a lack of education and livelihood options, of opportunities for peaceful participation in decision and policymaking. Each of these factors plays a role in the *mobilization* of young people.

Broader responses to the problem of child soldiers come in the form of a number of significant policy developments in the area of children in armed conflict and child soldiers, specifically, pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPCAC). The optional protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict requires governments to take all feasible measures to ensure that children under the age of 18 do not take part in hostilities; bans all compulsory recruitment under 18; requires governments to raise the minimum age for voluntary recruitment to 16 and bans all military recruitment and use of children under 18 by armed groups. United Nations Security Council Resolution (1379 S/RES/1379,2001)

...requests the Secretary-General to attach to his report a list of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in violation of the international obligations applicable to them, in situations that are on the Security Council's agenda or that may be brought to the attention of the Security Council by the Secretary-General, in accordance with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

Security Council Resolution 1460 in January of 2003, heralded what Secretary General Kofi Anan called the "era of application" of the global ban on the use of children as soldiers.<sup>7</sup> 1460 expresses the intent of the Security Council to enter into dialogue with parties in violation of international standards in an effort to pressure the development of "time bound action plans to end (the) practice."

The resolution follows the Secretary General's Report S/2002/1299, submitted to the security council in November of 2002, which names 23 parties, five of which are currently on the Security Council's agenda, among them rebel and government forces in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Somalia, where children are currently being employed as soldiers.

Child soldiering has become an unambiguous and internationally recognized mark of regimes and rebels deserving of the condemnation of the international community. The legal imperative to stop using children as soldiers is as clear and strong as it could be.

But governments, armed forces and non-state actors, in the trajectories of war and politics, need to pragmatically adapt and change their strategies for mustering support. These strategies, almost without exception, have included the mobilization of children and youth, and not exclusively through forced recruitment for military purposes. Youth are not, as is commonly thought, an alternative to adults. Warring parties and politicians have recognized that youth offer opportunities and capabilities that make their allegiance invaluable and their enmity dangerous. As a power base, youth have been used with great efficiency.

Predation of youth potential is not a new phenomenon. Every colonial liberation struggle, democratic election campaign, violent armed rebellion and social reform movement has recognized the critical role of youth in transitions. These moments of demographic sensitivity are fleeting, however, leaving youth, once they have served their purpose, to their own devices.

The idea of voluntarism among children, particularly in the context of the highly publicized forced recruitment methods of groups such as Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front, has come into question. Armed coercive methods aside, the decisions of children and youth joining armed groups are subject to social, political and economic pressures<sup>8</sup> that cast doubt on the degree of free choice exercised. There is little doubt that poverty is dominant among these pressures, as children and youth themselves have testified.<sup>9</sup>

It is ominously difficult to find African youth today who are not facing some form of extreme economic, social, or cultural pressure. Educational and livelihood choices range from limited to non-existent for the African majority. Although weak state capacity, the failure to deliver essential services, the political invisibility of young people and too few life chances are conditions that exist-before, during and after armed conflicts, choices are narrowed in wartime by the further breakdown or failure of family, community and state mechanisms that would protect them.

Recruitment methods capitalize on this, from the most brutal and coercive, to the more subtle and ideological. Recruitment potential is created equally during armed conflict by destructive sub-state actors who destroy infrastructures and social fabric in order to recruit forcibly, and peaceful times by governments that are unaccountable to young people. Recruitment potential is thus a product of both inclusion and exclusion.

### **Mobilization: Motivated youngsters wanted**

What motivates young people to co-operate with armed groups is as varied as the individuals themselves, and as the huge variety of educational, developmental and personal influences in their lives. Curiously, the apparent oblivion of states to the needs of children and youth in peacetime contradicts dramatically the acute awareness of regimes and rebels of what it takes to raise a young army in wartime or to contain challenges to the state in more peaceful settings.

Writers such as Alex De Waal and Nicholas Argenti<sup>10</sup> argue that sustaining hierarchies headed by 'gerontocracies' requires the suppression and containment of young people within paternalistic, sometimes 'traditional' social frameworks that can be manipulated to serve the ends of clientelism. Education can also play a role in this:

Reinventing the role of village elders, the political elite have commonly adopted the same attitude of didactic condescension. At all levels of the education system, students are therefore compelled to memorize, to repeat, to recite, and thus to embody their subjection to the authority of the master.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, a common way of discrediting armed opposition groups such as Angola's Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army and Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front has been to draw attention to their lack of coherent ideology beyond

dogmatic critiques of the existing order.

What passes for education in youth mobilization or suppression campaigns plays two key roles, firstly, to indoctrinate, and secondly to sustain the illusion of the opportunity of gaining education itself. Educational offerings need only appear better than the alternative of no education at all.

A similar argument could be made for mechanisms of political participation, which, like education systems, are an opportunity not to be passed up. Youth in Mozambique's Independence Struggle exalted in their newfound political roles and took pride in their young cabinet and Ministers barely in their thirties. Youth were employed early in the struggle to spread the message throughout rural areas and to prepare the people for liberation. Later during the civil conflict between the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), both parties enticed young people into their movements on promises of scholarships that sometimes did not only fail to materialize, but landed the prospective scholar on the front line armed with an assault rifle in place of a pencil.<sup>12</sup>

The opportunities inherent in compliance or resistance can be presented in the form of political participation and educational opportunities, but also health, social services and the promise of personal emancipation. Ethiopia's Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was able to indirectly recruit women fighters through the establishment of social services, such as health and education. The movement established a counter-government that sought to address gender equality through legal reforms in the areas of marriage, divorce, education and land reform. Some women sought to join the movement as a way of escaping early marriages.<sup>13</sup>

The motivation of young people is very clearly not accomplished exclusively through the barrel of a gun. Positive choice-making belies the desire of most youth to be included in decision-making and to pursue what Argenti has pointed out are "conventional aspirations for their future lives... education and a useful job".<sup>14</sup>

Another case is that of generations of youth who have literally been socialized in war contexts. With no peace or stability in living memory, how conventional can the aspirations be of an Angolan adolescent living in the 21st century in a context described by UNICEF in 1999 as "the worst place in the world to be a child"?<sup>15</sup>

The situation in Angola asks us to reflect on what the state, with its narrowly beneficial war economy and shattered capacity to govern, much less provide services, intends to do about a population consisting of nearly half under 15's, a large number of whom have migrated to urban areas and are unlikely to be excited about rural subsistence farming in the hinterland.<sup>16</sup>

New channels always open for youthful energy. If positive, constructive incentives are not on offer, it may take the path of least resistance: re-mobilization into new resistance movements, mercenarism, and criminal activity. The experiences of child fighters often described as traumatic or damaging, once normalized by the surrounding catastrophe, can also become empowering.

For some, fighting has proved an alternative preferable to disarming and losing the status of a fighter and the money and power that accompanies it. These, surprisingly, according to Argenti, are only a small minority: "the remarkable thing to consider is not why some of Africa's youth have embraced violence, but why so few of them have."<sup>17</sup>

Fighting rebel wars, controlling gangsterism and even basic law enforcement can quickly become backlashes against youth who are seeking the only alternatives available to them<sup>18</sup>. This occurs while governments respond to the international call to protect children by signing international agreements aimed at protecting children, while apologize for their inability to deliver critical services due to insecurity, lack of capacity and myriad other forms of justification. No government wishes to be seen to be casting off its children, particularly when the prospect of international assistance is at stake.

### **Demobilization and reintegration: Only children need apply**

The past decade has seen dramatic progress in the way children are approached in peace

processes, notably efforts to 'mainstream' child protection in United Nations peace mission mandates, specialized, separate DDR programmes for under-18s and in the improvement in of family tracing and reunification programmes.<sup>19</sup>

Of particular importance is Security Council Resolution 1379 (S/RES/1379 2001), which calls for states to:

Provide protection of children in peace agreements, including, where appropriate, provisions relating to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers and the reunification of families, and to consider, when possible, the views of children in those processes.

The demobilization of youth, much less the legally meaningless category of youth or the vague notion of 'youth identity' are unlikely to figure in the near future in carefully circumscribed peace negotiations, despite the meticulous attention to securing youth as a power base during conflicts. The 18 standard and all it entails was a hard won victory, but may prove a double-edged sword.

By including children under special protection mandates or signing on to legislation, states can safely resort to 'lack of capacity' (due, for example, to the nihilistic destruction campaigns of the opposition, poverty, structural re-adjustment programmes, etcetera) for delivering basic services, far easier to defend against than the charges of corruption, neglect and nepotism that is seen to spur the outbreak of wars in the first place. As long as the gesture of protecting children is seen, the political reality of a young disenfranchised majority can be overlooked. Who can fault governments that minister to 'special interest' groups such as children?

But this leaves several critical questions:

- Can DDR programmes addressed to children and adults afford to overlook the youth factor that has been so instrumental in armed conflicts?
- More broadly, are peace settlements that seek to restore oppressive gerontocracies sustainable?
- Do post-war reconstruction programmes that do not prioritise the youthful the majority in reconstruction and development lead to long-term stability?

The answer to these questions hinges on whether demobilization, or more accurately, the broader process of demilitarisation, finds its antithesis in mobilization and adequately counters the incentives used to draw people into violent conflict.

## **Beyond the optional protocol**

The 'era of implementation' of the Optional Protocol brought in by Security Council resolution 1440 will require more than just targeted interventions to prevent states and non-state actors from recruiting children and specialized disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. Responsibility must not rest only on the shoulders of a few predators and a handful of non-governmental organizations with the mandate to protect and rehabilitate children.

Alex de Waal argues that the logical progression of the campaign against the use of children against soldiers is to "address the structural conditions that make it so easy to militarise African youth".<sup>20</sup> This means the reduction and elimination of the 'recruitment potential' that arises from generational exclusion: the absence of viable livelihoods, the failure of education and social services, the inequitable exploitation of natural resources, including land, and the lack of participation of young people in policy and decision making. Government policy impacts youth in ways that are not clearly understood or anticipated.<sup>21</sup> The creation of seemingly bottomless recruitment pools of young people is a good example.

The lack of accountability to children and youth is obviously having an impact human security but this complex set of relationships will not become clear without the insights of young people

themselves. What also seems apparent is that the burden of care and the practical implications of guaranteeing the rights of children have either been grossly underestimated or simply ignored due to the political invisibility of children. The price of this oversight is the prominence of young people in wars, as both victims and perpetrators.

Rights-based approaches to child welfare drawing on legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child have a largely un-recognized but critically important role to play in addressing the root causes of conflict. Although child welfare measures are not directed to youth over the age of eighteen, the 'trickle-up' effects of guaranteeing child welfare include improvements in accountability as a whole. Childhood should not be viewed only as a training ground for adulthood, but children who have had access to education, health care and social services and the protection of family, communities and states, are imbued with the values that enable these institutions to thrive in the future. These are the constructive incentives that must replace the predatory offerings of those who misuse children.

Education in particular must be used to promote respect for the rights of others and to promote democratic ideals. Article 29, clause 1b of the Convention on the Rights of the Child States that

...States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to... The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations...and clause 1d, The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

## Participation

While rights such as primary education, health services and guardianship are those most associated with children's legislation, children's political rights are also addressed explicitly within the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

And in the principles of outcome declaration of the 2002 General Assembly's Special Session on Children, entitled "A World Fit for Children":

Listen to children and ensure their participation. Children and adolescents are resourceful citizens capable of helping to build a better future for all. We must respect their right to express themselves and participate in all matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity.<sup>22</sup>

Meaningful participation of children in democratic decision-making is a relatively new concept and still subject to experiment. The case for youth participation is even more difficult. Child participation forums, as are becoming more common in advocacy circles, will likely exclude over-18s. Youth have neither the special status nor the legal protection that may eventually guarantee children a voice in policymaking.

The dimensions of youth identity—demographic, political, economic and social—need first to be better understood. Ostensibly, young people glean some of their understandings of conflict from the older generation and are thus given a rationale for their own problems—the baggage they carry as political actors in their own right. It is unlikely that the pursuit of old grievances and the struggle for privilege in clientelist regimes would be the ambition of most youth, given the choice. For the most part, the gap between child victims and power structures is terra incognita, occupied by neither child rights activists nor security analysts.

What then, will ensure the political rights of young people and the protection of their political space against incursion?<sup>23</sup> UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center makes strong arguments for promoting children's participation in democratic decision making. They argue that the impact of government policies on children's lives is poorly understood because the experience and knowledge of children is ignored. In the African context, with governance already on precarious ground in many states, this gives a voice to an exceptionally small minority, and renders practically invisible the impact of public policy on children, considered by many to be of "special interest" rather than of mainstream concern. In effect,

Without access even to the formal democratic processes, children have an even stronger claim for comparable political participation. Exclusion from participation imposes a two-fold discrimination on children. It represents a denial of the fundamental right to be listened to and taken seriously in decisions that affect them in legislation, policy, resource allocation, as required by Article 12 of the CRC. As a result of this exclusion, they are denied the right to influence the exercise of other rights.<sup>24</sup>

The substance of this argument is magnified in the African context. The need to re-examine the political roles of children and youth in Africa is underscored by the reality that nowhere has there been greater failure on the part of adults to guarantee the rights of children, nor more devastating consequences arising from the neglect of children's rights.

Acting in the best interests of children will only be achieved with the participation of young people themselves and for this they require structured, sustained and meaningful participation. While the movement for child participation in the developed world is gathering momentum, few would argue that the consequences of political exclusion anywhere are equal to those seen in Africa.

Okwir Rabwoni, a former Ugandan National Resistance Army fighter, recruited at 15, breaks the catch-22 of political invisibility and takes this argument to its logical conclusion with the recommendation that the voting age be reduced to 16:

If we are serious about winning young people away from armed militancy, we must open up avenues for civil and democratic participation instead. Legalising their entry into the democratic decision-making process will encourage young people to be more responsible citizens with a greater stake in their countries' democratic process.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

This essay does not even begin to capture youth perspectives on what conflict prevention, peace-building and post-war reconstruction should entail and to speculate would be to commit the error of instrumentalization over again.

What is crystal clear, however, is that recruiters of children and youth are brokers in vulnerability, gauging the state of youth, their susceptibility to ideological enticement, hunger and violent coercion, among a huge spectrum of incentives. Those who create recruitment potential through bad governance and the neglect and exclusion of young people achieve the same effect as those who systematically destroy social fabric and infrastructures to facilitate forced recruitment. The latter are much more visible and easier targets for outrage, but the condemnation of a few will not eliminate the potential for recruiting children and youth.

Peace processes, sustainable disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and post-conflict recovery need therefore to reflect on mobilization. This means replacing incentives to violence with incentives to peace and stability. Peace that does not offer dividends to African youth, *per se*, and overlooks the significance of this group will not be peace for the majority. For Africa, it means taking a long look at the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and understanding what a powerful, home-grown conflict prevention tool it could actually be.

A drastic conceptual shift in the way we think of children and youth that does not begin with “how can we harness the potential of youth?” is required. This mode of thought is where the problem begins: youth are not a commodity to be plundered along with natural resources and public funds. We must begin with the realization that young people: children and youth included, are not a ‘special interest group’ but the majority of the African people.

## Notes

1. N Argenti, *Youth in Africa: a major resource for Change*, p.145, Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth. Africa World Press, 2002.
2. Women’s Commission on Refugee women and Children Monthly Update, March 12, 2003.
3. A McIntyre, E Kwesi Aning and P Nii Nortey Addo, *Politics, War and Youth Culture in Sierra Leone: an Alternative Interpretation*. African Security Review, 11(3), Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2002.
4. A McIntyre, E Kwesi Aning and P Nii Nortey Addo, *ibid*.
5. International Labour Convention 182 prohibits forced recruitment of children under 18 for use in armed conflict; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child prohibits the recruitment or use of children under 18 by government forces; the Rome Statute for an International Criminal Court defines the recruitment and use of hostilities of children under 15 by any armed group as a war crime.
6. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) SIERRA LEONE: IRIN Focus on first indictments of the Special Court, march 2003.
7. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict entered into force in February, 2002.
8. A Twum Danso, *Africa’s Young Soldiers: the Co-option of Childhood*, Institute for Security Studies, forthcoming, quoting G Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, London: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd, 2001 and Brett and McCallin, *Children, the Invisible Soldiers*, , Children: The Invisible Soldiers, Stockholm, Radda Barnen, 1998.
9. A De Waal and N Argenti Eds., *Ibid*.
10. N Argenti, *Ibid*, p.128
11. A Leao, *Untitled*, Institute for Security Studies, forthcoming in 2003.
12. A Veale, *From Child Soldier to ex-fighter: a Political Journey*. Institute for Security Studies, Forthcoming in 2003.
13. N Argenti, *Ibid.*, P.149.
14. UNICEF, *State of the World’s Children*, UNICEF, 1999.
15. I Parker, *Youth, Conflict and Identity: Political Mobilization and Subjugation in Angola*, Institute for Security Studies, forthcoming in 2003.
16. N Argenti, *Ibid*, p.150
17. A McIntyre and T Weiss, *Exploring Small Arms Demand: A Youth Perspective*, Institute for Security Studies, forthcoming in 2003.
18. A negative by-product of growing international concern over the use of child soldiers could be that over the years, the imperative to not be caught with child soldiers among one’s

ranks has become strong enough to cause the rapid and unmonitored discharge of children from armed forces. Fear of political liability has resulted in thousands of child soldiers in Sierra Leone, Mozambique, the DRC and other contexts being cut loose without any formal support for reintegration. Another overlooked segment of the militarized youth component is a potentially large number of youth and adult combatants recruited as children and discharged once they were over 18.

19. A De Waal, *Realizing Child Rights in Africa*, A De Waal and N Argenti Eds., *Ibid.*, p. 22.
20. De Waal and N Argenti Eds., *op cit*
21. *A World Fit for Children*, outcome declaration of the 2002 General Assembly's Special Session on Children, UNICEF, 2003.
22. I Stavrou, *Youth Mobilization in Uganda*, Institute for Security Studies, forthcoming in 2003.
23. G Lansdown, *Promoting Children's Participation on Democratic Decision Making*, UNICEF Innocenti Digest, Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2001, p.6
24. O Rabwoni, *Reflections on Youth and Militarism in Contemporary Africa*, A DeWaal and N Argenti Eds., *op cit.*, p 168.

