

**Why We Cannot Find the Hidden Girl Soldier:
A Study of Professional Attitudes Towards Gender Analysis in
International Conflict and Development Work**

Lisa Kays*

* Lisa Kays currently serves as a technical advisor to an initiative that provides primary school scholarships and mentoring to African girls. Previously, she served as Peace Corps volunteer in Benin for three years, where she taught English and served as Peace Corps Benin's national WID Coordinator. She completed this research while pursuing an MA. in international print journalism at American University in Washington, D.C. She is extremely grateful to Dr. Lori Handrahan for her advice, support and encouragement throughout the research, writing and publication of this paper.

Abstract

Girls' experiences in combat are not as well understood as boys'. International development and relief projects focus on boy soldiers, though many girls are combatants and have experiences that are not addressed through boy-centred programmes.

To explore the potential influence of development professionals' attitudes on implementation of gender mainstreaming in such programmes, eight individuals who work at an NGO that does international conflict resolution and development work—were surveyed about their knowledge of and attitudes towards gender analysis and their feelings about a proposal for assisting child soldiers in Africa created and submitted by their organisation with their input.

The results of the self-assessment of the professionals are then compared with the gender analysis executed within the proposal, to determine if the self-assessment is accurate.

The surveys indicate that professionals often may not fully understand gender analysis, and therefore do not account for girl child soldiers—negatively impacting the effectiveness of their efforts. Based on these findings, recommendations for remedying this trend within conflict and development NGOs are offered.

Introduction

The NGO¹ in question has specialised in international conflict resolution since 1982. Their child soldiers proposal endeavours to serve Angola, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique and will provide training in reconciliation and conflict resolution for development practitioners, former child soldiers and community leaders and provide a number of other programmes aimed at providing a voice to former child soldiers and preparing citizens to receive them back into

¹ As per the discretion of the author, the NGO's identity will remain anonymous throughout.

their communities.² The NGO has offices in each of these countries except Mozambique. Each country director would determine the country-specific project scope to ensure its appropriateness to each country.³ The proposal has not, to date, been funded or implemented.

The proposal's overarching goals are reintegration and improving the development community's ability to assist child soldiers through dissemination of best practices.⁴ Because these goals are relevant for each country, the proposal will be viewed holistically.

The potential impact of this work, due to its emphasis on training and information dissemination, drew my attention—as an employee of the NGO at the time—to the gender dimensions within the proposal. Having served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Benin, coordinating a Women in Development program and learning of the importance of gender analysis in development work, I was struck at times by what I felt was a lack of gender awareness in the NGO's programming. I inquired to the Chief Operating Officer as to why there was no gender division to handle gender analysis and integration into their programming. I was told that the NGO tried not to interfere with programming from headquarters and instead left those issues to the individual field offices—an unsatisfying answer to me since the organisation had a cross-cutting Arts and Culture Division, and a few months after I posed the question, a Youth Division. When I began coursework in conflict and development during graduate studies under the guidance of Dr. Lori Handrahan—who further instilled the importance of gender analysis and accountability in conflict and development work—my interest in the NGO's approach to gender analysis grew as I felt it might indicate trends within the development community. I had served as an executive assistant to the COO for a little under a year when I

² African Child Soldiers Reintegration Initiative: Angola, Burundi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, UN Development Programme Project Document, p. 5.

³ Reintegration Initiative, p. 5.

⁴ Reintegration Initiative, p. 7.

acquired his permission to conduct this research. The child soldiers proposal seemed a logical point of departure because of recent developments in research demonstrating the need for gender programming and research into child soldiers.

Hypothesis

The research is based on the proposal and surveys of the NGO's employees. It hypothesises that the proposal will fall short of adequately accounting for gender and that the survey will reveal that those involved in the proposal share some of the international community's confusion over gender analysis—and will assume that inclusion of girls ensures that their needs are addressed.

Gender Theory and Analysis

Gender and development theory has evolved since the 1950s, when women were viewed primarily as mothers and caretakers.⁵ Women's contributions beyond the “reproductive sphere” were not acknowledged because they were not recorded in national statistics.⁶ Increased awareness of women's contributions led to the Women in Development (WID) approach in the mid-1970s; it raised global awareness of women's issues and helped women organise—focusing on inclusion of women in existing power structures within society.⁷

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach was shaped in the 1990s out of concern that WID didn't address the male-dominated overarching framework.⁸ GAD turned development approaches away from mere inclusion, or separate women's programmes, and toward integration

⁵ USAID Office of Women in Development, “Gender Assessment and Recommendations for Enhancing Gender Integration into USAID/RCSA's Program (USAID: WIDTech, 20002), p. 3.

⁶ USAID Office of Women in Development, Gender Assessment, p. 3.

⁷ USAID Office of Women in Development, Gender Assessment, p. 3.

⁸ USAID Office of Women in Development, Gender Assessment, p. 3.

of women's issues into the structures perpetuating inequalities. GAD is concerned with "the social construction of gender and the assignment of specific roles, responsibilities, and the expectations to women and to men."⁹

Gender analysis is a tool to determine men's and women's realities, highlighting otherwise hidden women's realities and societal contributions. Gender analysis, as defined by a 1997 Gender and Development Trainers' Manual, is an "assessment of policies, plans or programs in a structured way to determine if they are gender sensitive...a systematic effort to record the predominancy or participation rates of women and men respectively, in a set of activities that constitute a production system".¹⁰

Similarly, in 1997 the United Nations Economic and Social Council defined gender mainstreaming as:

...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any area and at all levels...a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.¹¹

There are organisations using gender analysis in their work with child soldiers. Sierra-Leone's Canadian-based Christian Aid for Under-Assisted Societies Everywhere (CAUSE) targets girls forced into fighting, providing psycho-social counselling, vocational training,

⁹ National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW), "Gender 101", http://www.ncrfw.gov.ph/insidepages/gendermainstream/gad_101_p2.htm (last checked by the author December 2004).

¹⁰ NCRFW, "Gender 101."

¹¹ International Labor Organization, "Definition of Gender Mainstreaming," <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/gender/newsite2002/about/defin.htm> (last checked by the author December 2004)

trauma counselling and human rights advocacy.¹² CAUSE representative Paul Carrick says, “new funding was secured recently after the group realized girls were facing some unique problems.”¹³ The Forum for African Women Educators (FAWE), an international organisation in Africa working on girls’ education issues, focuses in Sierra Leone on providing information on some of these unique problems.¹⁴ The Boys and Girls Society of Sierra Leone’s Regent Village Centre works with former girl soldiers, teaching them to make and sell dresses to support themselves and providing trauma counselling.¹⁵ Rebuilding Hope, the NGO’s intended partner in Mozambique, works with girl soldiers dealing with sexual assault and experiences as rebels’ wives.¹⁶

Granting girls specific programming arenas and acknowledging their roles as combatants and their unique experiences is a crucial step towards understanding the issues they face and will increase knowledge over time about their realities.

Child Soldier Defined

Defining “child soldier”—not a simple task—is an important factor in the extent to which an accurate picture of boys’ and girls’ experiences in conflict will be realised. One survey respondent—like other professionals—defined it as a child who serves as a combatant, and not as a porter, sex slave, or “wife.” This definition often eliminates girls, eliminating them also from demobilisation and reintegration programs. “War-affected youth,” as two respondents stated, would better encompass all children involved in and affected by war and violent conflict.

¹² “Female Victims of Wartorn Africa Get Hand from Canmore Group”, *Calgary Herald*, 11 June 2001, p. B6.

¹³ *Calgary Herald*, “Female Victims,” p. B6.

¹⁴ Salmon, Katy, “Girls Soldiers to Swap Guns for Books,” *Global Information Network*, 23 July 1999, p. A6.

¹⁵ Grant, Claire, “Rebels Forced Finda to Kill Her Father, Now She Can Smile Again, There is Hope Exclusive: Claire Sweeney’s Diary with Sierra Leone’s War-Scarred Children”, *The Mirror*, 28 Nov. 2001, p. 30.

¹⁶ Becker Jo, “Human Rights Defender Rebuilds Hope in Mozambique,” Human Rights Watch California Newsletter, (1999).

The primary reference to gender in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, concerning children in armed conflict, is made when it recognises the, “special needs of those children who are particularly vulnerable to recruitment or use in hostilities contrary to the present Protocol owing to their economic or social status or gender”.¹⁷

An addendum to the Cape Town Plan of Action illuminates gender, saying that a child soldier is anyone under 18 who participates in an armed force in any capacity, such as combatant, cook, porter, messenger, etc...“it includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.”¹⁸ This definition is broader than previous ones, referring to children beyond those that carry arms.

Graca Machel also uses this broader definition—the only one thus far that assumes explicitly that boys and girls are combatants:

a child soldier is any child—boy or girl—under the age of 18, who is...recruited or used in hostilities by armed forces...Child soldiers are used for forced sexual services, as combatants, messengers, porters and cooks...The majority are boys, but a significant proportion overall are girls.¹⁹

While these definitions include children serving in capacities beyond combatant, the Convention does not mandate this. Adopted in 1989, its Article 38—focusing on the child combatant—uses language such as “direct part in hostilities” and “recruitment into their armed forces.” Such language perpetuates an understanding of the child soldier as combatant, excluding many girls because of perceptions that they hold only non-combatant roles.

¹⁷ UNICEF, “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict,” *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, <http://www.unicef.org/crc/annex1.htm> (last checked by author December 2004).

¹⁸ Cape Town Plan of Action. “Annotated Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into Armed Forces and Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa,” adopted 30 April 1997, http://iggi.unesco.or.kr/web/iggi_docs/02/952579100.pdf (last checked by author December 2004), p. 11.

¹⁹ Machel, Graca. *The Impact of War on Children: A Review of Progress Since the 1996 United Nations Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (London: Hurst and Company, 2001), p. 7.

The definition used by the NGO in their proposal²⁰ includes any child who serves, regardless of function, and indicates that girls can and are often used in support roles and as combatants.

The Unknown Girl Child Soldier

To researchers and observers, the boy soldier was the most evident, and therefore became the standard within academic research and development programs. Without gender-specific data, the girls were not as evident and were considered a rarity. Susan McKay writes, “The majority of reports, international campaigns, and initiatives continue to use the generic term ‘child soldiers’ or ‘children,’ almost always meaning boys, and do not identify differential impacts for boys and girls before, during, or after armed conflicts.”²¹ The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported in 2002 that the dominant image of “boys with guns” continued, five years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 acknowledged the impact of war on women and girls, to marginalise the issue of the girl soldier.²²

A 1994 book, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict*,²³ demonstrates this incongruity. The book features about 50 photos of child soldiers. While most are of boys, at least six²⁴ feature armed, female combatants.²⁵ Statistics within the text indicate knowledge of

²⁰ A child soldier is any person under 18 years of age who is part of any, regular or irregular, armed force or group. This includes those who are forcibly recruited as well as those who are said to join voluntarily. This includes all child or adolescent participants regardless of function; cooks, porters, messengers, girls used as ‘wives,’ and other support functions are included as well as those considered combatants.

²¹ McKay, Susan and Dyan Mazurana, “Girls in Militaries, Paramilitaries, and Armed Opposition Groups,” War Affected Children, September 2000, <http://www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca/girls-e.asp> (last checked by author December 2004).

²² Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC), “Themed Reports: Girls With Guns: An Agenda on Child Soldiers for ‘Beijing Plus Five’”, 4 April 2002, http://www.child-soldiers.org/themed_reports/beijing_plus.html (last accessed 16 Nov. 2002).

²³ Cohn, Ilene and Guy S. Goodwin-gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

²⁴ Photos of girls are featured on pages 21, 22, 49, 52, 90, and 145.

²⁵ Cohn, Ilene, *Child Soldiers*, p. 3.

girl soldiers, such as Uganda's estimate that 500 of its 3,000 child soldiers were girls.²⁶ Yet, child soldiers are described primarily as "boys" or "children." The book's first direct reference to girls comes on page 23 as a statement that assault rifles are made so girls and boys can carry them.

A UNICEF report included two photos of girls, but no data about girls at their centre. In the photos, boys were surrendering weapons, receiving counselling or learning to farm. Girls were inactive, relaxed and smiling, with a caption reading, "Women relaxing at My Sister's Place..."²⁷

A 1996 Human Rights Watch study quoted and interviewed only boy combatants, though girls were in the armed forces in seven of the eight surveyed countries.²⁸

Though not accounted for in much research and literature, the girl soldier is a real phenomenon. McKay found that, "Women and young girls are known to have taken part in some 20 wars in recent years, as soldiers or as military support forces."²⁹ Between 1990 and 2000, underage girls participated in armed conflicts in a minimum of 32 countries.³⁰ Case studies from El Salvador, Ethiopia, and Uganda demonstrate that a third of child soldiers were girls.³¹

Out of Sight, Out of Mind—The Impacts on Programming

The lack of studies and data on girl soldiers has real impacts for these girls. Dyan Mazurana writes, "...international reports and initiatives...for the most part they ignore the fate of girls. And international programs addressing the needs of girls—when such programs exist—are

²⁶ Cohn, *Child Soldiers*, pp. 34, 139.

²⁷ McKay, "Girls in Militaries."

²⁸ McKay, "Girls in Militaries."

²⁹ McKay, "Girls in Militaries."

³⁰ Mazurana, Dyan and Susan McKay, "Child Soldiers: What About the Girls?", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 57, (2002), pp. 30.

³¹ CSC, "Themed Reports."

poorly informed.”³² Without a process through which the needs of girls and boys are analysed without assumption, “constrained notions of girls’ roles contribute to their being overlooked for post-conflict demobilisation and rehabilitation. Most of the time, fighters are the exclusive priority for disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes—significantly marginalising girls.”³³

In Mozambique, the majority of girls taken by Renamo forces were not recovered because of the failure of the humanitarian community to acknowledge their unique situation.³⁴ In Liberia, less than two percent of demobilised soldiers were girls for a reason that was inexplicable in reports.³⁵

Possible scenarios for these ineffective efforts could be that towards the end of conflict and following, girls—who still cook, clean, etc.—are of more use to armed forces than boys no longer needed as fighters.³⁶ As a result, the likelihood that girls would be overlooked increased.

This is only one way girls’ experience is unique in the armed forces. Research demonstrates that boys, like girls, are made to provide sexual services, but that the potential for this type of abuse is much more frequent for girls, to the point of being automatic. The majority of these girls are infected with sexually transmitted diseases, often HIV/AIDS.³⁷

Rape also has consequences beyond HIV/AIDS. It is more severe, in terms of permanent damage, for young girls, with problems ranging from uterine deformation, infection, vaginal sores, menstrual complications, premature births, stillbirths, sterility, and sometimes death.³⁸

Abducted girls who become pregnant after rape often experience serious complications, many

³² Mazurana, “Child Soldiers,” p. 30.

³³ Mazurana, “Child Soldiers,” p. 33.

³⁴ Mazurana, “Child Soldiers,” p. 30.

³⁵ McKay, “Girls in Militaries.”

³⁶ McKay, “Girls in Militaries.”

³⁷ Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, p. 13.

³⁸ Mazurana, “Child Soldiers,” p. 34.

of which are permanently debilitating.³⁹ Depending on the group's priorities, remedies to pregnancy might include intra-uterine devices, contraceptive injections, forced abortions or having children reclaimed by the fighting forces.⁴⁰ Birthing practices themselves are often violent; in Sierra Leone, the RUF forced objects into girls' vaginas or jumped on their abdomens to induce birth if forces needed to move quickly.

The differences in boys' and girls' psychology require special examination in designing programmes. With sexual assault, girls have the extra burden of facing societal stigmas associated with pre-marital sex. Sierra Leone and Mozambique's citizens ostracise girls even if they were forced into sex.⁴¹ Having children out of wedlock, or being unable to produce children—often the case with repeated rape—affects girls on a societal level that must be addressed through education campaigns and reintegration efforts.

CAUSE's Carrick stated that, "One thing that's come to our attention is that needs of girl soldiers are quite different than those of boy soldiers, and they've been terribly under-represented."⁴²

Another obstacle facing all child soldiers is that of education and the ability to become a productive member of society after the trauma of serving an armed force in a conflict. According to Machel, "Adolescents, who make up the vast majority of child soldiers, will need training in life skills, vocational classes and specific preparation for employment. This will not only help them survive but can facilitate their acceptance at home and provide them with a sense of meaning and identity."⁴³ Because many girls are forced to run households or care for children during and after conflict, their need for education is extremely high because it improves their

³⁹ Mazurana, "Child Soldiers," p. 34.

⁴⁰ Mazurana, "Child Soldiers," p. 33.

⁴¹ Mazurana, "Child Soldiers," p. 34.

⁴² *Calgary Herald*, "Female Victims," p. B6.

⁴³ Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, p. 20.

ability to earn money to support the household, generates better chances of increased health for those in the household, etc. Unfortunately, this need is rarely met because access to school is far more difficult for girls than boys and in conflict and post-conflict societies that must rebuild, education is a limited resource. Globally, two-thirds of children not in school are girls, a phenomenon that is heightened during conflict.⁴⁴ A UNICEF report, *The State of the World's Children 2004*, reports that, "International development efforts are drastically short-changing girls, leaving hundreds of millions of girls and women uneducated and unable to contribute to positive change for themselves, their children, or their communities."⁴⁵ UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy said when the report was released, "UNICEF noted that illiteracy rates are still far higher among women than men, and at least 9 million more girls than boys are left out of school every year – statistics that have lasting implications not only for girls and women, but for their children and families as well. We stand no chance of substantially reducing poverty, child mortality, HIV/AIDS and other diseases if we do not ensure that all girls and boys can exercise their right to a basic education."⁴⁶ Further, inherent gender biases within school curriculum and teacher attitudes make learning often inaccessible to girls even when they can get to school.⁴⁷

The Case for Gender Analysis

When literature portrays girls only as victims of sexual violence, it leads to the misperception that girls are not "real" child soldiers. This is a dangerous precedent for multiple reasons, and

⁴⁴ Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, p. 98.

⁴⁵ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2004*, http://www.unicef.org/sowc04/sowc04_contents.html (last checked by author December 2004).

⁴⁶ UNICEF, "UNICEF Says Getting More Girls into School is First Step to Reaching Global Development Goals," Press Release, 11 Dec. 2003, http://www.unicef.org/sowc04/sowc04_16165.html (last checked by author December 2004).

⁴⁷ Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, p. 98.

one that gender analysis would alleviate. As Mazurana and McKay's work demonstrates, girls' and boys' many roles within the armed forces are more interchangeable than is assumed.

Because gender analysis is crucial to effective development as relates to child soldiers, this paper focuses on conflict and development practitioners' attitudes and knowledge regarding gender analysis to determine if an increase in professional awareness and knowledge of the practice and importance of gender analysis is necessary to increase its usage within the field.

Methodology⁴⁸

Sample Data/Sources

Those surveyed represented a cluster random sample of the NGO's employees. They were selected because they were involved in the NGO's child soldiers proposal as determined through conversations with the organisation's leadership, who indicated those individuals who had been involved at various stages. Nine surveys were sent out and eight were returned (89 percent). Three were conducted by personal interview at the NGO's headquarters. The others were submitted via e-mail. Of those who returned surveys, three were female and five were male. The original group included two organisational leaders (one male, one female) who drove the development process; two outside consultants (one male, one female); three country directors (two male, one female) who provided input; and two headquarters-based programmatic staff (one male, one female) who provided input at the final stages.

Variables

Two questions determined how much impact participants felt they had on the proposal. Two

⁴⁸ All methodology structure and related information taken from *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.

questions elicited changes the participant would make to the proposal to establish whether respondents determine gender to be a priority. One question extracted information regarding knowledge of gender analysis. One question provided insight into whether the participant felt gender analysis was conducted in developing the proposal. One question determined whether participants listed gender concerns as part of the data lacking in relation to child soldiers.

Data Analysis Techniques

The surveys were analysed qualitatively through content analysis to determine trends. The analysis was utilised to develop a mixture between a modal profile⁴⁹ and a holistic profile.⁵⁰ This method was chosen because some responses (organisational status, gender, etc.) can be cleanly determined, making modal profiling appropriate.

For more subjective responses, because the sample size is so small, there was often not a clear frequency of answers. A holistic profile was used in this case.

The Profile

The Modal Profile

The individual best representing those who worked on the proposal works from headquarters⁵¹ and is male.⁵² If in the field, he is more likely to be male than female. Though not the majority response, he is more likely to have worked on drafting the programmatic

⁴⁹ A modal profile, according to *Mixed Methodology*, is “a detailed narrative description of a group of people based on the most frequently occurring attributes of the group. For example, if the majority of individuals are 50 years old, the group is identified as middle-aged.” A holistic profile, according to *Mixed Methodology*, is a “narrative profile consist[ing] of the overall impressions of the investigator regarding the unit of investigation” (131).

⁵⁰ Tashakkori, Abbas and Charles Teddlie, *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), p. 131.

⁵¹ 63 percent of respondents.

⁵² 63 percent of respondents.

revision than other parts of the process.⁵³ All but three respondents said they had substantive input in the draft at some stage.⁵⁴

He feels that the proposal reflects his thoughts “almost completely”⁵⁵ to “somewhat”.⁵⁶ The combined responses for “somewhat” and “almost completely” represent 88 percent.⁵⁷

His most frequent concern about thoughts not fully reflected in the proposal relates to methodology, assessment, and indicators.⁵⁸

Perceptions of Needed Changes

When asked what changes the respondent would make to the proposal, every response was different. Three of the eight recommendations,⁵⁹ submitted by two individuals, focused on gender or girls. Two of those related to the need to better look at impacts and needs assessments specifically for girls and the other mentioned boys and girls when speaking of another issue. One responded that the focus of the proposal should be kids or at-risk kids in general, rather than child soldiers.

Defining Gender Analysis

When asked to define gender analysis, two levels of data are worth exploration. The first consists of linguistic and verbal clues that could indicate levels of comfort with the topic. The other is the actual knowledge expressed. The former is possible only with interviewed

⁵³ 38 percent of respondents.

⁵⁴ 86 percent of respondents.

⁵⁵ 50 percent of respondents.

⁵⁶ 38 percent of respondents.

⁵⁷ The one individual who answered otherwise said that he couldn't answer honestly due to the fact that he hadn't seen the proposal since it had been revised.

⁵⁸ 25 percent of respondents.

⁵⁹ One of those who remarked on gender qualified the statement by noting that he may have been prejudiced by earlier conversations with the researcher on this topic.

respondents. With all three of those individuals, the response was preceded by a long pause and modifiers such as “um” and “I guess” that did not occur with the other questions. While this was the only question that demanded a definition, the drop in confidence level was noteworthy. Additionally, one respondent answered with multiple questions about the intent of the question, while another added to a written survey, “I haven’t tried to define it before!”

Of those definitions provided, half utilised phrasing indicating that gender analysis involved looking at an issue or context from the perspective of both genders. Thirty-eight percent defined gender analysis as viewing activities and/or their impacts through the eyes of boys and girls, or a lens of gender. Two respondents included a qualifier that it means doing an analysis based on the feminine gender or perspective or of looking at how marginalisation of females is relevant to a situation or a programme. One respondent described gender analysis as an examination of relationships between females and other elements of society, encompassing ideas of gender as primarily a female issue as well as an issue of her context within society. Two respondents related gender analysis to the concept of breaking down data or analysis in terms of economic indicators, age, status, etc. One individual said that he had “no idea” what gender analysis was.

Gender in the Proposal

The respondents’ assessment of whether gender was taken into account revealed that half felt that it was not taken into account at all or “not extensively.” Some who felt it was not cited a lack of information on girl soldiers and confusion about the definition of child soldiers as reasons. One indicated that it wasn’t certain that there were female combatants in one of the countries, and felt that expanding the scope of the project to war-affected youth would have enabled a greater focus on girls.

Three respondents said that the project incorporates gender analysis by involving girls. One of those specified that girls would not be looked at separately, but that they would be included in the activities.

Three respondents indicated that separate programming needs were considered for girls.

In further commentary, one indicated a divide wherein girls' needs regarding sexual assault would be a focus while boys would be targeted for involvement in extreme violence.

Two respondents listed project areas that would target girls, such as radio programming giving equal treatment to girls' and boys' issues, round tables to discuss issues related to girl soldiers and the partner NGO's work with girls.

Missing Research and Data

Of those surveyed, 38 percent felt there was a lack of data on the subject of child soldiers. No respondent specifically noted a need for more information on girl child soldiers.

Holistic Profile

The data supports a holistic profile of an individual who is not overwhelmingly concerned with gender issues as relates to the child soldier unless specifically tasked with such considerations. On his own, his primary concerns are related to methodology, the appropriateness of the proposal to the field, gathering better data and better resources on trauma healing and child psychology.

While he probably wouldn't conduct a gender analysis on his own, if asked to do so he would be able to conduct one, as determined by his demonstrated basic understanding of the concept. However, his level of discomfort with his knowledge of it would likely surface.

It would therefore be important that the individual be given as much information as possible regarding the country or issue on which he is working, within a gender framework. This would help the individual see that there are differences in the way each gender is affected by a conflict and that girls play various roles in armed conflict, including combatant. Because the individual doubts to a certain extent that girls are impacted by the problem and serve as combatants, such information would be most helpful.

It is also imperative, as noted by four respondents, that adequate time be given to project planning. This proposal was put together quickly according to respondents.⁶⁰ To conduct a thorough gender analysis or to research the issues as they impact girls and boys, an initial investment of additional time and resources is required.

Once equipped with such information and time, the individual would need guidance and training in executing gender analysis, and in developing program directives within a framework of gender.

Gender Analysis⁶¹ within the Proposal

The objectives of the NGO's proposal include reintegration programming and dissemination of best practices.⁶² The project's beneficiaries include "conflict-affected children and young adults...with a particular emphasis on demobilised underage soldiers, combatants who were recruited as children, and other young people associated with fighting forces. The project beneficiaries will include both female and male war-affected children."⁶³

⁶⁰ One respondent indicated in an aside that this proposal is not a good example of the NGO's normal approach, as it was very top-down and rushed.

⁶¹ The NGO's COO requested that it be indicated that the presentation of the program descriptions in the proposal are not complete, and do not, in any respect, address the specific implementation facets of the project.

⁶² Reintegration Initiative, p. 6, 11.

⁶³ Reintegration Initiative, p. 12-13.

While the proposal accounts for girls in its programming, it does not demonstrate that the issue of girl child soldiers for each country is thoroughly understood, presenting the risk of focusing on boys' needs because they are the most generally accepted prototype of the child soldier. Despite the intent to include girls and boys, it is likely that certain efforts, such as those designed to address aggressive behaviour, will focus primarily on boys.

This could occur because the NGO's staff seems largely to have accepted the dichotomy of boys as combatants and girls as victims of sexual assault. For the majority of respondents who elaborated enough to determine their perceptions of girls, the link between girls and sexual activity, and the tendency to disassociate girls from with violence, is strong. Some quotes include the equivocation of "whatever the different sets of impacts [for girls] are" with "abduction, sexual slavery, forced wives." One respondent, who felt that the definition of child soldiers needed to be broadened to war-affected youth to include girls, said of the country in which he works, "In terms of who was bearing arms and who was drafted to act as porters around the camps, I think that they are almost exclusively boys, but that's not a scientifically proven fact." The "You Need a Woman" phenomenon in Angola was a focus of another respondent's comments. This phenomenon focuses on the issue of girls forced to marry rebel leaders while in the armed forces. Further elaboration produced the following statement: "And also women are used a lot as porters...they weren't soldiers but they were definitely involved in the fighting forces..." Another respondent indicated that extreme violence is demanded of boys "more especially" than girls, and that sexual assault related "more specifically" to girls, while acknowledging that each would affect girls and boys to some degree.

The actual proposal language harbours this bias. One respondent mentioned that girls and boys would be accounted for in Sierra Leone through documentation of reintegration

experiences. The proposal says they will document “a combination of former combatants and former sex slaves.”⁶⁴ The language could indicate a move towards gender integration, granting a differentiation of experience without making assumptions based on gender. When combined with the previous comments though, it is possible that there is an assumption that boys are the former combatants and girls are the sex slaves.

These statements do not indicate that the NGO’s staff are wholly unknowledgeable about the countries in which they work, but rather that they, along with much of the international community, are missing a large portion of the data surrounding girls in conflict.

In Burundi, the introductory summary makes no mention of girls and the survey revealed that those working in country were not aware that girls were used in combat. However, a Human Rights Watch report indicates, “the Hutu opposition in Burundi has systematically recruited boys and girls under 15 years of age into its armed groups.”⁶⁵ Another report, issued by Defense for Children International-Burundi (DCI), states that between 1,000 and 1,500 boys and girls were recruited by the rebels.⁶⁶ Radda Barnen, a DCI representative, stated in July 1996 in *Africa Confidential* that, “most young men of fighting age (and many girls) are being trained as guerrillas.”⁶⁷ A separate study concludes that girls join, are recruited or abducted into, and are present in paramilitary and opposition groups in Burundi.⁶⁸

The section on Mozambique makes no mention of girls though they are known to be present in government, paramilitary, and armed opposition groups.⁶⁹ The reference to girls in the

⁶⁴ Reintegration Initiative, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Brody, Reed and Iain Levine, “More than 120,000 Child Soldiers Fighting in Africa,” Human Rights Watch, 19 April 1999, <http://www.hrw.org/press/1999/apr/cs0419.htm> (last checked by author December 2004).

⁶⁶ GlobalMarch, “Burundi-Hutu Rebels,” <http://www.globalmarch.org/virtuallibrary/radda-barnen-child-soldiers/database/burundi-hutu-rebels.htm> (last checked by author 17 November 2002).

⁶⁷ GlobalMarch, “Burundi-Hutu Rebels.”

⁶⁸ McKay, “Girls in Militaries.”

⁶⁹ McKay, “Girls in Militaries.”

complete summary is as victims of rape.⁷⁰

The Sierra Leone portion does not mention girls, but states that the rebel forces “had ‘small boy units’” and speaks about those children who went through the formal World Bank funded demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programme^{71,72} The summary neglects that in Sierra Leone, girls make up 30 percent of the RUF’s forces and that despite this, of the 1, 213 children released by the RUF in May, just 15 were girls.⁷³ A separate study notes that Sierra Leone has girls present in its armed opposition groups.⁷⁴ In its more complete summary, the proposal states, “More young men and women are demobilized, including almost 7, 600 ex-combatants, are without livelihoods [sic]”.⁷⁵

Without accurate data on the numbers of girls and where and how they are impacted, it is difficult to design programmes to account for them. Without knowing, for example, how many girls are being missed by demobilisation programmes, how can one begin to think about engaging them? Without knowing how many girl child soldiers there are in comparison to boys, how can one know if the project’s participant numbers are in correct proportion?

While girls go without great mention in the proposal’s summaries, they are not completely forgotten. The proposal includes initiatives to account for girls. In each country’s project description, apart from Sierra Leone, girls and boys are distinctly mentioned as target groups.⁷⁶ An example of an initiative designed with gender in mind is the expectation in Burundi to determine, through its needs assessment, the number of girls affected by conflict.⁷⁷ Burundi will

⁷⁰ Reintegration Initiative, p. 38.

⁷¹ The World Bank program in Sierra Leone, according to Mazurana, is highly problematic because it doesn’t work for women and girls. Unfortunately, it is likely to be repeated in other countries regardless (Mazurana interview).

⁷² Reintegration Initiative, p. 9-10.

⁷³ Mazurana, “Child Soldiers,” p. 31.

⁷⁴ McKay, “Girls in Militaries.”

⁷⁵ Reintegration Initiative, p. 44.

⁷⁶ Reintegration Initiative, pp. 25, 32, 39.

⁷⁷ Reintegration Initiative, p. 32.

also highlight the issue of boys and girls in military service in its roundtables.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The above is not meant to indicate that the NGO's practices in relation to gender are unique. Rather, the researcher assumes that further study of a larger group of practitioners would find that the gender imbalances found within the leadership involved in the proposal and the attitudes themselves would be replicated throughout the field.

The NGO's willingness to participate in the survey indicates a rare, but much-needed, interest in self-examination within the development and relief community. As Michael Edwards outlines in his book, *Future Positive*, honest self-reflection and learning rarely occurs in international organisations, because, though essential to development work, "the problem is that learning implies honesty and change, and it is difficult to admit to failure in public when fund raising is based on the image of success...learning means the search for the truth, not a confirmation of what the organization wants to hear."⁷⁹ This learning is essential to organisations working in development, and to development itself. While the culture of closed information circles and unpublished failings, which could indicate pathways for greater practices and developments in the field is far from being changed, the NGO's willingness to participate in this survey and the candour of those who did so indicates an internal culture that is conducive to institutional learning and change.

Relatedly, the Chief Operating Officer of the organisation read this paper in its entirety—along with recommendations based on its findings—offered feedback, approved its presentation to the staff and requested a summary to be presented to staff involved with the survey. Finally,

⁷⁸ Reintegration Initiative, p. 33.

⁷⁹ Edwards, Michael, *Future Positive: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*, (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 1999), p. 207.

he offered feedback as to the NGO's approach towards gender and indicated an interest in doing more to build awareness among senior staff on the importance of understanding the different variables and social factors that impact men and women served by their programmes and taking this into account in their work.

With this in mind, it is fair to assume that which the research revealed: the NGO's culture does not—at the time of the survey—seem to foster, much less demand, serious considerations of gender in its programming. Though those surveyed are open to the idea, it is evident that they are not well versed in, encouraged or expected to incorporate gender-sensitive measures into programme design. Ideas regarding the definition of gender analysis were varied enough to demonstrate a lack of coherent philosophy or commitment to it within the organisation.

The NGO is certainly not alone, as NGOs are faced with increasing pressures and challenges regarding funding and manpower. When combined with the added complexity and needs of a conflict zone, gender can seem a luxury to be considered only if one has the time, staff, knowledge and resources to do it.

However, it is crucial to understand that gender analysis is not a luxury, but integral to accurate and effective development practice. Gender is just as strong a divide as that of adult and child, combatant and civilian, mediator and party—distinctions the conflict and development professional would consider essential to their work. Gender analysis does not only impact girls and women; because of inherent differences in the way genders are treated across cultures, the only true way to define, understand and address the needs of anyone is through a gendered perspective. While it is largely girls' needs that are undercut when boys are assumed to be the standard, doing so leads to potentially unrepresentative generalisations about boys.

Luckily, to correct an organisation's vision is not impossible. For a small NGO such as the

one surveyed, little would be required other than leadership committed to addressing gender in all projects, and a commitment of training, resources and staff development to equipping its professionals with the ability to do so.

A general underpinning philosophy in doing conflict and development work is to “understand the differences, act on the commonalities.” While this is not necessarily a programmatic framework, in the case of gender analysis it might be wise for organisations to apply this dictum internally, and work to understand the differences and commonalities shaping the realities of both genders. This would likely result in programmes that generate the potential for true equality, and eventual commonality.

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