

Planning Educational Response Strategies for Reintegration of Demobilized Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo



Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor

Basic Education and Policy Support

CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC.



United States Agency for International Development
Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-00038-00



Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL)

Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity

USAID Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-00038-00

The Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) Activity is a major component of the Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity, a multi-year, worldwide, indefinite quantity contract from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Center for Human Capacity Development (HCD). The BEPS activity is designed to be responsive to USAID's overall goal of "human capacity built through education and training" by supporting improved and expanded basic education, especially for girls, women, and other under-served populations. ECACL focuses on building the capacity of USAID to respond effectively to the problem of abusive child labor through basic education policies and programs.

Mission and Strategy

The mission of the ECACL activity is to provide technical, management and program assistance to USAID Missions, Regional Bureaus, the Global Bureau, and organizations in non-presence countries to combat abusive child labor throughout the world. Using basic education as the principal tool, ECACL will address and combat abusive child labor situations by:

- Providing technical assistance and advisory services;
- Facilitating program planning and coordination;
- Conducting applied research;
- Organizing regional and/or country-specific conferences/workshops;
- Implementing pilot projects; and
- Developing information networks and dissemination systems.

Guiding Principles

The seven principles guiding ECACL activities are:

- Ensuring that activities undertaken address the short and long-term interest of child laborers and their families.
- Targeting children working in the most abusive forms of child labor.
- Establishing a clear understanding of the context, needs and priorities of working children.
- Ensuring collaboration through close dialogue and ongoing linkages with organizations dedicated to child labor prevention and advocacy.
- Applying a participatory approach that builds from the community-level up.
- Serving all areas of society regardless of gender, race, class, literacy, physical condition, and even health status.
- Applying a level of excellence that ensures all program activities are implemented effectively with meaningful, measurable results.

The opinions expressed in this document are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of USAID.

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Strategies for the Reintegration of
Demobilized Child Soldiers in the
Democratic Republic of Congo**

Final Report

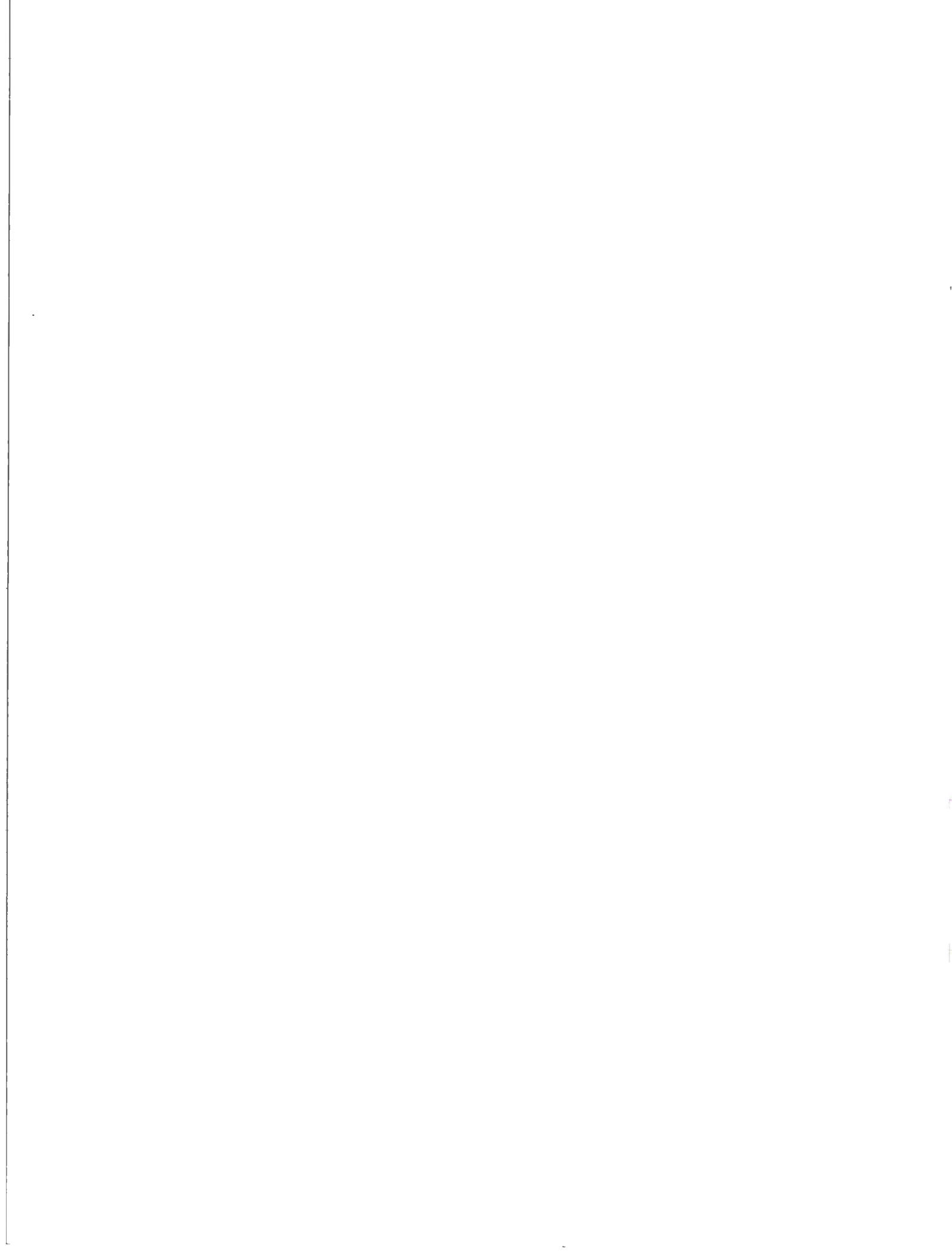
Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor
(ECACL)
Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS)
Activity

Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-00038-00
Task Order No. 09

Prepared for:

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
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FOREWORD

Over one quarter of the nations of the world are experiencing some form of armed conflict. Such areas of instability are breeding grounds for bad or unethical elements to take root and survive at the expense of its people—the most vulnerable being the children. In armed conflict over recent years, children are increasingly being victimized as both the target and the agents of violence. The number of children under the age of 18 who have been recruited or forced to bear arms as child soldiers is estimated to be around 300,000 worldwide, and 15,000 to 25,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) alone. The humanitarian crisis in the DRC has been described as one of the worst in the world—hunger, malnutrition, disease, and lack of access to education—millions of people have died due to the poverty situation enhanced by the ongoing conflict. Yet, people are surviving, and children are being released as soldiers and/or are self-demobilizing—searching for a better safer life and returning to their families and communities. But doing so is a difficult process, and help is needed to build bridges that enable ex-child soldiers and victimized girls to traverse the obstacles that prevent them from returning to the childhood, homes, and families they left behind.

“Building bridges” to education for children who have been in abusive child labor situations, such as child soldiering and children (especially girls) being used as domestics or sex slaves by armed groups, is the primary goal of the Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) Activity conducted by Creative Associates International, Inc. This report is the summary of the results of a desk review and rapid assessment that was conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo in September 2001 on behalf of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Recognizing the urgency of the child soldier problem, USAID requested ECACL to: conduct a rapid assessment to determine the current educational needs, conditions, resources, and barriers faced by demobilized child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and utilize the results of the needs assessment to design one or more pilot project activities to be implemented through the ECACL subtask order. The rapid assessment of demobilized child soldiers and war-affected children, including victimized girls, was conducted with the goal of understanding how formal and non-formal education services could facilitate their reintegration into civil society. The assessment was conducted in the government controlled West of the Country (Kinshasa) and the rebel-controlled East (Goma and Bukavu).

The views contained within this report reflect those of the ECACL rapid assessment team members: Dr. Art Hansen, Francine Ahouanmenou-Agueh, and Andre Lokisso Lu’Epotu; and the BEPS’ ECACL Washington, DC based team.

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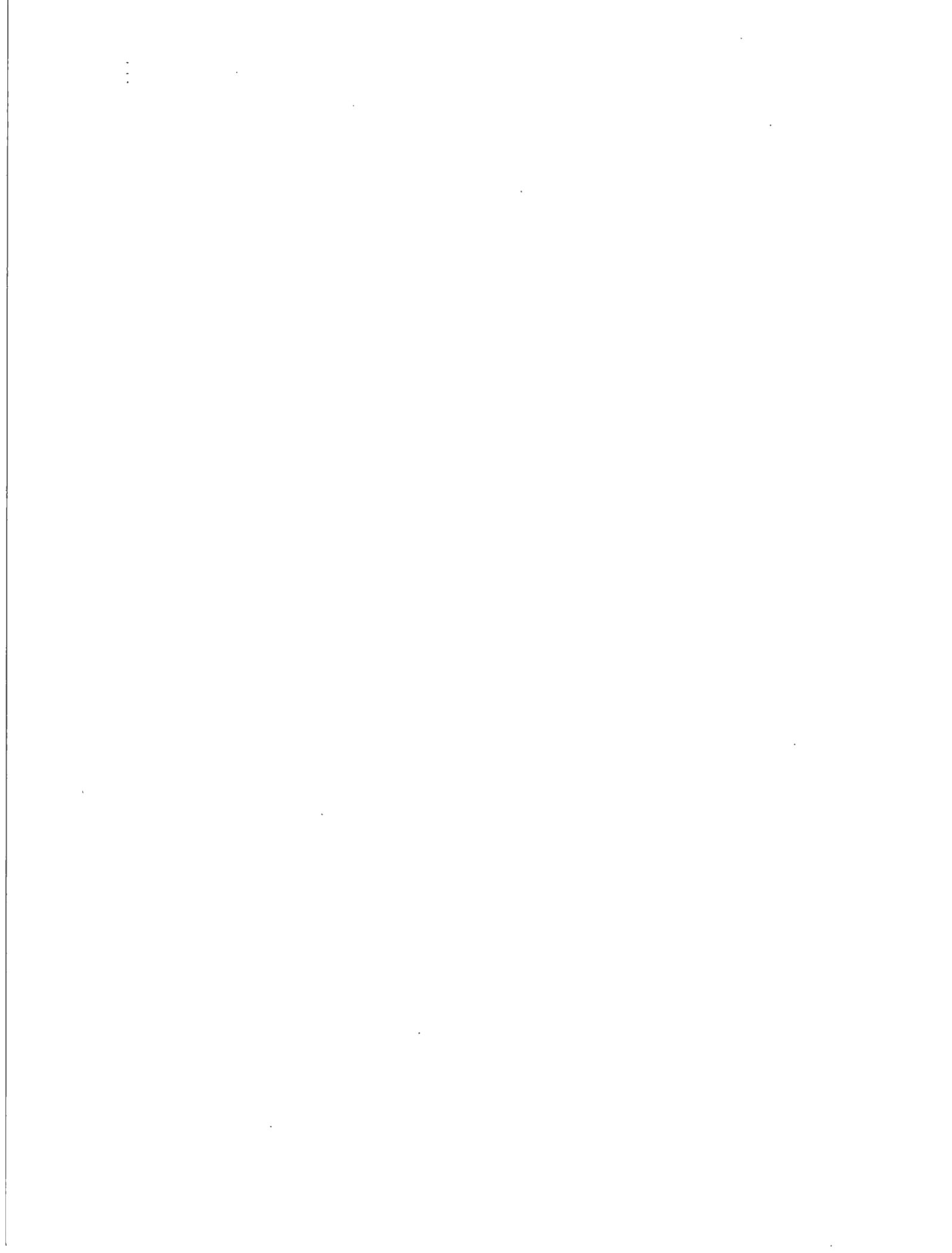


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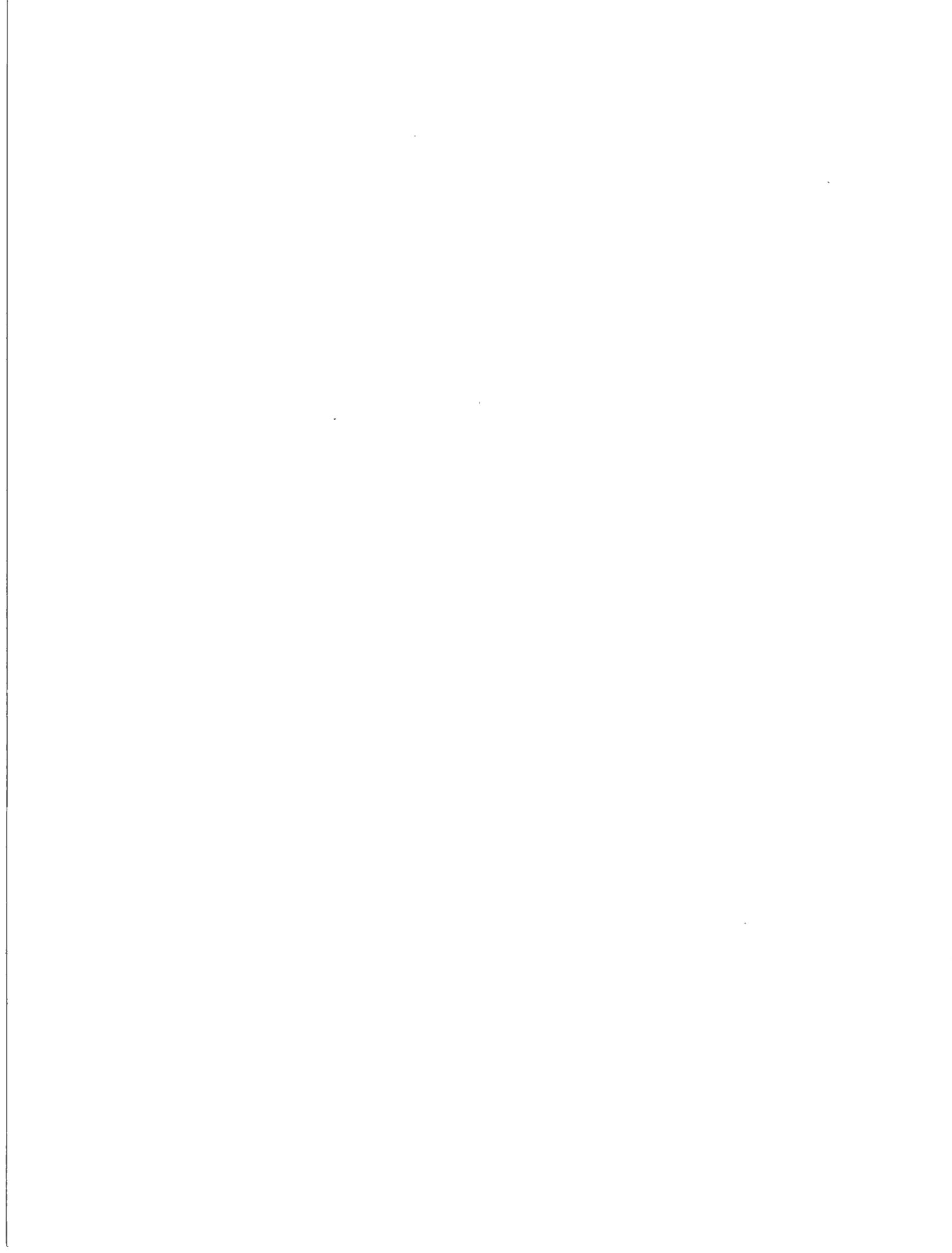
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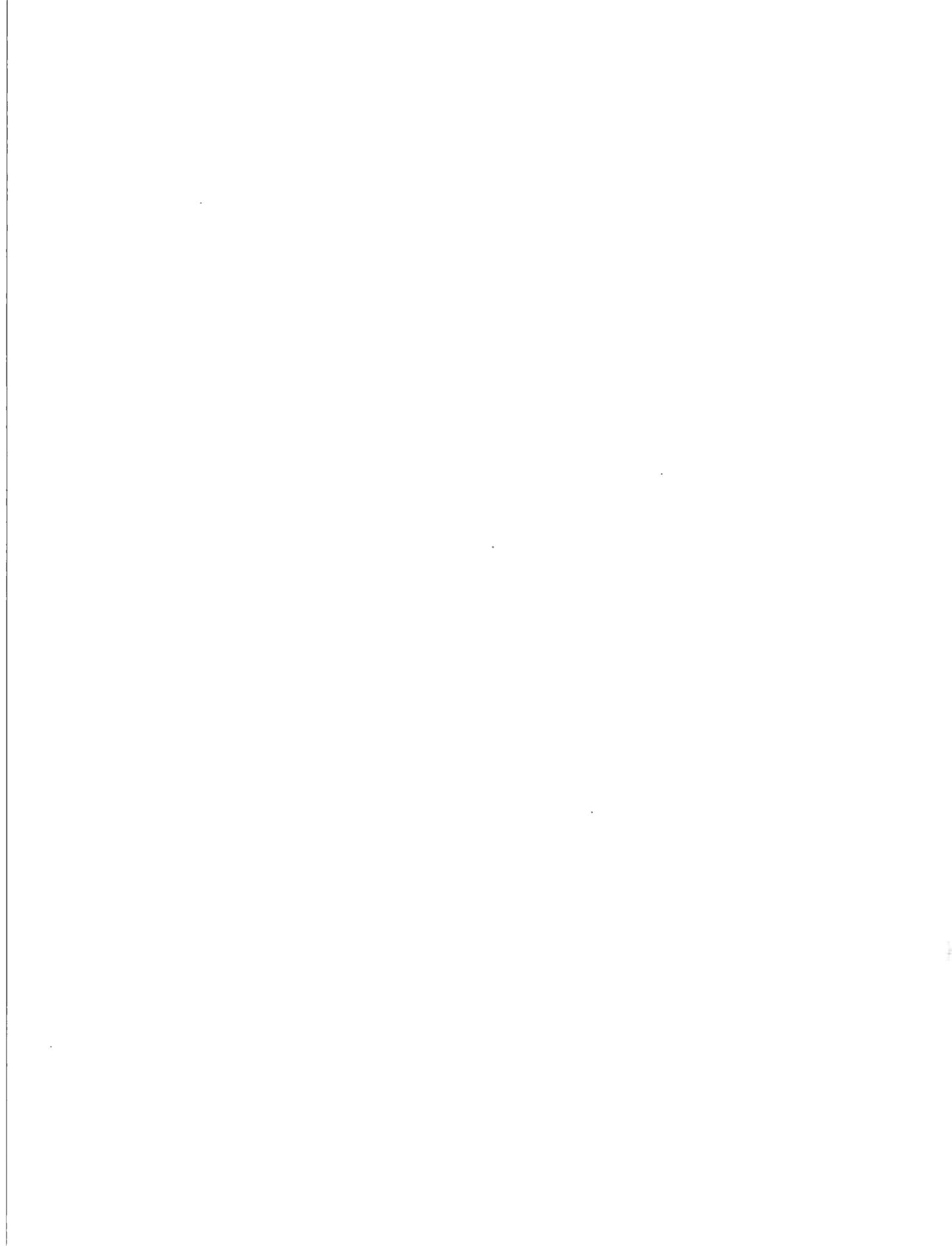
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AFDL	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo
BEPS	Basic Education and Policy Support Activity
BICE	International Catholic Office for Children
BUNADER	National Office for Demobilization and Reintegration
CAII	Creative Associates International, Inc.
CAJED	Council of Action for Young People and Discriminated Children
CBO	Community-based organization
CEDC	Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRONGD	Regional Network of Development NGOs
CTO	Transit and Reorientation Center
DIVAS	Division for Social Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECACL	Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor
GADERES	Action Group for Child Soldiers
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ILO	International Labor Organization
IR	Intermediate Result
IRC	International Rescues Committee
MONUC	UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of the Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
PAERNA	Cooperation Projects to Aid Developing Countries (a Swiss NGO)
RCD	Congolese Assembly for Democracy
REPAD	Network for Rural Children in Distress in South Kivu
RFDP	Network of Women for the Defense of Human Rights and Peace
ROADE	Network of NGOs for the Defense of the Child's Rights in North Kivu
SCF	Save The Children Foundation, United Kingdom
SO	Strategic Objective
UN	The United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Responding to a request by USAID Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) Activity of Creative Associates International Inc. (CAII) fielded a team of consultants to assess educational response strategies for child soldiers and other war-affected children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The team visited three areas in the country, one in the government controlled West (Kinshasa, Gombe Province) and two in the rebel controlled East (Bukavu, South Province and Goma, North Kivu Province). The goal of the assessment was to determine the current educational needs, conditions, resources, and barriers faced by demobilized child soldiers and to design one or more pilot project activities that could be implemented under the BEPS/ECACL task order.

Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been in a state of protracted civil war following the ouster of the long time dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, in 1997. The fighting intensified in 1998, when the Congolese Assembly for Democracy, or *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD)*, took control over much of the East of the country in response to the seizure of power by Laurent Kabila in 1996. The wars that ensued have had disastrous humanitarian consequences, causing the deaths of more than 2.5 million people, mostly civilians who have died from disease and malnutrition.

Education System

The educational system in DRC has fallen out of state control and most of the infrastructure is in very poor condition, especially in rural areas and in the East. Nationally, the gross primary enrollment rates declined sharply from 94.1% in 1978 to 72.2% in 1995, mostly from a lack of school infrastructure, textbooks, teaching materials, and supplies. This was accompanied by a drop in government expenditure on education, from 26.4% in 1972 to less than 1% today.

The Ministry of National Education is responsible for administering primary and secondary schools, as well as vocational and professional secondary schools. The Division of Social Affairs, or *Division des Affaires Sociales (DIVAS)* manages non-formal education, including bridge courses, or *remise a niveau*, that are offered by reintegration programs or at transit centers. School is neither compulsory nor free, and most schools require the payment of fees to attend, often many times the average per capita income.

National and International Support for Child Soldiers

The international community has promoted the rights of child soldiers since the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). This has laid the groundwork for other conventions and protocols that protect the rights of child soldiers, including the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1998) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999). These international conventions prohibit the use of children in armed conflict and support the role of educational programs in the improvement of their lives. Efforts of governments to comply with the provisions of the conventions have resulted in internationally funded child soldier projects implemented by UN agencies, International NGOs, and national NGOs.

The national government of DRC (in the West of the Country) has supported the demobilization of child soldiers through Decree 66, which provides for the demobilization of vulnerable groups, including children, old people, and the handicapped. The RCD (in the rebel controlled East) has developed the Interdepartmental Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Social Reintegration, and supported this through statements by political authorities supporting the prohibition of using child soldiers. There have been no similar announcements or activities by the other armed forces in the East as of the time of this assessment.

The Situation of War-affected Children

The use of child soldiers has become an integral part of the war in the DRC. They are recruited because they are inexpensive, forge a strong allegiance with the army or militia, and can be more easily convinced to participate in acts of violence. Children were used in the military on a wide scale since the 1960s, though the incidence has increased substantially as a result of the wars of 1996 and 1998. Child soldiers have been recruited from nationals of other countries, such as Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, and these children fight alongside their adult sponsors.

Estimating the Number of Child Soldiers

The incidence of child soldiering is very difficult to measure, though the United Nations and other organizations estimate the total number to be “more than 10,000.” Measurement is complicated by the definition of child soldiers. For instance, are the children in uniform that work in military camps doing menial tasks, such as fetching water, child soldiers? The lack of information and clear definition may account for widely varying estimates. The team encountered 11 populations of child soldiers in the three focus areas, and we estimate the number in these areas alone to be as many as 25,000. The precise definition of the role they serve may become irrelevant, since all of these children will need to return home after the fighting has ended, and they all face the unclear prospect of picking up their lives where they left off.

The Situation of Child Soldiers

The social and psychological profiles of child soldiers are diverse, and vary case-by-case. A survey by a local NGO, the International Catholic Council on Childhood, or *Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance* (BICE), found that children in the government forces in the West of the country are more literate, educated, and from better family conditions than their counterparts in the East. Piecemeal research conducted in the East, reveals that RCD and other forces rely more on the recruitment of vulnerable groups such as street children, orphans, refugee and internally displaced children and children working in forced labor conditions (i.e., mines or as shepherds). It was apparent that survey findings in the West were generally better researched and documented, while those in the East were less likely to be based on professional statistical research methods.

The Situation of Victimized Girls

An important category of war-affected children is victimized girls, or *le fille victime*. These include girls directly victimized or traumatized by the military or militia personnel, most often through rape, sexual exploitation, or forced labor. The USAID mission specifically requested that this group be included in this assessment, because they recognize the effects of the war across gender. In general, victimized girls include girl soldiers in uniform, girls working as servants or slaves in military camps, and girls raped or sexually violated by soldiers. There are no programs that specifically target this group, though there are a number of projects that have been proposed or are underway that target women and child victims of human rights abuse and gender-based violence.

The Situation of Other War-affected Children

The most comprehensive category of war-affected children is what the UN has termed Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC). These include child soldiers, victimized girls, orphans, unaccompanied children, as well as the physically handicapped, chronically ill, and psychologically disabled. In 2001, the UN decided to stop focusing on the incidence of child soldiers and concentrate on CEDC, because “the distinction between war-inflicted and chronic vulnerability in the DRC had been practically eroded” because of the “dreadful consequences” of years of warfare (United Nations 1999). The UN estimated that there were at least 50,000 CEDC at the end of 2000. The concept appears well founded given the millions of civilians who have died as a result of deteriorating economic conditions, forced migration, lack of access to food, and poor hygienic conditions, particularly in and around the refugee camps in Goma and Bukavu.

The Situation of Child Laborers

There is a widespread recognition that other abusive child labor practices exist throughout the DRC. A variety of NGOs have assisted children in such situations. Some of the most prominent forms include:

- Porters for the military.
- Laboring on agricultural plantations.
- Brick making.
- Fishing.
- Shepherding livestock.
- Mining and quarrying.
- Domestic servitude.

The Needs of Child Soldiers

Demobilization and reintegration is not simply a process of “going home” again. Children must leave behind the prestige, lifestyle, and security of carrying a gun, and replace their self-image with the uncertain process of personal and vocational development. Depending on the circumstances and the availability of opportunities in the community, this period can be a time of personal turmoil or personal growth. This suggests that programs need to help mark the transition to civilian life and develop new opportunities for children. The following aspects are most important in this process of reintegration:

Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

The protection of demobilized child soldiers requires reconciliation with the victimized groups to ensure that animosity does not manifest itself in future violence. This requires awareness by the community of what they can do to facilitate the socialization and reintegration process. At the same time, ex-soldiers need to learn how to express and satisfy their needs non-violently. Children and other community members may also need to be made aware of the danger posed by some of the demobilized soldiers, and what they can do to lessen or avoid it.

Child Protection

Due to the risk of remobilization and further victimization, there is a need for monitoring the conditions of ex-child soldiers and other CEDC. Child soldiers could easily return home to be remobilized, or end up in other hazardous child labor situations (i.e., mining). Victimized girls may become easy targets for further victimization, including prostitution, forced servitude or being trafficked for prostitution. Community-based approaches to monitoring the situation of children who have returned to their homes are considered more effective.

Psychosocial Counseling

The psychological and social problems resulting from traumatic wartime experiences vary from case to case. Most demobilized adult soldiers can reintegrate and get on with civilian life, while others require special counseling and assistance. Disregarding the impact of such experiences may cause the child to manifest them in future displays of violence, depression, and/or other destructive behaviors. Counseling and other concerted efforts are needed to directly address the child’s need. Programs should also include an evaluation mechanism that can assess the psychological and social needs of each child.

Life Skills Training

The children need urgent preventative health messages, including those on HIV/AIDS, the environment, and landmines. Teachers and community workers need training to disseminate these messages, and to help ensure they are current. School subjects should include peace and tolerance messages offered through entertaining activities that make learning fun. Life skills should be adapted for and included in the existing curriculum, and incorporated into the weekly schedule.

Key Strategic Considerations

The development of a strategy to address the problems of demobilized child soldiers require some agreed upon principles and assumptions about how to proceed in the climate of warfare and how to best target assistance. The following are the two key strategic considerations in the design of a child soldier demobilization and reintegration program:

How to Deliver Services to Former Combatants

The program must decide upon how it will deliver services to former combatants, either by *segregating* them into a special program or by *integrating* them into a wider program for children at risk. Those in favor of segregation suppose that a focus on the needs of child soldiers will minimize danger to other children, and facilitate the delivery of a more appropriate program that better meets their psychological and social needs. Proponents of the integration position maintain that segregation into a separate program encourages military enlistment (to make them eligible), limits their opportunities for social interaction with non-military society, costs more per child, and does not address the most vulnerable children in the community. Most of the sources interviewed for this report support integration, because they recognize the wider humanitarian crisis, and the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a program exclusively for child soldiers.

Whether to Work Toward Demobilization During Wartime

The program must decide whether to proceed with demobilization activities in a continuing environment of conflict. Organizations, such as UNICEF, maintain that comprehensive reintegration cannot occur until the implementation of a comprehensive peace, and that isolated efforts at demobilization and reintegration may only fuel the conflict¹. Local and national NGOs, on the other hand, believe that demobilization does not require a state of peace. They believe reintegration can be achieved through advocacy with local military leaders, that children can be successfully reintegrated into the communities and families of origin, and that effective monitoring can ensure that armed groups do not remobilize the children. The team recommends that demobilization and service delivery proceed despite the conflict, in order to build the institutional capacity of programs to meet the needs of child soldiers, if or when they are widely demobilized following a comprehensive peace.

Child Soldier Reintegration Programs in DRC

Save the Children UK has a series of child soldier projects in Kinshasa, Bukavu, Goma and Oriental Province in the North. Their experiences offer important lessons on program methodologies that work for child soldiers. They have created a Transit and Reorientation Center, or *Centre de Transit et d'Orientation (CTO)*, in the focus areas that work to reintegrate unaccompanied children into their communities and with their families of origin while helping to provide for educational, vocational, and social needs.

¹ They maintain this position in part because one of their reintegration programs was overrun by armed forces after the outbreak of war in 1998. At this time, more than a hundred children were forcibly recruited back into the army and the program was forced to shut down.

Civil Society

The team found a dynamic and active civil society in the DRC, especially in the city of Bukavu. National NGOs and Community-based Organizations² (CBO) are involved in addressing a range of social concerns, including education, health, human rights, community development, and the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. The team met with many of these NGOs during the assessment, and found them enthusiastic about implementing projects with ECACL.

SCF Social Welfare, Protection, and Inclusion Program in Kinshasa

In a poor neighborhood of Kinshasa, SCF operates the USAID-funded Social Welfare, Protection, and Inclusion Program that targets demobilized child soldiers, ex-prostitutes, street children, and children treated as witches. It offers protection for the children and provides education, healthcare, and income-generation activities. Additionally, the program offers scholarships to children so they can afford to attend school. The demobilized soldiers living with their families participate in income-generation projects to increase their family income, including raising rabbits and vegetables.

SCF Unaccompanied Child Reintegration Program in Bukavu

The SCF reintegration program in Bukavu provides an interesting example of how to establish and operate a child soldier demobilization and reintegration program. Children are housed in a Transit and Reorientation Center (CTO) that provides support for unaccompanied children and child soldiers, by serving as a halfway house for children on their way home to their families. While in the center, staff are working to locate the child's family, offer vocational training and social counseling, and arrange for their return to their home. The project grew out of an initiative in 1994 to relocate displaced children, mostly refugees from Rwanda. Since August 1999, the transit center received 463 children from a variety of warring factions. An additional 700 children did not pass through the center to return to their families directly. This supports a general observation that children prefer returning home directly, because it is less threatening to the child.

The center advocates with local military commanders for the demobilization of children under arms. The location of families has been surprisingly straightforward. Since many of the children have kept in touch with their families, the program claims to find the families of more than 98 percent of the children. Following the return home, the project works with families and communities to help effectively reintegrate the children and setting up a monitoring system to ensure they are not remobilized into the armed forces.

The program overcame early problems. Children ran away from the center in the first few months, because they were misinformed about services to be made available at the center. They thought that they were eligible for a wide range of benefits and training, and were disappointed when they became aware of the actual services offered. In addition, within the first week of moving to the new facility, the local community attacked the center, throwing stones and injuring

²It is important to make a distinction between CBOs that work at the local level and NGOs that work on a national or regional level, usually through a centralized headquarters and/or a network of CBOs. CBOs deliver services while the role of the NGOs is technical assistance and capacity building.

some of the children and the staff. The problem was caused by envy, fear, and confusion about the purpose of the center. Some believed it was a training camp, while others felt that their children were equally deserving of the services. The program worked to overcome the negative community attitudes through awareness raising activities, and by opening up the center to other community members, especially children.

Programs for Victimized Girls

The assessment team did not find any programs focusing specifically on the needs of victimized girls in any of the three focus areas. This fact may be a reflection of the lower status of women in the society. Girls did participate in other programs for disadvantaged children and street children that provided vocational training in sewing, baking, embroidery, or other areas. However, no psychosocial counseling services were provided to victimized girls in these centers. There is a clear need for assistance in this area.

The team found that the NGOs most likely to recognize and serve the needs of victimized girls are those involved in women's rights, the protection of abuse victims, and health. Many of these organizations already implement awareness raising activities, such as publicizing the problems of rape and HIV/AIDS. The Mater Misericordiae Center in Bukavu is an example of an organization that provides medical support to victimized girls and women.

In Bukavu, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which works primarily in health and sanitation, showed us a proposal for the reintegration of victimized girls and women (under the rubric of victims of torture and gender violence). The project was designed to build on the existing network of local NGOs working in health and human rights by building their capacity to deliver medical care, psychosocial counseling, and improving their infrastructure. Concerned local NGOs could apply for financial assistance and training through an umbrella grant.

The need for assistance for this group is clear. One case from North Kivu involves four girls found on a roadside and taken to a local hospital by a local NGO, *The Network of NGOs for the Defense of the Rights of the Child in North Kivu (ROADE)*. The girls suffered injuries—one had severe lacerations to her head, arms, and leg. Because of resource constraints, the NGO was forced to return the girls to the bush after only a short stay in the clinic and very limited medical care.

Summary of Findings

<i>Formal and Non-formal Education Systems</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bridging programs are the primary educational tools for demobilization and reintegration. 2. Agriculture and animal husbandry should be the focal points of training in the East.
<i>Demobilization and Reintegration</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Partial demobilization can be arranged at the local level with local authorities even in the absence of a comprehensive peace. 4. Dialogue with the military is important to support the process and orient the children before they are demobilized. 5. Most child soldiers will manage the process of demobilization and reintegration by themselves. 6. Active recruitment by the armed forces frustrates the process of demobilization. 7. Transit and orientation centers (CTOs) are needed to shelter and orient children, especially those who are abandoned or orphaned.
<i>Community-based Programs</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. There are active and dynamic civil society organizations functioning within the DRC, i.e., CBOs, NGOs, and NGO networks. 9. Reintegration programs need to be community-based. 10. Public information and awareness programs are important to inform the community and promote human rights and reconciliation. 11. It is important to consider the needs and capacities of the families and communities of returning demobilized child soldiers. 12. Self-help projects can unite communities and encourage support for returning demobilized child soldiers.
<i>Integrated Programs</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. An integrated and comprehensive approach to rehabilitation is crucial because ex-child soldiers and victimized girls have a variety of needs. 14. Income-generating activities and/or scholarships may be necessary.
<i>Importance of NGOs and NGO networks</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. NGO networks can facilitate the implementation of demobilization and reintegration programs. 16. Local NGOs are crucial partners in an environment of insecurity and conflict. 17. NGOs can improve communication and safety of humanitarian activities. 18. NGOs can improve cost efficiency and sustainability of reconstruction and development activities. 19. Local NGOs are active in conducting demographic studies in DRC. 20. Local populations can more effectively access communities and territories during wartime. 21. Local NGOs can identify appropriate solutions to priority community concerns. 22. In North and South Kivu, local NGOs identified child soldiers and facilitated their release. 23. Local NGOs provide important feed back to the program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

ECACL recommends that USAID sponsor a program for demobilized child soldiers and victimized girls. Where possible this can be expanded to include children from other groups defined by the UN as CEDC. Child soldier reintegration should be considered a social “development” activity, while health and humanitarian assistance is relief work. The strategies may have become confused in the CTO approach, which treats child soldiers much as it does displaced persons, where the emphasis lies in finding the child’s place of origin and sending them back. Child soldier reintegration and victimized girl programs also have a special meaning for the peace process, demobilization, and reintegration; because of a special symbolic and political significance. They need more than a project that showcases the happy experiences of a very few. They need opportunities.

Learning from Other Programs

The assessment has brought forth lessons that can be utilized in future activities, helping planners learn from the past. While many of these have been touched upon in other sections, they need repeating because they affect program planning in fundamental ways:

1. Child soldiers are not necessarily displaced children.
2. Integration is preferable to segregation.
3. Programs can be implemented, even in the absence of a comprehensive peace.
4. Communities and military authorities need to understand the benefits of child soldier demobilization.
5. There are no programs for victimized girls.
6. The CTO is an expensive model, and appears to have limited outreach.

Building the Capacity of Community Education

Based on the foundation of the lessons learned, ECACL proposes the following strategies to reintegrate and educate demobilized child soldiers. These should be developed in the context of a pilot project to learn more about child soldier reintegration, and the most cost-effective mechanisms for governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations to deliver support. Only through this tripartite cooperation can financial, technical, and human resources support appropriate interventions identified and developed at the community-level. The following activities are designed to be building blocks of what we consider to be an effective program. The entirety is beyond the scope of a singular pilot project, though ECACL is prepared to offer assistance in one or more components according to the needs of USAID.

Research and Assessment: Further practical research is needed to design and implement useful programs. It is important to identify the factors that have the greatest effect on the situation of the children and their potential for reintegration. Important areas of inquiry include understanding where populations of child soldiers are located, sociological profiles of their characteristics, and economic opportunities that exist in their war-affected communities. Research should not merely document the extent of the problem, but should be a tool to develop proactive solutions for child

soldiers and victimized girls that are relevant to the conditions and factors existent within these children's local communities.

Participatory Needs Assessment: A participatory needs assessment workshop should be organized at the local level to assess the capacity of NGOs and CBOs involved in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration effort. It would focus on existing capacities, strengths, and weaknesses, and the mapping of their distribution and activities in the region. The results from local assessments could then be incorporated into an assessment of the province. At the provincial level, a workshop could be cosponsored by: in addition to International NGOs, bilateral, and multilateral institutions, CRONGD (representing civil society), BUNADER (representing the government and the Inter-Departmental Commission in the Kivus, if peace is not yet achieved), and UNICEF and/or OCHA (representing the international community).

Capacity Building: The program would need to build the capacity of organizations to implement community-based programs. These would include organizations responsible for administering and managing the program (International NGOs, National NGOs, and NGO networks) and those that would deliver services (CBOs and teachers). It is important that funding mechanisms are not lopsided, where more resources go to the administration and planning of education programs (i.e., to International NGOs and National NGOs) than to those groups that deliver the program (i.e., CBOs).

Supporting Community-level Activities: The products of capacity building are active community programs. The types of local interventions are varied and numerous, depending on the needs of the community, and the method most active to meet that need. Education activities could include, but are not limited to:

1. Non-formal education programs, such as literacy and numeracy classes.
2. Rehabilitation of school infrastructure.
3. Training of local teachers.
4. Childcare facilities or nursery schools.
5. Formal or non-formal vocational training.
6. Business development skills.
7. Agricultural training.

Strengthening the CTO System: The creation, staffing, and equipping of more CTOs is essential before the beginning of a massive demobilization. We believe that many child soldiers who have maintained contact with their families, will want to go home directly (perhaps through auto-demobilization and auto-reintegration), and may not want to pass through a psychosocial counseling and orientation phase. However, other children are not as fortunate. These children cannot go directly to their families and cannot expect to be cared for, such as the 26 child soldiers staying at the home of the RCD President.

Thousands of children, once demobilized, will immediately need the services provided by CTOs because the children will have to find places to sleep and sources of food and protection. There are very few centers now operating, and even those supported by SCF are poorly equipped. The number of centers needed in each province will depend on the number of child soldiers to be demobilized, distances between the camps, the percentage of children able to reintegrate into their family right away, and the accessibility of the local communities from the camps.

Other Activities Requiring a State of Peace

The development of a long-term strategy is complicated by the ongoing war in the East. Given obstacles encountered in the Inter Congolese Dialogue, the direction, feasibility, and timeframe of the peace settlement is still uncertain. The continuing state of conflict affects the potential in a number of important ways by:

- Affecting the security of project personnel, placing the lives of children and staff at risk as was the case with the UNICEF program in 1998.
- Decreasing the level of investment that the government is willing to make in infrastructure.
- Decreasing program outreach and mobility in rural areas where the war is still active.
- Increasing the likelihood that project beneficiaries may be remobilized.

The factors place serious, but not insurmountable, constraints on the program. These may require more innovation and coordination at the local level. There are, however, some activities that can only be done, or make sense, only in a state of peace.

1. **Community Monitoring System:** An information system is needed to identify and track children once they return to their families, and to monitor the progress of the demobilization and reintegration process. Children's identities (including background, psychological profile, and family information) could be standardized and updated by the coordinating institutions. Developing this system would include designing standard forms to be filled manually, as well as establishing and maintaining a computerized database at the provincial level.
2. **Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure:** The whole formal educational system has collapsed, and essentially all of the formal schools (both primary and secondary) lack equipment and furniture. The options for pilot programs focus on the rehabilitation of existing CTOs, schools, and health facilities. One objective is to increase the capacity of CTOs, schools, and health facilities to respond to the current needs of child soldiers and victimized girls. The second objective is to build the capacity of these organizations to expand their services to cope with larger-scale reintegration in the event of a comprehensive peace.

- a) Rehabilitate and equip existing CTOs. This would include building construction or repair, providing furniture, vocational and sports equipment, clothing, etc., and staff training programs, particularly in the areas of psycho-social counseling and non-violent conflict management and resolution.
- b) Rehabilitate and equip existing bridging schools. This would include building construction or repair, providing furniture, equipment, school supplies, etc., reviewing curricula, and teacher training programs, particularly in the areas of psycho-social counseling and non-violent conflict management and resolution.
- c) Strengthen health centers that respond to the needs of victimized girls and women. This would include providing furniture and equipment, sponsoring or supporting literacy and counseling activities, and staff training programs, particularly in the areas of psycho-social, rape, STD, and HIV/AIDS counseling.

Synergy with Other USAID Objectives

An education program for child soldiers and/or victimized girls should work in coordination with other strategic objectives (SO), intermediate results (IR), and existing programs. Coordination can help to establish the needed synergies and cooperative relationships required for a sustainable approach.

Health: Six of the DRC's IRs refer to health related issues, including HIV/AIDS. The ECACL pilot project could address any number of those issues through a Life Skills Education component designed for delivery to war-affected children.

Democracy, Legal Information and Human Rights: The reintegration of child soldiers and war-affected children will directly impact IR # 6 for democracy and legal information by increasing literacy of children and youth, the future leaders of the DRC, and improving the possibility for democracy and peaceful governance.

Environment: The program can work with the framework of IR #10 (access to environmental education and information) and IR #11 (strengthening environmental NGOs). The ECACL program will support strengthening the constituency for environmental protection and conservation through a program of social marketing and community mobilization.

Rural Credit: IR #12 (rural credit unions accessing viable credit providers in target areas) has direct implications for vocational education, and provides an opportunity to work on the development of apprenticeship programs, labor projections, and agricultural development. Apprenticeships are particularly suitable to youth such as ex-child soldiers and war-affected children. Through combining basic education and short non-formal skills training, ex-child soldiers can be prepared to return to the rural areas and taught how to access credit. The ECACL approach will therefore have contributed to basic education and avoided the trap of urban migration.

**Planning Educational Response Strategies for the
Reintegration of Demobilized Child Soldiers in the
Democratic Republic of Congo**

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L. Diane Mull, ECACL Manager
Kevin Elkins, Program Associate

II. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

CAII under its Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity has a subtask order to conduct activities to use education to combat abusive child labor. The Education to Combat Abusive Child Labor (ECACL) sub-task order provides assistance to the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) global and regional bureaus and missions.

The USAID Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) requested the ECACL team to conduct a rapid assessment in the Democratic Republic of Congo to develop and recommend appropriate educational response strategies for demobilized child soldiers and other war-affected children. The rapid assessment included a desk review conducted in August and an in-country assessment conducted in September 2001, by a team of expert consultants contracted under the ECACL activity.

Activities

Recognizing the urgency of the child soldier problem, USAID requested the following activities:

1. Conduct a rapid assessment to determine the current educational needs, conditions, resources, and barriers faced by demobilized child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
2. Utilize results of the needs assessment to design one or more pilot project activities to be implemented through the ECACL subtask order.

The rapid assessment of child soldiers, including children that have been demobilized and victimized girls was conducted with the goal of understanding how formal and non-formal education services could facilitate their reintegration into civil society. The assessment was conducted in the government controlled West of the Country (Kinshasa) and the rebel-controlled East (Goma and Bukavu). Kinshasa is the national capital in Gombe Province. Goma is in the North Kivu Province, and Bukavu is in the South Kivu Province. Due to continued fighting in outlying regions, the team restricted its activities to these urban centers.

Upon recommendation by the team and the USAID Mission, ECACL may fund a pilot activity with the goal of developing a model of effective and appropriate educational services for demobilized child soldiers in the country. The activity would be funded for 1 year, after which time it would be scaled up as appropriate. Where possible, the project would work through local

NGOs and utilize financial and human resources at the local level. It will also work to coordinate activities with existing child soldier programs, with organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, and Save the Children - United Kingdom (SCF).

The Assessment

After selection by ECACL and approval from USAID, the following three consultants conducted the assessment:

- Dr. Art Hansen, Child Soldier/Demobilization Specialist, Team Leader.
- Ms. Francine Ahouanmenou-Agueh, Education Specialist.
- Mr. André Lokisso Lu'Epotu, Child Soldier/Congo Specialist.

The ECACL team conducted research and pulled together copies of all previous and known studies regarding child soldiers in the DRC. This was provided to the team leader to conduct a desk review and summarize the findings from these studies within the report. The team leader participated in preparatory meetings with the ECACL team at the offices of CAII in Washington, DC, and follow-up preparation in Atlanta, Georgia where he reviewed previous assessments conducted by other agencies on DRC and their child soldiers, and finalized the agenda, travel schedule, work plan, and draft outline for the final report.

The rapid assessment team conducted the assessment in DRC in three weeks during the period September 9-28, 2001, and visited the areas of Kinshasa, Goma, and Bukavu. The team collected qualitative and quantitative data from a wide range of stakeholders involved with child soldier demobilization and reintegration (see Appendix B), including:

- USAID.
- Government representatives.
- Local authorities in the Kivus.
- The United Nations (UN).
- The World Bank.
- The donor community.
- International NGOs.
- Civil society organizations (including local and national NGOs).
- Child soldiers, victimized girls, and other children in especially difficult situations (CEDC).

The team briefed the American Embassy, USAID, and relevant DRC authorities, and stakeholders on the preliminary findings and recommendations at the end of the assessment and before their departure on September 28, 2001. The team submitted its draft report to ECACL on October 9 and submitted follow-up materials through October 26.

The itinerary for the DRC rapid assessment follows (for a detailed itinerary see Appendix A):

Itinerary, September 2001

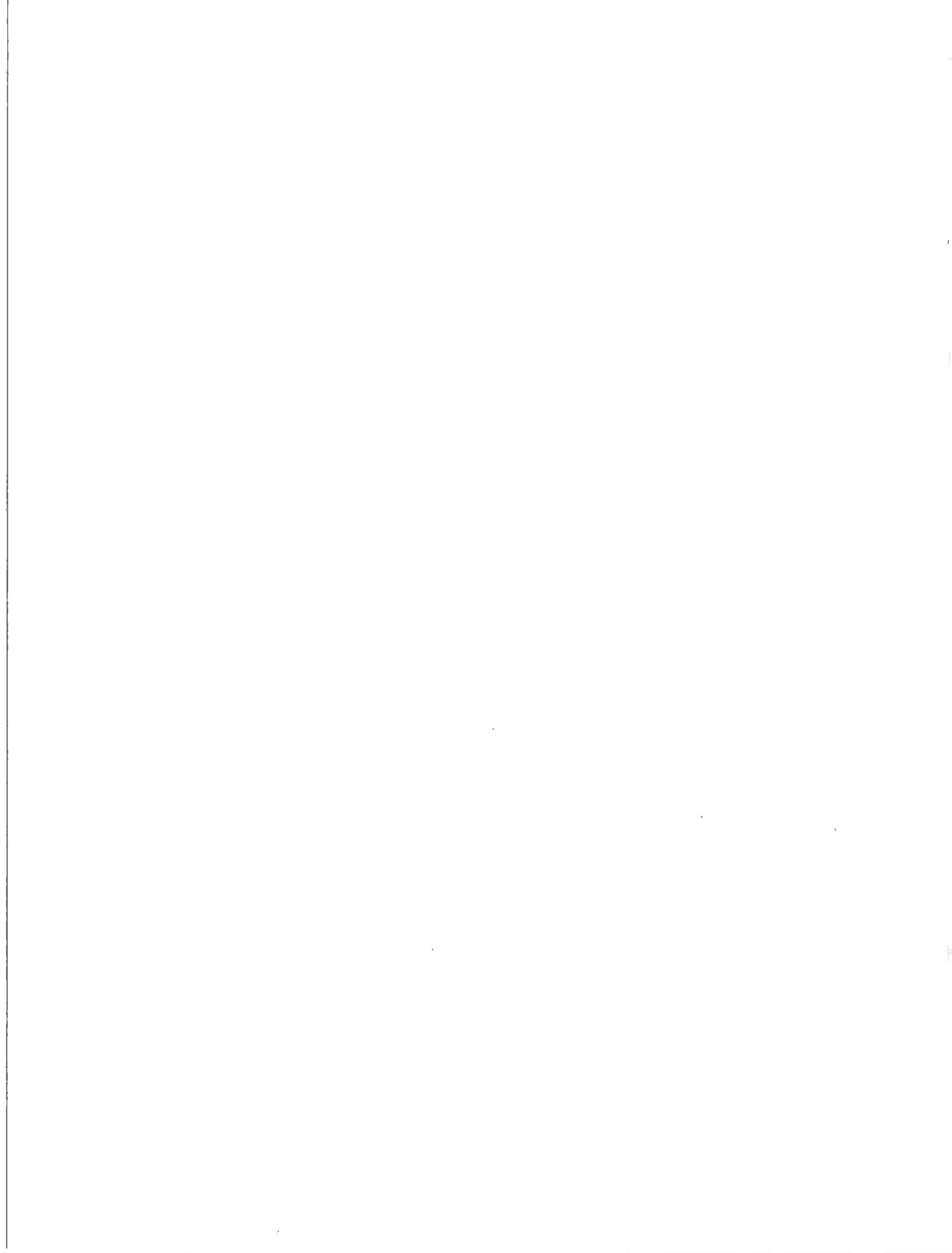
Date

9 th -11 th	Team members travel to and arrive in Kinshasa.
11 th -13 th	The team began the assessment in Kinshasa by meeting with USAID officials, the most relevant governmental ministries, and multilateral and non-governmental agencies.
14 th	The team flew to Goma (North Kivu) and began the assessment in Goma by meeting with local USAID staff, local governing authorities, and the most relevant multilateral and non-governmental agencies.
15 th	The team flew to Bukavu (South Kivu).
15 th -18 th	In Bukavu (South Kivu), the team met with the most relevant multilateral and non-governmental agencies and interviewed child soldiers and other girls and boys living in especially difficult situations.
19 th	The team flew to Goma (North Kivu).
19 th -23 rd	In Goma (North Kivu), the team met with local governing authorities and the most relevant multilateral and non-governmental agencies and interviewed children living in especially difficult situations. The team worked on preparing its preliminary report for briefing local stakeholders. The team briefed RCD authorities about the purpose of the rapid assessment before leaving for Kinshasa.
24 th	The team flew to Kinshasa.
24 th -28 th	In Kinshasa, the team met with the most relevant multilateral and non-governmental agencies and interviewed child soldiers. The team also finished its preliminary report, briefing interested parties on the team's preliminary findings and recommendations, and receiving additional information and clarification (feed back) from the briefings.
28 th -29 th	Team members left Kinshasa.

Methodology

The methodology used was that of a rapid assessment. Team members met with key stakeholders (donors, projects, government authorities, non-governmental organizations, potential beneficiaries, etc.) to determine the degree and extent of the problem, and possible project interventions. Techniques for data collection included:

- Reviewing existing information and prior assessments,
- Conducting formal and informal interviews and discussion groups,
- Consulting with knowledgeable individuals and organizations,
- In-depth discussions with key stakeholders, and
- Observing the context of the problem.



II. BACKGROUND

A. The Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a Central African country with a total area of 2.3 million square kilometers, four times the total area of France. The country is divided into 11 provinces, one of them being Kinshasa, the capital city.³ DRC shares borders with nine countries, including:

Angola	The Republic of the Congo	Tanzania
Burundi	Rwanda	Uganda
Central African Republic	Sudan	Zambia

The population of DRC reached 46.7 million in 1997 and is growing rapidly. The country has an annual population growth rate of 3.1 percent, one of the highest in Africa. Nearly half of the Congolese population is under 14 years of age, and women make up 51.5 percent of the population. According to the 1984 census, 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas and the average population density is 20.6 people per square kilometer. There is a high infant mortality rate with 101.6 deaths per 1,000 births, and an overall life expectancy of 49 years.

DRC is comprised of 500 tribes and numerous ethnic groups, including Bantu, Batwa (pygmies), and the Banyamulenge (related to the Tutsis in Rwanda). The country's predominant religion is Roman Catholic (50%). Other major religious groups include: Protestant (20%), Kimanguist (10%), Muslim (10%), and other syncretic sects and traditional beliefs (10%). More than 500 languages are spoken in the country. French is the official language of DRC, and the following four African languages are national languages:

- *Lingala* spoken in Kinshasa, Equator, Bandundu, and Oriental Provinces,
- *Swahili* spoken in Oriental, Maniema, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Katanga Provinces,
- *Kikongo* spoken in Bas-Congo, and Bandundu Provinces, and
- *Tshiluba* spoken in West and East Kasai, and Katanga Provinces.

Political History

The Belgians colonized the Congo in the 19th Century. Following its independence in June 1960, the country went through rapid political change. The founding President Kasa-Vubu and Prime Minister Lumumba renamed the country the Republic of Congo, which was later changed to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1963. Mobutu Sese Seko seized power in 1965, and renamed

³ Much of the information in this section comes from the following sources: U.S. Department of State's "Background Note: Democratic Republic of Congo," January 2000; the World Bank Country Report; and a UNICEF Report entitled, "2001: Education de Base pour Tous en RDC."

the country Zaïre (as well as the national currency and the main river). He remained dictator until his ouster in 1997. The legacy of the Mobutu regime is infamous, and the country suffered over decades from administrative mismanagement and corruption.

After the government threatened to expel the Zairian Tutsis (Banyamulenge) in 1996, Laurent Kabila's anti-Mobutu party merged with the Banyamulenge to form the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). It was during the "War of Liberation" of the AFDL that the first major mobilization of child soldiers occurred. President Mobutu fled Kinshasa in May 1997, and Kabila took power. At this time, the name of the country again became the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the national currency became known as Congolese franc.

A rebellion by ethnic Tutsis and ex-Mobutu army elements began in August 1998, and prompted the second major mobilization of child soldiers. With backing from Rwanda and Uganda, the rebels gained control over much of the East, with other rebel groups controlling the North. Rebels almost took Kinshasa, but were stopped by armed groups backed by Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. The war is estimated to have claimed the lives of 2.5 million people, mostly civilians who have died of starvation and disease.

Peace talks led to the Lusaka peace agreement of July 1999, signed between the government of the DRC and neighboring countries involved in the conflict. In August 1999, the three principal rebel movements (RCD-Goma, RCD-Dunia, and MLC) also signed the peace accord. The following armies fighting in the East have accepted the peace accord, but have not as yet implemented its provisions:

Mayi Mayi Padiri	Interhamwe	Ex-FAZ
Mayi Mayi Mudundo	Ex-FAR	Ex-DSP
Mayi Mayi Dunia	RPA	Burundian Army
Local Defence Militia (RDC)	Ex-FAC	FDD/FNL
Banyamulenge	Mongol	

Following the peace accord, a preparatory peace conference was held in Gaborone, Botswana, sponsored by the former President of Botswana, Katumire Masire. The conference brought together government representatives, rebel movements, non-armed political parties, and elements of civil society. This conference was conducted to reach agreement on the date, location, agenda, and internal regulation of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, scheduled to take place on October 15, 2001 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Addis Ababa Inter-Congolese Dialogue conference was postponed due to logistical problems. Issues on the table included: forming an electoral commission, the demobilization of child soldiers, and national reconstruction. The conference planned to bring together 330 delegates from the government, rebel factions, unarmed opposition groups, and civil society. It was scheduled to take place over a period of six weeks. However, the facilitator was forced to scale the conference back to 80 delegates. Participants were displeased, and felt more money was

necessary to ensure that all of the important delegates have the opportunity to attend. The decision was to postpone talks. South Africa, which has repeatedly offered to sponsor the talks and even pay half of the expenses, offered to convene the talks in November 2001. At the time of this report, the direction of this important component of the Lusaka Peace agreement is still in transition, and more time is needed to see the direction that it will take (*Addis Tribune*, October 19, 2001).

Economy

The country’s economy has been in chaos. This is largely due to almost four decades of corruption and mismanagement at the highest levels. Real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in the 1980s dropped to a third of the level of 1962, declining further still in the 1990s. The labor market has been disrupted by macro economic problems. Economic activity is very hard to measure given the large growth in the informal sector. In the late 1990s, economic growth and stabilization has begun. The spiral of hyperinflation and currency depreciation has been slowed, and inflation has dropped from 65.9 percent in 1996 to 15.3 percent in 1998. However, DRC continues to have a negative GDP and suffers other serious economic constraints.

TABLE 1: Economic Indicators (1997)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	\$6.1 billion
Annual GDP growth rate	-5.7%
Per capita GDP	\$350
Natural resources	Copper, cobalt, diamonds, gold, other minerals; petroleum; wood; hydroelectric potential
Agriculture	<i>Cash crops:</i> coffee, rubber, palm oil, quinquina, cocoa, sugar <i>Food crops:</i> manioc, corn, legumes, plantains, peanuts <i>Land use:</i> agriculture 3%; pasture 7%; forest/woodland 77%; other 13%
Industry	<i>Types:</i> processed and unprocessed minerals; consumer products, including textiles, plastics, footwear, cigarettes, metal products; processed foods and beverages, cement, timber
Trade:	
<i>Exports</i>	\$1.396 billion <i>Products:</i> diamonds, cobalt, copper, coffee, petroleum <i>Partners:</i> Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Africa, UK, US
<i>Imports</i>	\$1.022 billion <i>Products:</i> Consumer goods (food, textiles), refined petroleum products <i>Partners:</i> Belgium, China, France, Germany, Italy, South Africa, UK, US
Total External Debt	\$14.384 billion

Source: US Department of State, Background Note: Democratic Republic of Congo, January 2000

DRC is rich in natural resources, including the second largest rain forest in the world, fertile soils, ample rainfall, and vast mineral wealth. The fauna and flora of the country are diverse, with many rare species. The Congo River, its tributaries, and numerous lakes offer enormous transport potential. Historically, petroleum and the mining of copper, cobalt, diamonds, zinc, gold, and other precious metals accounted for about 75 percent of total export revenues, or 25 percent of the country's GDP. In addition, DRC has become an important producer of coltan, a raw material used in the manufacture of electronic devices, including mobile phones and computers.

Society

There is a popular belief in DRC that the country lived in harmony until the period of European colonization and the introduction of a modern political and economic system, which are viewed as being in opposition to the traditional values of the society. While individualism, consumerism, the value of time, organizational development, and economic planning have helped socio-economic development, they are viewed to be the fuel of poverty at the micro level and social conflict at the national level. Socio-economic disparity is reflected in the minority that holds three quarters of the country's wealth and productive capacity, while the great majority of the population lives in absolute poverty.

The wars in DRC have dramatically reduced the potential of the country. The economic disaster resulting from years of corruption and chronic warfare have increased unemployment and cut purchasing power. Most people live in poor sanitary conditions, and the formal education system has all but collapsed. Entire populations have been impoverished which has weakened the family unit. These disparities in wealth have also fostered feelings of hatred, revolt, and vengeance by groups, which have led to high rates of looting, vandalism, violence, and armed warfare.

Rural Areas: The 70 percent of the population who live in rural areas have been better able to protect traditional values. The extended family continues to be the primary social unit, meeting the social and economic needs at the community and household level. However, the family has also limited the potential of its members, including factors concerning its attitude toward formal education (in favor of magic and superstition), and its difficulty in providing basic services, such as nutrition, housing, sanitation, and health care. Despite the grinding poverty, rural communities have been resilient in the face of social and economic collapse, and have found innovative coping mechanisms to help ensure their survival.

Urban Areas: The 30 percent who live in urban areas have been more adept at adjusting to modern attitudes and behavior, though the extended family has been replaced by a weaker nuclear family. This has forced the family unit to lose its solidarity and surrender its traditional functions to institutions of the state (including social security, education, health care, financial institutions, and systems of credit). Urban youth view traditional life as primitive, and have the reputation for avoiding manual labor, responsibility, cooperation, and sharing. The movement by young people away from the traditional structures of the family has led to the social problems of street children, crime, prostitution, unwed mothers, alcoholism, and drug abuse.

Education System

Missionaries introduced formal education to the DRC. In 1906, the Vatican and the Government signed the first formal agreement whereby each mission would establish a school, which would be subject to government inspection and offer an approved curriculum (*UNICEF Report-2001: Education de Base pour Tous en RDC*).

The primary education system offers four levels of instruction:

- Preschool,
- Primary school (six years),
- Secondary school (six years), and
- Tertiary education (three to five years).

After independence in 1960, the government embarked on an ambitious basic education program, with 95% of total enrollment at the primary level, 4% in secondary, and less than 0.1% in tertiary education. Since this time, economic and political crisis has led to deterioration of the education system. The gross primary enrollment rates declined sharply from 94.1% in 1978 to 72.2% in 1995, due mostly to the lack of infrastructure. There is a scarcity of textbooks, teaching materials, and supplies. In 1993-1994, survival to fifth grade was only 25% (28% for boys and 23% for girls), and dropout rates rose from 10% in 1988 to 50% today.

The high dropout rate has followed the trend of parents having to bear all of the costs of education through direct fees to schools/teachers, as the government has pulled away its financial and technical support. The percentage of government expenditure on education decreased from 26.4% in 1972, to 6.1% in 1987, and to less than 1% today. If current trends continue, it is unlikely that the government will reach its goal of universal primary education by the year 2010.

Girls have been largely excluded from the education system in the DRC. Net female access rates fell from 39% (49% for boys) in 1987 to 19% in 1994 (26% for boys). In 1997-1998, female gross enrollment rates were only 51% (70% for boys). Gender disparities are even greater in rural areas—such as the North and South Kivu provinces—with enrollment rates of girls below 40%, significantly lower than the national average of 51.5%.

TABLE 2: Gross Enrollment Rate by Province and Gender (%)

<i>Province</i>	1990-91		1993-94		1997-98		1997-98 Girl: Boy Ratio
	All	Girls	All	Girls	All	Girls	
Kinshasa	73.1	71.6	66.6	63.1	58.0	58.0	1
Bas-congo	94.3	83.1	89.5	79.1	75.6	68.5	0.83
Bandundu	75.4	65.6	80.5	70.2	79.8	68.5	0.75
Equateur	76.1	59.2	75.1	58.7	65.2	60.5	0.86
Province-orient	71.1	54.5	69.9	60.2	61.5	51.5	0.72
Maniema	68.1	57.8	97.5	81.2	64.5	53.8	0.71
Nord-kivu	55.2	46.1	48.1	35.3	43.0	31.5	0.58
Sud-kivu	64.7	52.5	60.5	48.6	51.4	40.3	0.64
Katanga	79.1	64.9	69.6	58.9	50.3	42.5	0.73
Kasai-orient	64.0	53.2	69.9	59.8	66.4	55.9	0.73
Kasai-occid.	78.2	65.8	71.8	60.0	55.4	43.9	0.66
R.D.C.	72.3	61.4	70.9	60.2	60.7	51.4	0.73

Source: Direction de la Planification et des Statistiques Scolaires.

The education status of child soldiers is illustrated in the language they use. Their French language skills regressed significantly while in the military, including those with secondary education. Child soldier interviews in Kinshasa were conducted in Lingala, while those in North and South Kivu were conducted in Swahili. The lack of French language capability is directly correlated to the lack of formal education available in the country.

The Ministry of National Education

The Ministry of National Education administers primary and secondary schools, as well as vocational and professional secondary schools, or *Centres de Specialization Professionnelle*. In terms of the infrastructure, the buildings, furniture, and equipment of most primary and secondary public schools need to be upgraded. Schools run by churches have more resources, but are overcrowded in most of the cities. Many child soldiers and unaccompanied children are from rural areas, where services and infrastructure are much worse.

The vocational and professional secondary schools provide a potential framework for the vocational training of ex-child soldiers. However, all of those schools would have to be rehabilitated. That would include buying new equipment (which is usually expensive), improving curricula, training teachers, and providing learning materials.

UNICEF is providing pedagogical materials and teacher training to selected schools (around 20 schools per province). This is only a starting point, since hundreds of schools need to be rehabilitated. However, the impact of UNICEF assistance is visible. Many parents switch their children to UNICEF-assisted schools. As a result, the number of students in UNICEF schools has more than doubled, which can adversely affect the quality of education.

The Division of Social Affairs

The Division of Social Affairs (DIVAS) manages non-formal education, including bridge courses that are offered by reintegration programs or at transit centers. Most ex-child soldiers at CTOs will be enrolled in these classes, since many cannot immediately re-enter primary or secondary school. This creates an important role in reintegration programs for DIVAS, which has been generally responsive and supportive to the needs of ex-child soldiers.

B. Geographic Focus

The mission concentrated on three focus areas—Kinshasa, the national capital located in the government controlled West of the country; Goma, North Kivu Province; and Bukavu, South Kivu Province. Goma and Bukavu are located in the rebel controlled East of the country.

Kinshasa City and Province

Kinshasa is the political, administrative, and economic capital of DRC, with a population of about 7 million in 2001, or 14.8 % of the population. Ethnic groups from all areas of the country live in Kinshasa, and there is a significant intermingling of populations. The city is large, but infrastructure and business are highly concentrated in the city center, causing severe overcrowding and congestion. Following the destructive plunder in 1990-91 and the wars that ensued, Kinshasa has even more severe social and economic problems, including high rates of poverty, unemployment, crime, prostitution, and street children. Due to the instability, values and the functioning of civil society have eroded, and the informal and illegal economies have dominated over the past decade.

North Kivu Province

Goma is the administrative center of the North Kivu province and its six rural territories: Beni, Lubero, Rutshuru, Masisi, Walikale, and Nyiragongo. The province has a population of 3.8 million (8 percent of the country's population), and the population density of 45 persons per km² is one of the highest in the country. Population growth is 3 percent per year. There are eight major tribes in the Province: the Nande, Hutu, Hunde, Tutsi, Tembo, Nyanga, Kano, and Kumu.

The agricultural sector employs 80 percent of the population and accounts for 50 percent of the province's economic production. Agricultural production decreased following the departure of international assistance programs in 1990. Production has been further devastated by nationalization, the ethnic wars of 1993, the massive immigration of Rwandan refugees in 1994, and the wars of 1996 and 1998. These external shocks have caused production to revert to inefficient traditional modes of production, and have caused the widespread destruction of agricultural land and death of livestock.

The arrival of Rwandan refugees following the civil war in 1994 seriously impacted political and economic stability in the region. Refugees taking part in the atrocities in Rwanda created a climate of terror prompting entire villages to transform into tribal militias to fight aggression, or to migrate to communities in Rwanda or Uganda. The wars of 1996 and 1998 aggravated this

situation, and the refugee and displaced person population increased by 500,000 in the province, with only about 300,000 returning to their communities of origin.

South Kivu Province

Bukavu is the capital of South Kivu, with three urban districts and a population of 450,000. The population was about 3.5 million in 2001, or 7.3% of the national population. The population density is 50 persons per km². This is compared to a national average of 13.3 inhabitants per km². Population growth is 3.5 % per year, and the major ethnic groups are Bantou and Nilotique, which comprise about a dozen tribes.

Agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing comprise the economic base of South Kivu. Subsistence agriculture includes the cultivation of manioc, bananas, beans, groundnuts, rice, corn, potato, sorghum, fruits, and vegetables. Commercial crops include tea, coffee, cinchona, sugar cane, and palm oil. Agricultural production decreased sharply for the same reasons as North Kivu.

Industrial mining has been developed mainly by the SOMINKI group, in addition to small mining operations whose primary products include coltan and gold. The migration streams from Rwanda and surrounding areas are similar to those in North Kivu, experiencing the same problems and constraints. In addition, there are fifteen armed groups with different military objectives and economic interests that are active in the province.

C. National and International Policies and Programs

International Conventions

Since 1990, global attention has been drawn to the rights of children in armed conflict.⁴ Governments and NGOs around the world have responded to the issue of children's rights through the ratification of a number of important international conventions directed toward the protection of the civil, political, social and cultural rights of children, specifically:

1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1990.
2. ILO Convention No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1999.
3. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999.
4. UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2000.

The CRC was the keystone document of this international movement. The document articulated the full range of children's rights and established a framework that requires signatory states to

⁴ The reports by Grac'a Machel (1996) and the "Report of the UN Secretary General" (July 2000) provided the basis for this section. Children's rights were included in human rights treaties including: the Geneva Conventions (1949), additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention (1977), and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). The Rome Statute defined conscription, enlistment, or use in hostilities of children under the age of 15 years as a war crime.

promote the physical and psychological rehabilitation and social integration of children involved in armed conflict. Other documents strengthened the capacity of the international community to respond to the problem in the following ways:

- The period of childhood has been extended from 15 to 18 years of age. Early conventions, such as ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age of Work, defined children as being under the age of 15. Convention 182 extends the window of protection until the age of 18.
- The provisions of the CRC have been strengthened. The 2000 CRC Optional Protocol called on signatory states to provide technical and financial support for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of demobilized child soldiers.
- The UN has been more proactive in addressing the problem of child soldier. Resolution 1279 (1999) incorporated child protection into the mandate of the peacekeeping United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Mission De L'Organisation Des Nations Unies en Republique Democratique du Congo (MONUC). In addition, the UN Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in 1997.

National Policies and Programs

In 2000, the government and the RCD established laws and policies supporting demobilization, reintegration and the prevention of further recruitment of child soldiers. In addition, new organizations have been institutionalized to coordinate and implement activities, in addition to visible public statements by political leaders. However, the team did not find comparable evidence of support from leaders of other armed groups and militias.

Government

On June 9, 2000, the President of DRC signed into law Decree No. 66⁵, which is the framework for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers throughout the country (see Appendix D). This law was to take effect on the date of signing, and was subsequently published in the Official Journal of the Government of DRC. In addition to serving child soldiers, Decree 66 provides social protection for vulnerable groups including invalids, the aged, and orphans in armed groups. The Ministries of Defense and Human Rights are responsible for implementing the law, and have the following responsibilities:

- The Ministry of Defense is responsible for administering the military aspects of demobilization, including the identification of vulnerable groups, removing them from the military, and educating the military concerning this process.
- The Ministry of Human Rights is responsible for coordinating civil aspects of the process of demobilization and to create the ad hoc structure needed to administer demobilization, including a General Commission on Reintegration.

⁵ Prior to Decree No. 66, the Ministry of Human Rights in December 1999 had published a fairly comprehensive plan for child soldier demobilization and reintegration (see a copy of Schema Directeur in Appendix D).

Program for Demobilization and Reintegration

In December 1999, the government published a booklet, *Schema Directeur du Processus de Demobilization et Reinsertion des Enfants Soldats en Republique Democratique de Congo*, which outlined a comprehensive demobilization and reintegration program (see Appendix D). It briefly described a program of public awareness and information dissemination. The program stressed the principles of having the program be child centered and administratively decentralized, as well as stressing the need to reunite children with their families and serving the needs of girl soldiers.

The government plan is nationwide, with demobilization to progress province-by-province. The first step is to inform and sensitize the military, communities, and children on child's rights. Once demobilized, the child would return to his/her family via a short stay in a CTO that would provide education and vocational training, with or without the use of a bridging school.

BUNADER.

The National Bureau for Demobilization and Reintegration [*Bureau National de Demobilization et de Reinsertion (BUNADER)*] is an inter-ministerial unit supervised by the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Defense. It was established in January 2001 to coordinate the implementation of demobilization and reintegration programs following a long process of advocacy and sensitization by international organizations including UNICEF and the World Bank.

Despite limited resources, BUNADER has staff working on activities such as coordinating donor meetings and conducting socio-economic studies of vulnerable groups in the government army (see Appendix C), supported by a World Bank and ILO funded project. A logical next step is to conduct a census of child soldiers in the government army prior to demobilization.

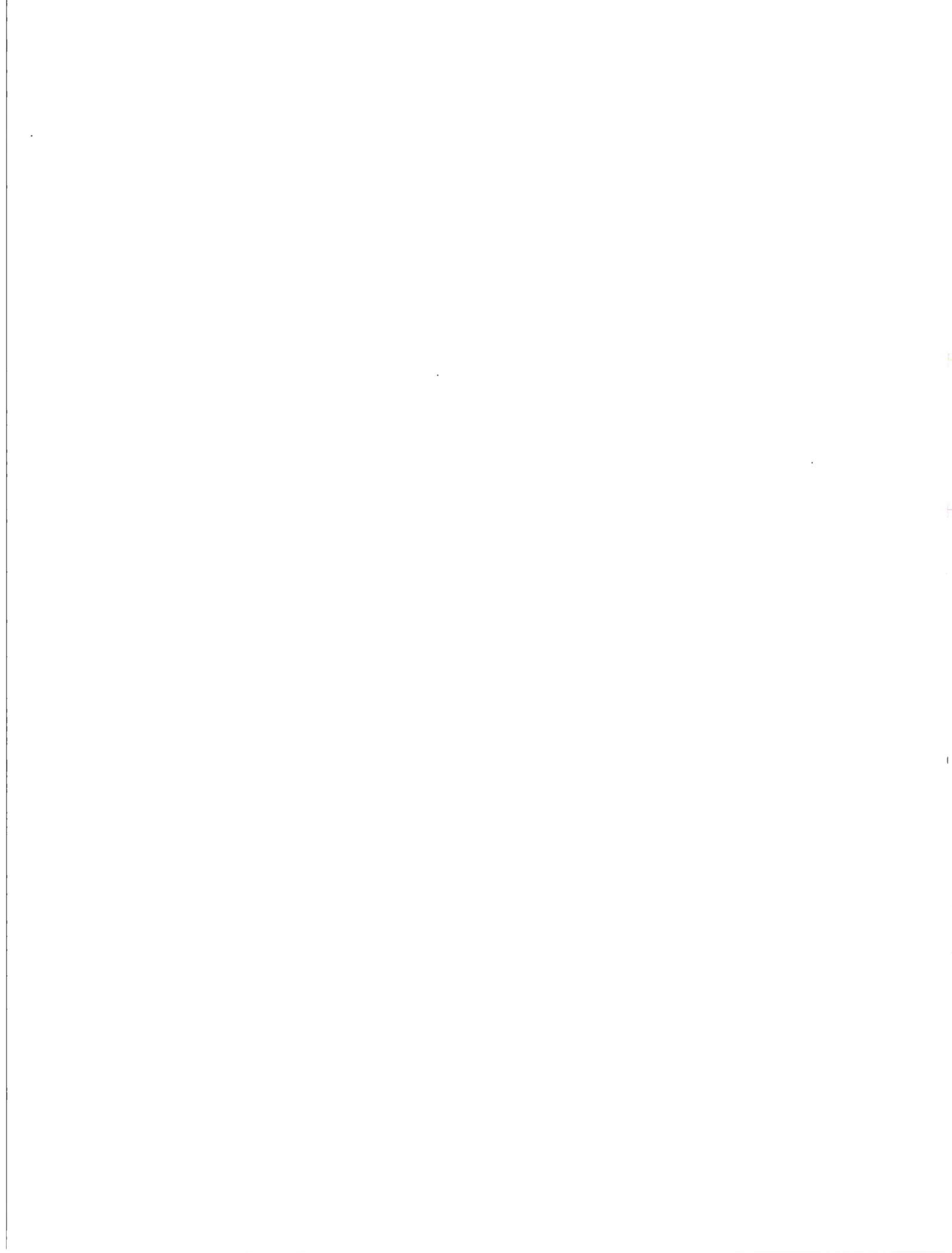
There are plans for BUNADER to implement ILO and World Bank funded projects, though their focus is not clear because the funding plans are still in the pipeline. It is not known whether they will concentrate on demobilization through CTOs, or post-CTO reintegration.

The Congolese Assembly for Democracy (RCD)

The local authorities in the East of the country have implemented a number of measures to promote the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. They are as follows:

- The Inter-Departmental Commission for the Processes of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers was established by the RCD President on May 15, 2000 (see Decision No. 19 in Appendix D). Its responsibility is to apply and enforce measures to protect the rights of children, and to plan and coordinate a demobilization and reintegration program in collaboration with UNICEF and other national and international partners.

- The Head of the RCD Department for Territorial Administration, Mobilization and Information, Youth and Sports instructed provincial governors to help authorities stop the recruitment of child soldiers on May 22, 2000 (see copy of No. 177 DEP/ADM-TER/2000 in Appendix D).
- The National Congolese Army (ANC) was ordered to cease the recruitment of children under 18 years of age, and to keep existing child soldiers away from the front lines while they await demobilization. The First Vice President and Chief of the Military High Command of RCD gave this instruction to all Brigade Commanders on August 28, 2000 (see copy of No. 112/RCD/CP/KB/QM/2000 in Appendix D).
- The RCD President issued a statement on the “Situation of Children in RCD Territory” that was supportive of demobilization, and enumerated the child soldiers in the RCD army on August 13, 2001, (see a detailed analysis of this statement in Appendix C).



III. THE SITUATION OF WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN DRC

The focus of this assessment is demobilized child soldiers, though the team recognizes the importance of serving the needs of other war-affected children. For this reason, at the end of this section we will briefly analyze the general population of war-affected children. These include: children directly involved in combat (child soldiers), girls victimized by combatants (victimized girls), and other children suffering deprivation as a result of the war. These categories are fluid because children can move between them, and each child is affected by war differently.

The situation of war-affected children impacts a child soldier project in two ways:

- First, a project or program to address child soldiers must consider how it will find and serve ex-child soldiers, possibly at the exclusion of the other, larger group of disadvantaged children (see discussion in Section IV). There is an argument that programs that serve only demobilized child soldiers may actually encourage army enrollment (in order to participate in the program), or that services for ex-combatants may, in practice, exacerbate the conflict.
- Second, the other groups of disadvantaged children have comparable humanitarian needs. To make involvement in warfare a “criteria” of participation would overlook more important factors such as disease burden, nutritional status, access to basic services, and other important aspects of childhood development.

The following section will provide an overview of the situation of child soldiers, victimized girls, and children in especially difficult circumstances (CEDC) based on first hand observations, interviews, and previous assessments. Additionally, it will help to put the problem of child soldiers into context. Child soldiers (*l'enfant soldat*) are defined in this report as those children who have served in regular armies, militias, or other armed groups. Some reports have used the term to refer only to children serving in regular armies, preferring terms such as combatant or fighters for those in militias and other forces. Some reports define children as being under 15, while others refer to those less than 18 years of age. For purposes of this report, children are defined as those less than 18 years of age.

A. The Military Socialization of Children

Childhood is a time of personal formation, when children mature and learn how to function as adults in society. The process of socialization (or enculturation) involves parents, family members, neighbors, and community members who each teach children the rules and principles of social life, including societal morals, values, history, and traditions, as well as the sanctions (rewards or punishments) that society uses to enforce standards of behavior.

Psychologically, children accept rules and information as part of their own identities and conscience by internalizing them. Instead of needing to be told something is “bad,” children avoid behavior because it makes them feel bad. In this respect, a child’s “internal sanctions” become equally as powerful as those imposed from the wider society. Childhood is the time to

shape these emotional responses and to mold them for the future. Recruitment into armed forces distorts this socialization process and introduces many negative effects on the psychological development of the child.

Military Society

Even though transformed by wartime conditions, civilian society operates differently than military society. In general, civil society is more complex, less severe, and less rigidly disciplined than military society. Civil society allows a wider variety of perspectives, including tolerance of gender concerns and freedom of the individual.

Conversely, military society is simpler, more severe, more masculine, more hierarchical, and more disciplined than civil society. Military society is simpler because it concentrates on fewer domains and presents soldiers with fewer options and recommended behaviors. Military society is more severe because it focuses on and prepares soldiers for life or death activities and requires soldiers to prepare for and carry out actions that are prohibited by civil society, such as killing people on command. Strict enforcement of rules, obedience to commands from superiors, and rigid and/or severe sanctions are the hallmarks of military society.

At the time of recruitment, the child adopts the social status of a soldier (or military trainee), replacing his or her social roles in non-military life (son, daughter, student, worker, etc.). The recruit is expected to learn the rules of the new society and become a different person⁶. Membership requires differentiation with the outside society, and the new recruit may be forced to undergo initiation rituals or training. In brutal wars, these initiation rites may include forcing recruits to commit atrocities against their communities, sometimes even their families, to prove their allegiance.

Effects on Women and Children

Military society exacerbates the opposition of the sexes. Civil society relies on the integration of men and women to perform essential tasks or rear children, which forces civil modes of compromise and respect according to the society's rules for social interaction. Military society, on the other hand, is primarily male and does not effectively integrate women, so the opposition of the sexes is more pronounced. Commonly, wives stay at home, while other women may choose or be forced to live in the camps and serve as domestics or provide sexual services. These women are often not respected and are vulnerable to abuse. Rape and the victimization of girls and women become socially acceptable, and child soldiers learn to devalue or exploit women. These attitudes last long after military service and need to be addressed in the social reintegration process. Likewise, the victimization and trauma experienced by these girls and women also needs to be addressed in the social reintegration process.

⁶ This abrupt change is lessened if the military unit is a local militia where the group is familiar and the service intermittent.

B. Situation of Child Soldiers

Children have been soldiers in DRC since the early 1960s. Perhaps 50,000 children have served as soldiers in DRC during the past five years. Many of these have died or been wounded; some have demobilized; and 15,000 to 25,000 are still serving in the three areas visited by the team.

Historical Overview

Two rebel armies emerged in 1963 (in the present day Provinces of Bandundu and Oriental) following a then unprecedented period of social and political unrest. The army was headed by General Mulele, and later by Ngwenye, and was provided support by the ex-Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba with backing from the USSR and China. The rebellion lasted more than twelve months (1963-1964).

The campaign was the first to practice the widespread recruitment of child soldiers mostly from at risk groups such as school dropouts, runaways, and street children. The Mayi Mayi rebellion was based on popular folklore preaching the invincibility of fighters who drank spiritual water that made their bodies impenetrable to gunfire. The children who participated were fueled by their feelings of injustice and inequity. They attacked all sectors of society, including teachers, government employees, private sector companies, and missionaries. The Mayi-Mayi movement continued to operate sporadically in cooperation with an insurrection movement of Kabila in 1996, and the practices were used further in the war of 1998.

Since 1994, warfare in the adjoining states of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda has fermented ethnic conflict and warfare throughout the country. The wars of 1996 and 1998 involved even more recruitment of child soldiers. These children worked in surveillance, espionage, and activities such as fetching water, preparing meals, theft, and sexual services for army officials.

Estimating the Number of Child Soldiers

During the assessment, the most common estimate for the number of child soldiers in the entire country was "more than 10,000." This figure has been supported by a number of sources including:

- *The Report of the UN Secretary-General (July 2000)* with an estimate of 10,000 to 20,000 soldiers under the age of 15 engaged in fighting (page 12).
- The United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for the Democratic Republic of Congo (2000) with an estimate of at least 10,000 child soldiers under the age of 15 at the end of 1999.
- "No End in Sight" (August 2001), a report by Save the Children UK, Oxfam, and Christian Aid which estimated that there are more than 10,000 child soldiers, of which 15 percent are under the age of 18. Many of those are under age 12 (page 6).

The team found that these estimates might not be fully inclusive of populations and recommend that more research is needed to obtain the full accounting of the population. For this reason, the

team has compiled the following estimates of child soldier populations from various sources gathered during the assessment.

Child Soldier Populations in Kinshasa

Twelve Government-controlled Sites

In August 2001, BICE, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Defense collaborated to administer a survey of child soldiers in twelve government-controlled sites. Only partial results from the survey were available at the time of the assessment, but 2,648 child soldiers in the government's army were interviewed. The surveyors anticipated interviewing as many as 3,950 child soldiers (see table in Appendix C).

Two Camps Near Kinshasa

A UNICEF spokesperson noted that the government has been training about 1,000 child soldiers in two camps near Kinshasa over the period 2000-01. These child soldiers were enrolled at the time the government signed Decree 66 forbidding the additional enrollment of child soldiers. These 1,000 children may eventually be demobilized, but their fate was unclear when the team left DRC in September 2001.

An Army Base in Kamina

In September 2001, another cohort of child soldiers for the government army, probably numbering more than 400, had finished their basic training in Bas Congo in an army base in Kamina. The decision was being made whether to demobilize the child soldiers or send them to the front lines.

Within a 100-mile Radius of Kinshasa

Among the children attending a SCF child protection and rehabilitation program in Kinshasa, 160 were identified as having been child soldiers. They were now about 16 or 17 years old. A SCF spokesperson working in Kinshasa stated that many more ex-child soldiers had not been identified as such and estimated that there were between 2,500 and 3,000 demobilized child soldiers within a 100-mile radius of Kinshasa.

Child Soldier Populations in South Kivu

RCD Forces Throughout the Country

In August 2001, the RCD documented 2,650 child soldiers in its armed forces throughout the country (see Appendix C). RCD and UNICEF were negotiating issues surrounding the decision to demobilize and reintegrate these children. The final outcome of these negotiations was unclear at the time of this report.

The UN and NGO sources in Bukavu noted that the RCD wanted to recruit 25,000 new soldiers and to establish minimum recruitment quotas for each region, amounting to five thousand new recruits from South Kivu. Adults in the area were fleeing the draft; so many of the new recruits are expected to be children (a UN source observed a group of 35 children waiting for orders). In response to an inquiry on this subject, an RCD spokesperson explained that a 'misunderstanding' had occurred during recruitment efforts. He said that when an RCD leader had encouraged

people to send their “young people” into the RCD army, they may have misunderstood him to mean children.

Mayi Mayi

The UN and NGO sources in Bukavu also noted that the majority of soldiers in the Mayi Mayi forces were children, specifically 3,500 of the 6,000 soldiers in Odilo’s branch. Civil society sources in Bukavu explained that the demobilization of children from Mayi Mayi is complicated by the problem that these children are often recruited into the RCD after they have been reunited with their families.

Throughout the Province

The Coalition to End the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers reported child soldiers in South Kivu in July-August 2001 (see Appendix C). Covering Bukavu and much of the rest of the province (but not the western territory of Shabunda), they estimated there were 2,000 to 3,500 child soldiers. They noted the continuing recruitment of children by various armed groups, with significant variation from one place to another. They specifically cited the following groups: the Mayi Mayi (FAP), Banyamulenge, Rwandan and Congolese military, and the Popular Self-Defense Militia (MAP).

Project Beneficiaries in Bukavu

The SCF demobilization program in Bukavu received 494 child soldiers over the past nine months (December 2000 to August 2001). Of these, 431 had been reintegrated; 27 were still in the CTO; and 36 had left (run away from) the center. After reintegration, 21 children had tried to remobilize themselves, but the center was successful in convincing the commanders to demobilize them again.

Child Soldier Populations in North Kivu

Three Areas of North Kivu

The Collective of Christian NGOs for the Rights of Children reported on the number of child soldiers in only three areas of North Kivu during July 2001 (see Appendix C). They estimated or observed 9,900 child soldiers in the following armed groups: RCD, Interahamwe, UPDF, Mayi Mayi, and Mongols. This was by far the highest regional estimate the team encountered. If true, their statistics show that child soldiers could represent almost two percent of the total local population.

Project Beneficiaries in Goma

The SCF demobilization program in Goma received 164 child soldiers in the past eleven months (October 2000 through August 2001). Of these, 120 had been reintegrated, and the others were still in two CTOs.

ECACL Assessment Team Estimate of the Size of the Population

There will probably never be a definitive or accurate estimate of the number of child soldiers, because much of the fighting is taking place in remote areas that lack reporting mechanisms and communication channels. However, it is our estimation that under-reporting is likely. The following factors also contribute to the under-reporting of the problem:

1. *Armies and militias guard information* on the size and composition of their forces during wartime.
2. *Armed groups understand the international disapproval of using child soldiers* so spokespeople deny or under-estimate the phenomenon.
3. *The current demobilization of child soldiers is not documented.* Most children who leave the military probably “auto-demobilize” or desert. Self-directed migration (such as auto-demobilization) is common and undocumented.
4. *Armed groups continue to recruit child soldiers* so the population is probably still increasing. This underlines the argument that demobilization and reintegration without the prevention of further recruitment is not a viable strategy, given that many are recycled (or remobilized) into their previously associated armed groups, or into new ones.

While the information gathered for sources in the three focus areas is anecdotal and cannot provide an accurate estimate of the overall incidence of child soldiers in DRC, it, nevertheless, provides valuable insight. The following table summarizes the numbers of child soldiers identified by sources in our assessment (as detailed in the previous section).

TABLE 3: Identified Child Soldier Populations

<i>Area</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Source</i>
Kinshasa and the West		
Twelve Government-Controlled Sites	2,648	<i>BICE, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Defense Survey</i>
Two Camps Near Kinshasa	1,000	<i>UNICEF Spokesperson</i>
An Army Base in Kamina	400	<i>UNICEF Spokesperson</i>
Within a 100-mile Radius of Kinshasa	2,500 - 3,000	<i>SCF</i>
The East		
RCD Forces Throughout the Country	2,650	RCD

South Kivu		
RCD Recruitment in South Kivu	5,000 potential recruits	<i>UN and NGO Sources</i>
Mayi Mayi Forces	3,500	<i>UN and NGO Sources</i>
South Kivu Province	2,000-3,500	<i>Coalition to End the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers</i>
Project Beneficiaries in Bukavu	494	<i>SCF Demobilization Program</i>
North Kivu		
Three Areas of North Kivu	9,900	<i>Collective of Christian NGOs for the Rights of Children</i>
Project Beneficiaries in Goma	164	<i>SCF Demobilization Program</i>

While these numbers are not mutually exclusive, they total more than 25,000 in the three focus areas alone (the government-controlled West and North and South Kivus). This indicates that the estimate of 10,000 for the whole of the country is too low, and a more accurate, but still conservative, estimate for the three focus areas would be as much as 15,000 to 25,000 child soldiers. In any case, there are undoubtedly tens of thousands of child soldiers still serving in armed groups throughout the country, and many of these children will be in need of assistance if and when armed groups are demobilized. This is in addition to the constant stream of children that auto demobilize and currently need and reintegration assistance and support.

The Life of Child Soldiers

The life of a child soldier is rigorous and exhausting, and the physical and emotional impact may affect them even more than their adult counterparts. Apart from the risk of injury or death, child soldiers are especially vulnerable to epidemics of malaria, diarrhea, and sexually transmitted disease. Their mortality from these diseases is greater than for adults. Fighting groups usually lack access to clean water, and many die from cholera and other water-borne diseases endemic to major lakes and tributaries. In Kisangani, child soldiers in the Kadogo battalion were decimated by an epidemic of diarrhea in 1997.

The population of child soldiers in DRC is heterogeneous, so general reports are less informative than those that examine specific populations. The use of children in armed conflict is widespread because children make up such a large percentage of the population and because they possess social and psychological characteristics that make them attractive to recruiters. The 2001 Global Report by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers says that children are used in fighting forces because “of their very qualities as children—they can be cheap, expendable, and easier to condition into fearless killing and unthinking obedience. Sometimes, children are supplied with drugs and alcohol to achieve these aims” (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers, May 2001 Report).

The social and psychological experiences of soldiers vary. Military service may be viewed as a time of idealism for a war of liberation, or a time of brutal murder and pillage for a war of greed. In most cases, it is comprised of long periods of boredom, punctuated by periods of intense action and emotion, such as anger or fear. The military may be supportive or oppressive, and different soldiers will incorporate different attitudes into their post-service identities.



Child Soldier Transit Center, Kinshasa

17-year-old former child soldier

“I was trained in Kinshasa in the 8th Brigade of the Forces Armées du Zaire. We were sent to the front at Kenge. We did not expect to fight; we were told to form a military barrier. But when I got there, we were told to prepare to fight. We moved sand bags, dug trenches, and built control towers. Our forces were split into two groups. In the second week, one group left the camp to find wood. All of them were killed by Kabila’s forces, except one, who returned with his ear cut off. Panic followed in our camp. Besides the AK-47, I was soon carrying heavy weapons like the Galina—a big black mortar launcher. Fully armed, we positioned ourselves. Four days later, we came under mortar fire, and war broke out. The fighting changed my spirit. I became hardened, and I wasn’t afraid of death any more. Hearing the sound of weapons, we didn’t know; we heard that Americans were fighting with sophisticated weapons on the other side. We then returned to Kinshasa. Many child soldiers were killed in the fight on both sides. The death of my friends made me sad and angry. But I can’t cry. If you cry, you become weak, and you might get killed. I ask the United States and rich countries to help demobilize child soldiers from the army. Kids need help to study instead of going to war. Those handicapped by war also need help. We need peace now.”

Government Forces

In general, the assessment team found that child soldiers in the West are more literate, educated, and integrated into their families than child soldiers in the East. The variation between the East and West may reflect regional variations or simply rural-urban differentials, since the West is more urbanized and literacy rates and average level of schooling are greater in urban areas. The difference may also reflect the quality of data in these areas, since most data collected on child soldiers in the government army were based on interviews with children, while child soldier information in the East was based mostly on subjective observations.

BICE Pre-Survey in the Government Army

BICE, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Defense collaborated on a study of child soldiers in the government army (see Appendix C). At the time of the visit, the results of the full survey of 2,648 children were not yet available, so this section will rely on the pre-survey sample of 374 child soldiers. The pre-survey had the following findings:

TABLE 4: Characteristics of Children in Government Armed Forces

Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average age was 17 years of age, with the youngest being 12.
Education status of child soldiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children older, more literate, with higher school attainment than population in the East. • Average educational attainment was six years of primary school. • Literacy was 96 percent. • 51 percent of the soldiers were in school when they decided to enter military service, 19 percent were unemployed, and 17 percent were working.
Reasons for joining or remaining in the military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46 percent reported they enrolled to defend the country, while 22 percent were merely searching for employment. • Majority enrolled when warfare erupted in 1998, with 23 percent enrolling in 1996 and 52 percent in 1998. • 63 percent said they wanted to stay in the military. • 68 percent reported they had no means of social support other than the military.
Demand for education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79 percent recognized that they needed more education or training. • 57 percent wanted more formal education, and one-fifth wanted vocational training.
Educational and social status of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average educational attainment was one year of secondary school for fathers, and five years of primary school for mothers. • 97 percent of fathers were literate, and 86 percent of the mothers. • 76 percent of fathers were married when the children enrolled in the military, and 67 percent of mothers. 40 percent of children reported their parents were separated. • 87 percent of children lived with their families. The average family size was nine members.

Source: BICE, UNICEF, and Ministry of Defense 2001 Pre-Survey and Survey of Child Soldiers, March 2001.

The team reached three general conclusions:

1. Contrary to the conclusion in the report that the children came from unstable lower class families, the team’s analysis suggests that the children had relatively high levels of parental schooling, literacy, and family cohesion before they were recruited.

2. The team felt that enlistment was caused by the lack of educational opportunities, mostly because families could not afford school. Their willingness to continue education, as expressed in these survey results, might indicate they are good candidates for a school enrollment program that assisted with fees or other support.
3. The team realized that the most important factor that pushed children into military service was the overall lack of economic opportunity in the country. Poverty causes the phenomenon of child soldiers as much as warfare causes poverty. However, this vicious cycle also reveals a positive correlation between economic recovery and peace. Vocational and skills training can serve as a valuable means for preparing children for peace and economic participation, while providing them hope for the future.

Child Soldiers in the Kivus

The 2001 Report by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in South Kivu noted the children recruited into armed forces were mostly from the following categories of unprotected children, because they are easier to coerce or entice into service, including:

- Street children,
- Orphans and unaccompanied children,
- Undisciplined children rejected by their families or from their school
- School dropouts caused by an inability to pay school fees,
- Refugee and internally displaced children,
- Children working in mines or as shepherds (often as forced labor).

Specific data of the social characteristics of child soldiers in the Kivus were difficult to find, because most of the studies conducted were not based on formal interviews or accepted sociological research methods. Instead, data are based mostly on observations and impressions (see Appendix C). More structured research needs to be conducted to accurately measure the social, educational and psychological characteristics of child soldier populations in the Kivus.

C. Situation of Victimized Girls

The category of victimized girls, or *le fille victime*, includes all girls directly victimized and traumatized by the war, most often rape, sexual exploitation or forced labor by military or militia personnel. The USAID mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo expressed their recognition of the needs of this group and specifically requested that they be included in this assessment.

Victimized girls include:

- Girl soldiers, serving in uniform.
- Girl living in military camps, working as servants or slaves.
- Girls raped or sexually violated by soldiers.

Girl Soldiers

The term child soldier has a different connotation for girls than for boys, since commanders usually retain girls in uniform for sexual purposes. The prevalence of girl soldiers is unknown, although (1) the BICE pre-survey estimated their numbers to be three percent, while (2) the World Bank-ILO survey estimated their numbers at two percent. A three percent upper limit would imply that 450 to 750 of an estimated 15,000 to 25,000 child soldiers in the three focus areas would be girls. In Kinshasa, SCF assisted thirty young women or girls who were soldiers in uniform, all of whom reported they were drafted and retained for sexual purposes. After desertion, they worked as prostitutes to earn a living before entering the transit reintegration program.

Girl Servants or Slaves in Camps

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported that 500 to 750 children, mostly girls, were working in military camps in South Kivu during the period of July through August 2001. The types of activities that are performed by these children vary widely and may be intermixed with other duties that place the child in armed confrontations. These activities may include:

- Serving as porters and filling and moving sand bags for the military,
- Constructing and re-constructing towers, camps, and living quarters for armed soldiers,
- Cooking, washing clothes, and other domestic duties for armed groups,
- Providing sexual services for the soldiers,
- Gathering firewood,
- Raiding, looting, and other forms of stealing for supplies,
- Gathering military intelligence and committing sabotage, and
- Drawing sniper fire on front lines.

Girls Sexually Violated by Soldiers

Soldiers have sexually violated many girls. This has occurred both inside and outside of camps. The largest identifiable set of victimized females in this category were the Shabunda girls and women in South Kivu (aged 9 to 60 years) who were forced into the forest, held captive, and sexually violated repeatedly over a period of two years. Estimates of the number of girls and women victimized in Shabunda over this period vary from 400 to over 2,000. The number of children who were victimized is not known (see Appendix C).

Most of the victims conceal their experiences of abuse and captivity either for cultural reasons or because of shame. The team could not accurately estimate the number of victimized girls in DRC, but we assume it occurs in greater magnitude than the incidence of child soldiers (more than 25,000). The Network for Rural Children in Distress in South Kivu (REPAD) identified 1,610 victimized girls in a survey of five territories in South Kivu (not including the territory of Shabunda where abuses were widespread).

Girls face an additional risk of being socially excluded as a result of their victimization during wartime. In traditional society, females are dependent on male family members (fathers,

husbands, sons, or brothers) for financial and other support. When those men are killed in war, women and girls must provide for their own needs. These unprotected girls and women are vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse. Sexual exploitation may lead to their abandonment, because of social attitudes toward the sexual activity of women. Poverty may also influence the decisions of individuals or parents to force girls into prostitution—especially in areas with many soldiers in the population. The greatest threat to the lives of these girls is the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS, which is especially prevalent in areas occupied by foreign soldiers.

The war in DRC has been the setting for cases of extreme sexual violence. Rape and abuse by soldiers have increased both in magnitude and brutality. Examples of this brutal behavior include shooting women in the groin after raping them, killing a pregnant woman by cutting open her womb, or forcing women to have sexual intercourse in front of their husbands or children. These are not necessarily isolated crimes, but often become part of large-scale attacks on villages, neighborhoods, and camps. Rural areas are most vulnerable, as in Shabunda.

D. Situation of Other War-Affected Children

In 2001, the UN decided to stop the practice of estimating the total number of child soldiers, preferring instead to merge them into a larger category of CEDC. This echoed the position in its 2001 Appeal, that the distinction between war-inflicted and chronic vulnerability in the DRC had been practically eroded because of the dreadful consequences of years of warfare. The UN estimated that there were at least 50,000 CEDC at the end of 2000. This category includes:

- Child soldiers.
- Demobilized child soldiers.
- Victimized girls.
- Children separated from parents or guardians during forced migrations.
- Street children (many are mistreated and become involved in begging, prostitution and drug abuse).
- Orphans and unaccompanied children.
- Physically handicapped children.
- Chronically ill children.
- Psychologically disabled children

The team did not attempt to estimate the number of CEDC, but three of the reports received from North and South Kivu NGOs reported on children in this category (see Appendix C). The following are their estimates:

- The Coalition report from South Kivu noted that 500 to 750 children (mostly girls) were working as servants or slaves in the military camps.
- A report from Cooperation Projects to Aid Developing Countries (PAERNA), a Swiss NGO from North Kivu, identified 18,000 orphans and war-handicapped children, which accounted for three percent of the entire population.

- REPAD identified 895,472 children in a survey of eight rural territories in South Kivu. Among them were 25,784 orphans, 49,926 displaced children, some living alone (unaccompanied) and others living with their families who had lost everything.

E. Situation of Other Child Laborers

There is a widespread recognition that other abusive child labor practices exist throughout the DRC. A variety of NGOs have encountered and assisted children whose labor situations would easily fit the definition of abusive or the worst forms of child labor. A report by REPAD on the situation of rural children in South Kivu dated December 27, 2000, identified a variety of working situations that they considered abusive for children. They cited 4,229 children who were being exploited for work. Exploitation was defined as working for extremely low wages (\$5 per month) and working while being younger than 15 years of age. REPAD stated that exploitative child labor could be found in the following areas:

- Porters for the military.
- Laboring on agricultural plantations.
- Brick making.
- Fishing.
- Shepherding livestock.
- Mining and quarrying.
- Domestic servitude.

The REPAD December 2000 report cited the following numbers of abusive child labor in the following territories of South Kivu:

Territory	Number
Fizi	239
Idjwi	2,538
Kabare	460
Kalehe	100
Mwenga	235
Shabunda (Not surveyed)	?
Uvira	164
Walungu	493
Total	4,229

REPAD also identified 1,610 victimized girls (those sexually violated by soldiers inside or outside of camps) in a survey of five territories in South Kivu that excluded the territory of Shabunda where the massive, long-term rape of girls and women occurred.

The team, for instance, while in Bukavu, was introduced to four girls who had the day before been admitted to the transit center. The girls had been victims of domestic servitude where the families had first fostered the girls but later essentially enslaved them. Likewise, girls who had been child soldiers, domestic and sex workers serving armed groups, once demobilized, entered prostitution as their only means of income and/or ability to feed their children.



IV. THE NEEDS OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Like all people, child soldiers have the need for basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, and healthcare, which form the cornerstone of reintegration programs. However, they also have social and developmental needs that can only be met through reintegration into civil society. Reintegration involves the continuation of their interrupted process of learning in areas such as the rules, values, and behavior accepted in civil society. They need to learn to balance rights with social responsibility, and to gain a better appreciation of the role of women and girls in society.

Demobilization and Reintegration

Demobilization and reintegration is not simply a process of “going home” again. Children have been changed by their wartime experiences, and their social support mechanisms may be lost. Family and friends may have died, moved away, or married while the child was in the military. There is also a generalized prejudice against military people, so, while the military felt a need to provide for the social and economic needs of children to meet military objectives, non-military economy may shun them, especially in the context of high unemployment and political unrest.

Demobilization and reintegration is a difficult process, because, for some, the demobilized individual must leave the prestige, lifestyle, the social life, and the security of having a gun behind, and replace it with an uncertain process of personal and vocational development. This period can be a time of personal turmoil or personal growth, depending on the circumstances and the availability of opportunities in society. Unlike their entry into military life, demobilization does not include initiation rites to mark the transition. Transferring identity to that of civilian society is a less demarcated and subtler process that is often neglected. The role of a CTO program is to establish a formal welcome, reorientation, and transition period to facilitate this transformation.

The success of reintegration is determined by a host of characteristics of the individual and of the community into which the individual tries to reintegrate. These include:

- Qualifications and experiences of the child soldier, most importantly the quality of life before the conflict and before entering the military.
- Physical, psychological, and health conditions of the child soldier.
- Changes in the family, community, and society that occurred since the child enlisted.
- Societal acceptance of the receiving community.
- Availability of jobs and social opportunities.
- Existence of basic services.

Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

The protection of demobilized child soldiers requires acceptance by the society. Communities need to recognize that these children are victims of an adult society over which they had little control. Acts of violence require reconciliation with the victimized groups to ensure that

animosity does not manifest itself in future violence. Non-violent conflict resolution requires awareness by the community that the social development of these children has been delayed, and they need assistance to help them resume this interrupted learning and socialization process.

At the same time, the ex-soldiers need to learn how to express and satisfy their needs non-violently. The society and other children may need some protection from the ex-soldiers until they learn more about how to practice non-violent conflict resolution.

Child Protection

Due to the risk of remobilization and further victimization, the monitoring of the conditions of ex-child soldiers and other CEDCs is needed. Child soldiers who have been demobilized may return home and not enter school only to be remobilized or end up in other hazardous child labor situations, such as mining. Victimized girls may become easy targets for further victimization, return as sex workers with the armed groups, enter prostitution, or be at risk of being trafficked for purposes of prostitution. Methods of following up with these children to ensure their return to education and reintegration back into their communities, and to intervene when they are at risk, can best be undertaken at the community level.

To track these children would require the development of a system for the collection of statistics regarding the participation of CEDCs in reintegration, bridge, non-formal, and formal school programs. Such systems could include community surveys using students and local NGO networks to identify children who have been demobilized, children who are being remobilized, CEDCs who enter other hazardous child labor, and other further victimization of war-affected children. Programs to identify and target children and youth not attending school and the development of special programs to promote gender equity and participation of children with disabilities should be established.

Psychosocial Counseling

The needs of children and adults who experience psychological and social problems from traumatic wartime experiences vary from case to case. Most demobilized adult soldiers can reintegrate and get on with civilian life, while others require special counseling and assistance. Adults can often deal with trauma through rationalization, denial, and avoidance. However, the coping mechanisms of children are less developed. An auto-demobilized child soldier in Kinshasa was asked, "What was the worse thing about the war?" He answered, "The bad side was the killing. We saw many people die, and we killed many people. I regret this fact, and I'm sorry for the families of these young people. Adults send kids to war; that's the problem." This would suggest that although the child felt remorse for his actions, he also felt anger toward adults who placed him into this situation and forced him to commit actions that he will remember, and perhaps be traumatized by, for the rest of his life.

Children who have been victimized during war—child soldiers, domestics or sex workers used by the armed groups, or victimized children who were raped, abused, or disabled—have endured a significant trauma that can psychologically scar a child for life. Disregarding the impact that such experiences may have on the child can manifest itself in future displays of violence,

depression, and/or other destructive behavior. Counseling and other concerted efforts are needed to directly address the child's need. Some form of evaluation is needed to assess how well the child has adjusted and dealt with their trauma.

Activities could include offering recreational activities, creating a safe environment so that children can just "be a child," expressive activities that facilitate open communication and interchange without fear of reprisal, and community service activities that allow the child to give something back to their community as part of a healing process. This could include offering quick structured activities for children and youth and the organization of community service activities initially, followed by more structured activities as a "bridge" to more formalized instruction involving basic literacy, numeracy, life skills, and vocational training. For other children, in addition to these activities, more formalized counseling may be required to assist the child in overcoming their experiences of trauma. Ultimately, the incorporation of psychosocial training for teachers, psychosocial healing discussions for teachers and youth leaders, and the systematic and continuing development of psychosocial activities within the curriculum would provide for a sustainable, on-going provision of services as needed by children and youth.

Life Skills and Life Saving Information

Although child soldiers and other CEDCs have developed remarkable coping skills, life skills training and other life saving information that is outside or not adequately covered in the normal curriculum is needed. This would include the dissemination of urgent preventative health, HIV/AIDs, environmental, landmine, and other awareness messages. Likewise, to ensure that such information is up-to-date and ongoing based on future needs and issues, training of teachers and community workers in life skills is needed. A review or audit of previous curriculum and school subject materials, including context, needs to be conducted for the removal of hate messages or misinformation. Additionally, an audit of school subjects for Peace-tolerance, citizenship, health and environmental content, and other enriching curriculum with simple activities that reinforce these areas needs to be developed and acculturated for use within DRC. Thematic life skills activities in these areas that are adapted for grade-wise curriculum are needed and incorporated into the weekly schedule. Additionally, programs in these areas need to be developed and offered for non-school going child soldiers, CEDCs, and youth and other community groups. This will require specialized, ongoing training for teachers who can assist with the acculturation and field-testing of such materials and messages.

Academic, Vocational, and Skills Training

Child soldiers and victimized girls have often missed at least three years of education. For victimized girls, they may have had even less access to educational opportunities. Some child soldiers and victimized girls will be able to immediately reenter the formal education system, usually those who have had more or better schooling and those who spent fewer years in the military. Other children will require a more proactive approach. Non-formal education, or bridge courses, helps students to re-enter the formal educational track or provides an alternative way to receive a basic education. An important component of this approach is delaying their immediate need for employment. As a result, to facilitate their transition back into education, this requires

making available both non-formal education, such as language and numeracy classes and related activities, and formal education.

Evidence suggests that a majority of child soldiers return home and many may reenter education programs. However, a significant number may find that the formal education programs that they once participated in are no longer accessible—due to facility damage, no teachers, inability to afford school fees, etc. Planning for the restoration of a unified system of schooling, through focus groups and planning meetings with community, government, and regional authorities, is needed. This can be accomplished through a social mobilization approach using participatory planning activities. Mobilizing the community can help to establish longer-term strategies for the infrastructure rehabilitation that will be needed.

The first steps toward establishing educational normalcy are the establishment of pre-school classes and groups, and youth groups (including youth study groups if appropriate). These programs may initially function as non-formal educational activities with a life skills component for non-school going youth with coverage extended to meet community needs. Some youth study groups can develop into secondary school classes. Restoration of a standardized curriculum becomes a next step. Later in the reestablishment of the overall education system, arrangements can be made for certifying students, the fostering of interagency work to define basic competencies by school grade, and developing related study and test materials. In North Kivus, it will be necessary to consider the development of a curriculum for refugees that serve both the language and curricular needs of these students.

Child soldiers reintegrated into society have special economic needs, especially those who cannot participate in normal schooling. In these cases, vocational training or apprenticeships may be more appropriate. If the children do not find an appropriate track, there is a chance that they would return to the military or another socially detrimental path, such as living in the street, gang life, or theft. The reintegration strategy requires a responsive approach that develops the skills and experiences previous to military enrollment, whether these are academic or vocational.



Child Soldier Transit Center, Kinshasa

A 13-year-old child soldier

“When Daddy died, I joined the army. I was hungry, doing nothing in Kinshasa, and living with no money. I had already finished primary school. At nine, I left home and joined the army. They promised to pay \$100 a month. The army never paid us properly. I spent one and a half years away. I carried weapons, but was not afraid because my spirit was gone (had lost the will to live). Much of the time I was training in training camps. I was eventually sent on a mission. It was then that I fled. But I was afraid to come home, so I stayed in hiding with a group of about 50 other former child soldiers. We ate insects and survived on our wits. We buried our weapons, and wore the civilian clothes we had kept. We were attacked in our hideout and faced many hardships. That is when I came home to my mother, and came to this project.”

It is important that reintegration programs do not impose educational programs that are inappropriate. For example, NGO staff in North Kivu mentioned that their child soldiers come from rural backgrounds, and that traditional vocational training programs (for mechanics, electricians, metal smiths, carpenters, etc.) equip children to live in the urban areas, not their home villages. They asked: “How many mechanics are there in the villages?” Since reintegration into the family is the overall goal, it is important children are taught skills that enable them to return to and live in rural communities. The NGO in Kivu stressed that the only appropriate vocation in this region is agriculture.

Consideration must be given in the design of educational and reintegration strategies that address why children are not in school and enter hazardous or abusive child labor situations. This requires that labor market analysis is conducted to determine that the vocational training provided is representative of current and future employment opportunities within both the rural and urban communities or villages that are home for the child soldiers. Additionally, it requires that the curricula be considered relevant and valuable to the child and their parent(s), that the learning environment is not abusive, and that other obstacles to their participation, such as fees and other costs, are removed.



V. KEY STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

Targeting useful and relevant support for child soldiers presents logistic and strategic challenges, and it is important to clarify the assumptions that underlie the design of future projects or programs. The issue of how to target the children and how to plan for peace are two primary issues that need to be addressed in the development of an education strategy. While there are varying points of view on these issues, these problems continue to be unresolved.

A. How to Deliver Services to Former Combatants

Should child soldiers (and victimized girls) be a specific focus for reintegration programs, or should reintegration programs be open to all children who need to be reintegrated into society, such as orphans, and internally displaced and refugee children? Some proponents argue that child soldiers should be served separately from other children because they have special needs. Others argue that reintegration requires an early and comprehensive interface with the larger society.

The Segregate Position

The position that child soldiers have special needs that need to be specifically addressed in a separate child soldier program is supported by the following arguments.

- *Improving the lives of child soldiers promotes peace.* These children are symbols of warfare, and their pacification or demilitarization is an integral part of peace and the return to civil society.
- *Child soldiers have unique psychological and social needs.* The highly traumatic experiences of socialization into military society, armed warfare, and murder present unique social and psychological problems that cannot be served in a general program. Victimized girls may also face such social problems⁷.
- *Child soldiers may present a danger to other children or adults.* The primary reason the Catholic children's transit center in Bukavu did not accept child soldiers with the other children was because of the violent behavior shown by some of the ex-soldiers. They need to learn conflict resolution skills so that they are better able to practice non-violence.
- *Programs need to be developed to reach out to the community and raise their awareness of the rights of these children,* their special needs, and the types of abuse that these children have suffered.

The Integrate Position

The UN and much of the NGO community do not support the strategy of targeting only child soldiers, preferring instead to develop programs for war-affected children in general. This position was expressed in the 2001 UN Appeal document (United Nations, 1999), which focused on the needs of CEDC. The following lines of reasoning support this position:

⁷ The social and psychological effects of rape and sexual violence have been well documented in western societies, although the literature on modern slavery and hostages is not as well developed.

- *Special assistance for child soldiers may encourage enlistment of children in the armed forces.* As was the case in previous child soldier programs in the Kivus, parents decided to send children to armed groups for a few months in order to receive support from International NGO programs with services such as school enrollment, vocational training, or starter kits for income generation activities.
- *Child soldiers should not be housed separately, because this may decrease their potential for successful reintegration.* Reintegration requires joining other children. The team was repeatedly warned by national and International PVOs, as well as BUNADER, that child soldiers should neither be privileged nor put into a “ghetto.” They need to learn how to play and keep company with other children. Integration should begin with other children in the transit center, and continue into their schooling or vocational training.

Project staff agree that social reintegration in the family or community is preferable, in practice, to segregation in separate schools or barracks, which raises the issue of what happens to children who cannot be readily reintegrated into their family or their community of origin. It may be naïve to assume that traumatic experiences have not irreversibly affected the capacity of these children to reintegrate or be accepted.

A case in point concerns a boy we met in Goma who spoke to us about his life as a soldier and the people he had killed. Later, the staff told us that the boy had learned that his parents had been arrested (perhaps because of their son’s actions), and the boy did not think that he could ever return to them. The fate of this boy was uncertain, and no one could predict what would happen to him.

This would suggest that educational strategies may need to include within the design some level of psychological evaluation and needs analysis that is conducted with children involved in the program to determine those children less able to deal with their experiences or trauma and thus requiring additional counseling. This would suggest not segregating the children from participating in education, training or other activities, but supplementing the level of assistance for some children who have a greater need.

B. Whether to Work Toward Demobilization During Wartime

Both the government and the RCD have stated policies supportive to ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers, though they have not been effectively implemented in the field. We were unable to determine the extent to which the delay, or failure, to implement the policies reflects:

1. *The need for better political agreement*, such as the Inter-Congolese Dialogue;
2. *Reluctance to stop the use of child soldiers*;
3. *Communication problems* with the military stemming from the autonomy of local commanders; and/or
4. *Insufficient resources* to implement necessary programs, such as avoidance of the problem by the international donor community.

Whatever the reasons for delay, we found it necessary to consider actions under the different scenarios of peace and continued war to help USAID prepare a useful plan of action in these different scenarios. This is especially important given the evolution of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue peace negotiations outlined in the Lusaka Peace Agreement of 1999.

The Current Scenario: The Possibility for Peace

At the current time, the country is experiencing a period where sustainable peace is possible, but remains uncertain. None of the major parties to the conflict has committed itself to disarmament, and five neighboring countries (Angola, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, Rwanda, and Uganda) have active wars and troops in DRC.

In the current scenario, serious or intermittent warfare may continue, or an unstable ceasefire may be attempted. Whichever occurs, the demobilization of large numbers of child soldiers appears to be a low priority that may be delayed indefinitely. There are no guarantees that armed groups will slow or stop the recruitment of child soldiers, though auto-demobilization will continue. Currently, the government does not control all of the national territory, and plans for a comprehensive demobilization and reintegration program (such as those of BUNADER) cannot be implemented. USAID will likely face continued logistical constraints in the delivery of services for affected populations.

The Potential Scenario: The Achievement of Peace

Comprehensive peace is a best-case scenario where important warring parties agree to enforce a ceasefire. This is the most effective way to conduct disarmament, demilitarization, and the widespread demobilization of child soldiers. It is probably only in this case that the Government can implement provisions of the CRC and the Optional Protocol that prohibit the use of child soldiers. To implement these conventions, the government would need to:

- Prevent further recruitment.
- Demobilize existing child soldiers.
- Reintegrate demobilized children into civil society.
- Prevent the “remobilization” of ex-child soldiers or the prosecution of those who have deserted.

The Effect of Peace on the Strategy of the Program

The achievement of peace in the country means different things to those who work with child soldiers, and there is serious disagreement as to which is the best strategy to pursue under current conditions. In essence, this boils down to two positions:

- 1. Demobilization Requires a Comprehensive Peace Accord.** Agencies of the United Nations, such as UNICEF, believe a comprehensive political solution to the political situation is a prerequisite to the full-scale demobilization of child soldiers. They decline piecemeal offers of the demobilization of specific armed groups, because of the concern that the children could easily be remobilized when fighting resumes. Several times, UNICEF refused

offers by RCD-Goma to demobilize 2,650 child soldiers located in Goma for this reason (Interviews with UNICEF and RCD).

Problems with earlier efforts by UNICEF to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers, after the 1996-97 war, may explain its reluctance to become involved in reintegration before the establishment of a comprehensive peace. Earlier reports note that when the second war began in 1998, some UNICEF sponsored CTOs were overrun by armed groups the staff were threatened, and the children were remobilized.

- 2. Demobilization is a Localized Process that Does Not Require Comprehensive Peace.** Many in the NGO community place a priority on serving the needs of children over other political considerations. Local NGOs have been successful working directly with local communities and in advocating for partial demobilization with local political and military officials, often with the support of International NGOs such as SCF. Most of the programs serving child soldiers integrate them with other children at-risk such as CEDC or unaccompanied children and their needs are addressed in this framework.

The team understands the political considerations of the UN position, though we strongly recommend that USAID work now to strengthen the capacity and coordination of NGOs working in child soldier reintegration both at the Provincial and the community levels. Child soldiers and victimized girls need help now. In addition, service delivery mechanisms need to be developed to meet the needs of thousands of demobilized child soldiers when peace is finally achieved.

Political considerations may become of secondary importance if the needs of child soldiers are provided on a case-by-case basis in the context of a program that assists all disadvantaged children. Most of the programs visited by the team were integrated programs. This approach also serves the following social objectives:

- *To integrate child soldiers into civil society and give them the opportunity to make friends with children not involved in conflict.*
- *To allow programs to build lessons learned dealing with other children and better understand how the needs of these ex-soldiers differ from the needs of other war-affected children.*
- *To advocate for demobilization and reintegration with local political and military authorities who have the most control given the high degree of autonomy in most provinces.*
- *To better mainstream the needs of child soldiers into education and social service programs, which allows programs to work in better coordination with national programs of the UN and various NGOs.*

VI. CHILD SOLDIER REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS IN DRC

This section analyzes the lessons learned from current policies, practices, and programs of international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including churches, religious organizations, community organizations, and other sectors of civil society, that are addressing the problems of child soldiers and victimized girls. Given the limited time in the three locations in DRC, we concentrated our efforts on Save the Children UK and their NGO partners, since they had the most developed social reintegration programs for child soldiers. This section will concentrate on lessons learned from experiences of the SCF program, reports from the UN and NGOs, and observations by the team. This analysis recognizes:

1. The importance of both formal and non-formal education channels.
2. The importance of social, academic, and vocational education.
3. The broad interplay of education and childhood.
4. The importance of education in both civil and military society.
5. The complexity of the social and psychological transitions between civil society and military society.

Local and national NGOs, the core of any sustainable social program, are dynamic and active in the DRC. While the country has been described as a “failed” state (where state organizations were not functional and state employees were not paid), NGOs have stepped in to fill the gap. In practice, communities and other civil associations, who operate with semi-autonomous control, have assumed the management of many supposedly centralized state functions. This is especially true in the education system, where “government schools” are managed locally, and school fees are paid directly from parents to teachers.

NGOs cooperate with each other through networks that vary in their level of cooperation. We met with a number of these networks and were impressed by their eagerness to cooperate (see Appendix B). Some of these NGOs are local (confining their activities to one or more towns, districts, or provinces), while others operate at the national level. NGOs are active in a variety of sectors and social causes, including:

- Human rights (including women’s rights and children’s rights)
- Protection of abuse victims (especially victimized women and girls)
- Demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers
- Education
- Health
- Community development
- Child welfare
- Public information

We were pleased to find NGOs that were working with disadvantaged children. They provided us with surveys and reports that showed the way in which they were working to assess the situation of disadvantaged children in Bukavu and Goma, and activities they were using to

facilitate their reintegration (see Appendix C for summaries). The team met with the following NGOs while in the Eastern Provinces:

NGO Meetings in Bukavu

1. 15 people representing SCF and a partner NGO network. The nine NGO partners included REPAD.
2. Nine people from the Coalition to Stop the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, a network with a number of cooperating NGO partners.
3. Seven women from The Network of Women for the Defense of Human Rights and Peace (RFDP).

NGO Meetings in Goma

4. Two large meeting with commissions organized and managed by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) NGOs and NGO networks, such as PAERNA were well-represented and presented reports on their activities.
5. Representatives from the NGO Platform of Women from North Kivu for Indigenous Development (PFENDE).
6. Program of Support for Women Victims of Conflict (PAFEVIC).

A. SCF Social Welfare, Protection, and Inclusion Program in Kinshasa

In poor neighborhoods of Kinshasa, SCF and its NGO partners operate the USAID-funded Social Welfare, Protection, and Inclusion Program that targets demobilized child soldiers, ex-prostitutes, street children, and children treated as witches. It offers protection for the children and provides education, healthcare, and income-generation activities. The program offers scholarships to children so they can afford to attend school. The demobilized soldiers living with their families participate in income-generation projects to increase their family income, including raising rabbits and vegetables.



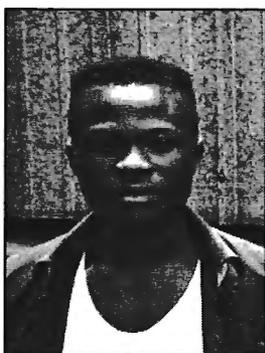
Child Soldier Transit Center, Kinshasa
11 year old demobilized child soldier

This boy is an 11 year old demobilized child soldier. His father is absent and he lives with his mother. At the age of 9, he left his family without telling his mother and joined the army. He then spent six months at a training camp, but was never sent to the front line. Life in the army was very different than he expected, so he left and came back home. When asked why he became a soldier, he replied, "For the money." This was true for all of the children who were interviewed. They all expressed that they had enrolled because they were poor and were disappointed when they were underpaid.

He now participates in a project operated by Alliance de Secour Chretien pour le Developpement de l'Enfant (ASCDE) with support from Save the Children Foundation-UK that is located in a poor neighborhood of Kinshasa, operated in an abandoned factory. The children are involved in rabbit breeding and small garden projects to generate income. Now I raise rabbits, thanks to this project. With the money I earn, I study electricity and do some work. One day I hope to be an electrical engineer. Maybe one day I'll study abroad and become a real expert.

"We haven't prepared the youth of today. Ex-soldiers experienced in weapons and violence, street kids with no direction, a whole generation that has missed school. This is Congo's time bomb," said a Kinshasa youth worker. All children should go to school, but they also need food to survive.

The ECACL rapid assessment team interviewed a number of boys who had gone to the front lines when they were 14 to 18 years old. They described their life as a soldier as being hard. They had been promised \$100, but got only \$10. Being a soldier was a tough lifestyle—hard officers, bad food, and no medicine. Several boys' shrapnel wounds were visible on their legs. Families celebrated when their children came back from the front. Many parents had thought their children were dead.



Paysanat Child Soldier Transit Center
18-year-old demobilized child soldier

“I was a street child. When I heard (former) President Laurent Kabila was recruiting, I decided to join up. I had no job, and was doing nothing. I had finished primary school. At 16, I went to a training camp to join the 3rd Brigade. I went to the front in Equateur province at Basankusu. I stayed there seven months learning how to use heavy weapons—rocket launchers, mortars, and 60 PCM, as well as light weapons. We had been doing nothing, and the good side was that we made friends and some money. The bad side was the killing. We saw many people die, and we killed many people. I regret this fact, and I’m sorry for the families of these young people. Adults send kids to war. That’s the problem.

After the battle we returned to Kinshasa. I came to Paysanat, began breeding rabbits, and doing a course in metalwork to make chairs, doors, and other furniture. My dream is to start a metalworking company that will employ others and stop them from going to war. I ask the United States and rich countries to stop making weapons that kill people in Africa. We need to make peace in Congo. Rich countries should send money so that people can go to school instead of going to war. Many foreigners come and take our pictures, but we wonder if they actually do anything for us. We need something practical like money, and a chance to go to school.”

In the Paysanat program, 160 children identified themselves as ex-child soldiers, though it is expected that many may have made false claims in order to receive services. SCF also believes that many actual ex-child soldiers may not have identified themselves. For the most part, child soldiers lost about two or three years of school, and averaged in age between 16 or 17 years.

One group of ex-child soldiers included 30 girls, who were drafted mostly for sexual service. They later worked as prostitutes after they deserted, or auto-demobilized. Since entering the program, they have learned new vocational skills such as baking bread, growing garden vegetables, sewing, and hairstyling in the hope that they will be able to earn a more secure living.

SCF has plans to cooperate with BUNADER in the anticipated government demobilization and reintegration program. SCF is expecting to train teachers and care-providers, and raise awareness of adults to the special needs of child soldiers.

B. SCF Unaccompanied Child Reintegration Program in Bukavu

In 1994, SCF started a reintegration program in South Kivu in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for unaccompanied children (children without the social or financial support of an adult). These primarily include children who have become refugees or internally displaced as a result of wars in the region.

The project reunited and reintegrated 600 children into their homes or communities of origin. Of those served, most were from refugee camps, some lived alone, while others were from foster homes (who were, for the most part, poorly-treated domestic servants). 400 children were returned to homes in Rwanda while most of the remainder were returned to communities in the DRC. Funding for this activity ended in 1998.

In 1999, more war-affected regions became accessible to the international community, and the estimated number of unaccompanied children in the area rose significantly from previous estimates (in the 1994-98 period). In response, SCF established a new activity to protect, recuperate, and reorient these children. The new initiative used a more community-based approach in collaboration with national and local NGOs. The model they developed included five phases:

Phase I: Advocating with the military.

- a) To advocate for children's rights and for the release (demobilization) of child soldiers.
- b) To advocate for children's protection and to stop recruiting new children.

Phase II: Reorienting children in the Transit Centers

Transit centers receive and house children for one to three months, in order to:

- a) Trace the child's family.
- b) Provide basic health services.
- c) Provide psychosocial counseling.
- d) Teach functional literacy and other bridging classes.
- e) Provide vocational training.

Phase III: Reuniting children with their families.

Phase IV: Fostering family and community support, through:

- a) Community education about children's rights, through such means as community child protection networks to advocate for the protection of children's rights.
- b) Counseling for families.

- c) Community development and self-help projects.
- d) Individual or small-scale income-generating projects.

Phase V: Monitoring the welfare of the children after they leave the center.

Strategy

The average length of stay in the transit center is about eight to ten weeks with the exception of complex cases where children are from insecure areas or fear for their security if they return. Organizations such as UNICEF suggest that two months are not enough to assure the rehabilitation of children, especially those who experienced excessive trauma. SCF believes two months are sufficient, because the ultimate goal is to reunite the children with their families. The time a child spends in the transit center depends on several factors, including:

- The time spent fighting,
- The trauma of their experiences,
- The period of family separation,
- The feasibility of family reunification (mainly for security reasons), and
- The attitudes of the community towards the return of the child (especially in light of the fact that some children were directly involved in local atrocities).

Different types and levels of education need to be available at (or accessed through) the transit center to serve children with different educational backgrounds, needs, and capacities. Children are organized into different levels at the center and assigned to a rapid, non-formal education (bridging) program to catch up lessons for children who are still able to reintegrate into formal school. Lessons include arithmetic, reading, writing, general culture, etc. Vocational skills are also taught, including small-scale production of soap, shoe polishing, farming and breeding techniques, etc.

Upon arrival at the Bukavu center, most children have information about the location of their families. In the fighting, children are not usually sent far from their communities and have maintained contact with their families through diverse communication channels. Once at the transit center, the children often wish to be reunited with their parents as soon as possible. In addition, the child generally knows whether it is safe for him to return home.

As a result, it has been easy to locate families, and 98 percent of reintegrated children have been reunited with their proper families (except children coming from insecure zones). The bulk of the work lies with identifying the problems that the child will face in his community, and sensitizing and preparing the community to welcome and protect the child upon their return. This job is done through local structures and community networks, and usually can be accomplished in about two months.

In terms of treating trauma, SCF believes that the most important post-traumatic therapy for victims of violence is to organize and restore a safe environment to ensure the child's protection

and rebuild their self-confidence. Family support is often the quickest and easiest way to restore their sense of identity and security, and is often preferable to the support children would receive at a transit center. SCF, therefore, believes reintegration into families should be emphasized over keeping them in a center.

Mayi Mayi and RCD Reintegration Program

In 1999, resulting from a direct request of the Governor of South Kivu, a program was started to reintegrate Mayi Mayi child soldiers captured by the RCD. The original group of 120 ex-child soldiers supported the expectation that the transit center would serve mostly Mayi Mayi children, though it soon became apparent that the primary beneficiaries were demobilized children from the RCD. This was due to the fact that the RCD referred more children to the program than Mayi Mayi forces.

TABLE 5: Transit Center Statistics (August 28, 1999 to April 30, 2001)

<i>Child Soldier Affiliation</i>	
RCD Forces	302
Captured Mayi Mayi Forces ⁸	84
AFDL	16
Mayi Mayi	17
Local Defense Forces	44
Total	463

<i>Status of Children</i>	
Children Received	463
Children Reintegrated	376
Children Still in the Center	48
Runaways	39
Children Returned to Center after Remobilization	17

Local NGOs collaborating with SCF in this program noted they demobilized and reintegrated about 1,200 child soldiers over the past few years. In addition to the 463 that passed through the center, 700 chose to reintegrate on their own without staying at the center. NGO staff said that most children returned directly to their families.

Lessons Learned

- Even in the absence of peace, demobilization can be negotiated at the local level with authorities, and children can be reintegrated. The local autonomy that makes this possible is in line with the general trend of local autonomy in many areas of the DRC.

⁸ RCD authorities usually refer to children from other armed groups as captured forces.

- Child soldiers are enthusiastic about rejoining their families and the majority will forgo CTO programs in favor of self-directed reintegration directly to their families if they have the opportunity. Those children with families who decide to go through the transit centers will probably do so as quickly as possible.

Problems with the Community

The SCF, the Governor of South Kivu's office, and the DIVAS signed an agreement in August 1999. DIVAS provided training and salary for two educators, three care-providers, and two guards to staff the transit center. SCF provided the services of one transit center manager, two assistants for reintegration, and one nurse to staff the center, as well as technical support for the staff.

DIVAS provided a building that could hold 100 to 120 children to house the transit center. However, the building was deemed not appropriate since it was centrally located in the middle of town on the main street and had no playground for the children. The transit center was subsequently relocated to a larger building, with a capacity for about 300 children, outside town near a residential neighborhood. This building, owned by a Protestant church, was previously a high school.

Just a week after the transit center had moved to this new location, local residents threw stones at the center, and some of the children and their caregivers were slightly injured. Since a military logistics center was located nearby, the military intervened and restored order to the situation. After the incident, NGO staff talked with neighbors of the transit center and representatives of the neighborhood and learned that there were grievances and misinformation about the center and its children. These interviews determined that:

- Some people thought the transit center was a re-education camp for captured ex-Mayi Mayi child soldiers who would be integrated into the RCD army.
- Others thought the center was going to be an orphanage sponsored by an international humanitarian NGO.
- People were angry because the building could have been used as a school for the local community, but was instead used for ex-soldiers.
- Others complained that children at the center benefited from better treatment (better education, medical care, food, etc.) than their own children, and wanted the opportunity for their children to benefit from the center.

It became clear that the incident had occurred because the host community was neither informed about the establishment of a transit center nor prepared in advance for the arrival of the children. In order to inform and involve the neighborhood, SCF organized a meeting with community representatives to explain the demobilization program in general and the work at the transit center. That meeting took place at the transit center to reassure the children that the community accepted them and gave neighbors the opportunity to visit the center.

Community representatives prepared and disseminated messages to churches and community organizations to inform community members about the center and their responsibility to protect the children there. Visits and playtime were organized with the children in the neighborhood, which later became an integral part of the transit center activities. People from civil society are allowed to visit the transit center and talk with children about different issues.

Lessons Learned

- It is important to involve the local community in the initial planning and development of any program or strategy that will be housed or operating within their local area. This is a good place to prepare children and community members for the child's reintegration.
- Opening the transit center or program to the community is a way to facilitate the psychosocial rehabilitation of the child soldiers and to involve communities in the protection of these children.
- Public information and awareness programs are important to keep the community informed and to communicate the importance of human rights and communal reconciliation. NGOs, including churches and community-based organizations, can play important roles in disseminating these messages.

Social Mobilization and Support

In the beginning, some military commanders blocked the program because they wanted to keep captured or released child soldiers in the RCD army instead of returning them to their families and communities. The personal intervention of the former High Military Commander of RCD, Jean Pierre Ondekane (current chief of RCD's Department of Military Activities), was crucial in overcoming this opposition.

In the beginning, children were opposed to the transit center's education program because of misinformation they received from military commanders when they were demobilized. The military commanders were frustrated because they were not allowed input into the design of the program. They told the children they would be cared for by an international organization in an orphanage, given money, and taught skills such as mechanics, carpentry, driving, etc., which were not the goals of the transit center. In addition, the education program did not initially adapt well to the varying education levels of children, most of who had not attended school for three or more years. The program was subsequently revised.

Many children ran away from the transit center immediately after their arrival, mostly in the early months of the program. Some of the children probably returned to armed service, while others were adults who should not have been at the transit center in the first place. The chief military commander of Bukavu, who actively supported this project, sent messages to military commanders to emphasize that children should be demobilized because of their age, and that they should not have high expectation of services offered at the center. The process was hampered by a lack of communication among military forces, resulting, in large part, from a lack of communications equipment.

Twenty-seven children were re-recruited after they had run away from the center. This was reported to SCF through follow up programs, and the children were subsequently demobilized again following advocacy efforts with military commanders. This taught children in the transit center that they would be spotted and demobilized again if they tried to rejoin the army, and reinforced the child's preparation for reintegration.

The RCD authorities started an initiative called "Local Defense." These groups serve as local militias to protect communities from attack. Soldiers in these forces were provided with military uniforms and guns, supervised by military, and sent to the front lines to fight. These local forces have incorporated many children, and SCF has been working with RCD military and civil authorities for the release of these children.

Lessons Learned

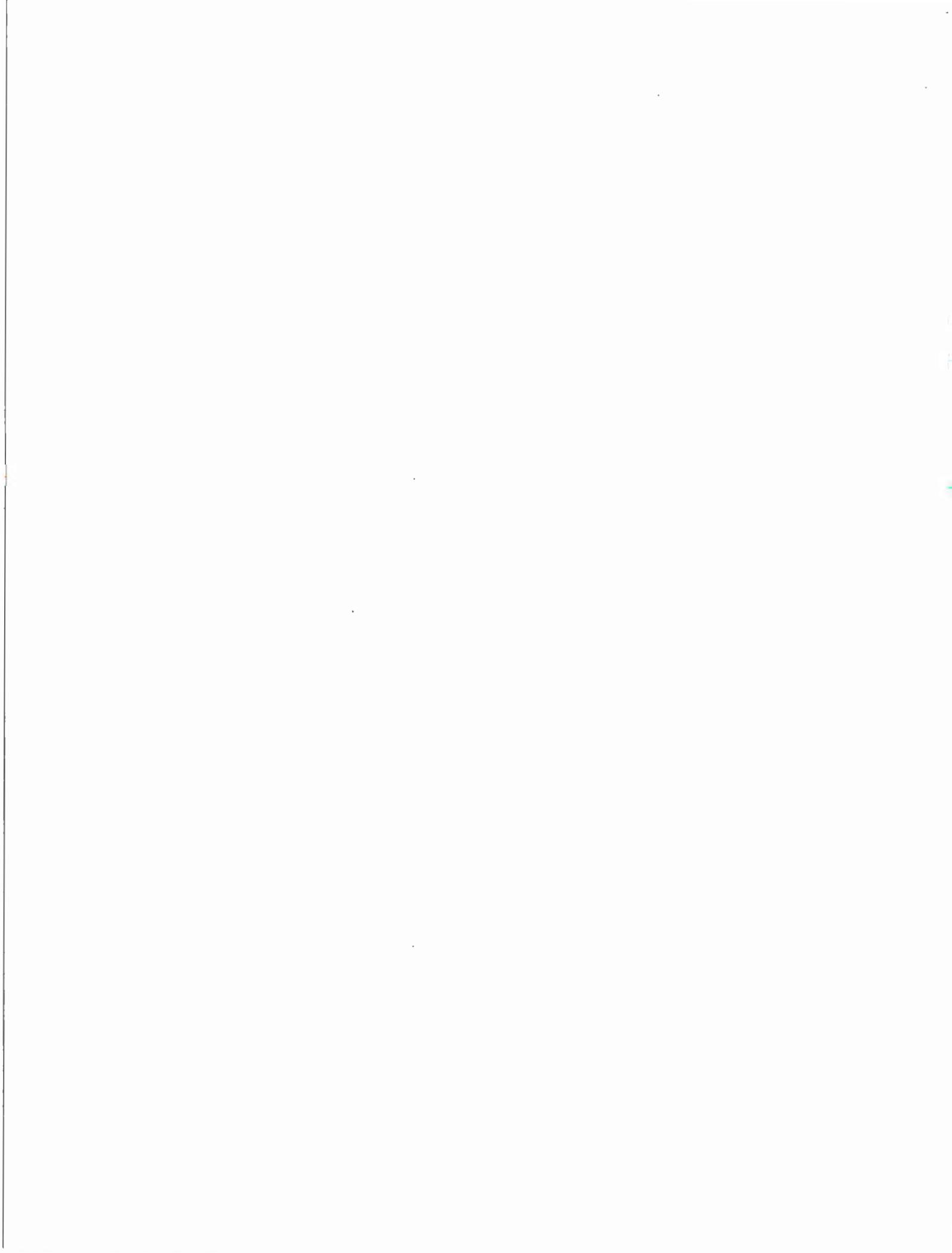
- Local military commanders may facilitate or frustrate the processes of demobilization and reintegration. It is important to start a dialogue with the military so that they support the processes and provide correct orientation and information to children before they are demobilized.
- It is much more difficult to prepare children for reintegration and to implement reintegration successfully if armed forces are still recruiting children, especially re-mobilizing reintegrated ex-child soldiers.
- Even in the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement, NGO advocacy and dialogue with local military authorities might encourage those local authorities to support demobilization and control re-mobilization.

C. Programs for Victimized Girls

The team did not find any program focusing specifically on the needs of victimized girls in any of the three focus areas. This fact may be a reflection of the lower status of women in the society. Girls did participate in other programs for disadvantaged children and street children, often provided with vocational training in sewing, baking, embroidery, or other areas. However, no specialized services were provided to victimized girls in these centers, such as psychosocial counseling. The team found that the NGOs most likely to recognize and serve the needs of victimized girls are those involved in women's rights, the protection of abuse victims, and health. Many of these organizations already implement awareness raising activities, such as publicizing the problem of rape and HIV/AIDS. The Mater Misericordiae Center in Bukavu has provided medical support to victimized girls and women.

In Bukavu, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which works primarily in health and sanitation, showed us a proposal for the reintegration of victimized girls and women (under the rubric of victims of torture and gender violence). The project was designed to build on the existing network of local NGOs working in health and human rights by building their capacity to deliver medical care and psychosocial counseling, and improving their infrastructure. Concerned local NGOs could apply for financial assistance and training through an umbrella grant.

The need for assistance for this group is clear. One case from North Kivu involves four girls found on a roadside and taken to a local hospital by a local NGO, the Network of NGOs for the Defense of the Rights of the Child in North Kivu (ROADE). The girls suffered injuries—one had severe lacerations to her head, arms, and leg. Because of resource constraints, the NGO was forced to return the girls to the bush after only a short stay in the clinic and very limited medical care.



VII. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section includes our observations and findings about educational systems as well as demobilization and reintegration programs. There is a clear consensus among NGOs about some of the lessons that have been learned and that should be applied in future programs. Although some of these were noted in the preceding section, they have been collectively summarized below.

Formal and Non-Formal Educational Systems

1. *Bridging programs are the primary educational tools for demobilization and reintegration.* This is where children can catch up on years of missed education and eventually reintegrate into primary or secondary school. Alternatively, ex-child soldiers may continue in the bridging school to finish primary school more quickly than in mainstream schools.
2. *Agriculture and animal husbandry should be the focal points of training in the East.* In rural areas, there are resources to support agriculture and animal husbandry, and these activities have more productive potential to support ex-soldiers. Children from rural areas who became soldiers do not have the experience and training to exploit most of the opportunities found in urban areas. Though the team did not learn details, there are numerous agricultural training centers in the DRC (presumably under the Ministry of Agriculture) that could be rehabilitated for training purposes. This would provide ex-soldiers with practical income generation skills, though many ex-soldiers are reluctant to stay in rural areas or to work in agriculture or animal husbandry.

Demobilization and Reintegration

3. *Partial demobilization can be arranged at the local level with local authorities even in the absence of a comprehensive peace.* Semi-autonomy in local regions makes this possible, since most communities do not feel constrained by the policies of weak national institutions.
4. *Dialogue with the military is important to support the process and orient the children before they are demobilized.* This is especially important because local military commanders can either facilitate or frustrate the processes of demobilization and reintegration.
5. *Most child soldiers will manage the process of demobilization and reintegration by themselves* More than 700 children went home rather than attend the SCK-UK CTO in Bukavu. They are often eager and capable of reintegrating with their community rapidly, and prefer to move quickly through the transit center phase.
6. *Active recruitment by the armed forces frustrates the process of demobilization,* because they often try to remobilize children in the program. Even in the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement, NGO's advocacy and dialogue with local military authorities might encourage them to support demobilization and curtail the recruitment of children.

7. *Transit and orientation centers (CTOs) are needed to shelter and orient children, especially those who are abandoned or orphaned, while the staff have time to:*
- a) Trace families,
 - b) Conduct evaluations of the children's needs, determining which educational and psychosocial counseling programs are appropriate,
 - c) Provide protection and counseling, and
 - d) Work with the children and families to determine the best placement options for each child.

Currently there are very few CTOs, no more than three per province, and all in urban areas. They are poorly equipped despite support from SCF. Of those visited, the CTO operated by the PEDER-Diocese of Bukavu had the best infrastructure and equipment, and had a separate place for housing girls. More and better-equipped CTOs are needed, and some need to be located in rural areas to facilitate reintegration into rural communities.

Community-Based Programs

8. *There are active and dynamic civil society organizations functioning within the DRC.* These include CBOs operating at the local or community level, NGOs functioning at the provincial or national level, and networks of NGOs. These organizations and networks are operating to fulfill the needs within their communities and in absence of government supported services. The capabilities of these organizations vary widely, but could be strengthened and utilized to deliver services and programs for demobilized child soldiers and victimized girls.
9. *Reintegration programs need to be community-based.* CTOs are only temporary staging areas from which children move out to communities to reintegrate. It is important to involve the local community in the transit center. Social mobilization activities within the community could help to gain their support and avoid unnecessary problems. This is a good place to start preparing the child and the community for the child's reintegration. Opening the CTO to the community is another way to facilitate the psychosocial rehabilitation of the child soldiers and to involve communities in the protection of these children.
10. *Public information and awareness programs are important to inform the community and promote human rights and reconciliation.* NGOs, including churches and community-based organizations, can play an important role in disseminating these messages.
11. *It is important to consider the needs and capacities of the families and communities of returning demobilized child soldiers.* A reintegration strategy should be an integrated strategy that addresses the entire environment of the child soldier, his family, and his community.
- a) Do the families have the resources needed to feed and shelter the ex-child soldiers and perhaps pay for school expenses?
 - b) Do the communities have the infrastructure, social cohesion, and economic resources to welcome and cope with the stresses of ex-child soldiers?

12. *Self-help projects can unite communities and encourage support for returning demobilized child soldiers.* These projects support community development objectives, as well as teaching community members to work side by side with the children. Projects could include the construction or repair of roads, schools, health clinics, and other community infrastructure.

Integrated Programs

13. *An integrated and comprehensive approach to rehabilitation is crucial because ex-child soldiers and victimized girls have a variety of needs,* including education, vocational training, economic self-sufficiency, health, and counseling. Almost all of the international and national NGOs interviewed stressed the importance of an integrated and comprehensive approach.
14. *Income-generating activities and/or scholarships may be necessary* to help children and their families afford school, food, or other basic needs.

Importance of NGOs and NGO networks

15. *NGO networks can facilitate the implementation of demobilization and reintegration programs.* In DRC, we found the networking of local NGOs with national and International NGOs helps to facilitate advocacy with political authorities, and the sharing of services and resources. International NGOs provide the lion's share of financial and technical resources, especially training.
16. *Local NGOs are crucial partners in an environment of insecurity and conflict,* because they can interface better with the community and facilitate the reintegration process, especially by finding families and welcoming children into the community. Outsiders are more likely to face mistrust and suspicion.
17. *NGOs can improve communication and safety of humanitarian activities.* They are in the best position to access remote areas experiencing the greatest insecurity, and have better access to the large administrative provinces that lack roads and communications. They are thus not tied to large cities, where many national NGOs and international organizations are located.
18. *NGOs can improve cost efficiency and sustainability of reconstruction and development activities* by utilizing local human and financial resources. Community involvement, in the implementation of projects and development of local infrastructure, increases their investment in the results, and increases the likelihood of their maintenance. Furthermore, local NGOs are not temporary institutions, like many international projects. NGOs are usually comprised of staff and members who live in the area and are much more likely to continue activities after the end of funding by donors. Institutional capacity building is important to foster this sustainability.
19. *Local NGOs are active in conducting demographic studies in DRC,* which provide the best available data on specific subpopulations. These studies are the basis for many available statistics, such as our estimation of the population of child soldiers in the three regions (see Appendix C for summaries of some of these studies).

20. *Local populations can more effectively access communities and territories during wartime.*
At a conference in November 2000, International NGOs and urban NGO counterparts found it impossible to survey the community of Walikare because of the security problems. However, a member of an NGO unaffiliated with the UN was in Walikare just prior to the conference and could provide the necessary information.
21. *Local NGOs can identify appropriate solutions to priority community concerns.* Community participation in decision-making is important to gain the support of the community and to develop sustainable and feasible interventions. On the other hand, externally imposed projects may not receive local support. For example, the SCF demobilized child soldier intervention did not target other needy children in the community or needs at the family level of the demobilized child soldier, which limited community support for these projects.
22. *In North and South Kivu, local NGOs identified child soldiers and facilitated their release.* The local NGOs received information from the local population and, with the help of International NGOs, negotiated for the release of the children and the delivery of their demobilization certificates.
23. *Local NGOs provide important feed back to the program.* Many parents found it difficult to manage and provide for the costs of children (especially school costs) after they returned from the army, so many children re-enlisted in the military. Also, children sometimes feel it is their right to be supported by an NGO because they have fought. Only after the local NGOs made SCF aware of these and other problems could the project develop a sustainable strategy to overcome them.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ECACL recommends that USAID sponsor a program for demobilized child soldiers and victimized girls. Where possible this can be expanded to include children from other groups defined by the UN as CEDC. Basic needs assistance to war-affected regions in the East should continue to be the focus of USAID support, while the reintegration of demobilized child soldiers also has a key importance to peace and development. However, the short-term goals of relief and long-term goals of reintegration and social development are very different.

The approach of CTOs may need to be reconsidered since the welfare of child soldiers goes well beyond their location. Their education and socialization requires sustained effort and objectives cannot be achieved in a short period with only a single activity. They need community-based support that provides for their immediate basic needs and for their future psychological, social, and educational development.

The challenge of delivering basic services to child soldiers echoes those of meeting the needs of the population as a whole. Because of a special symbolic and political significance, child soldier reintegration and victimized girl programs also have a special meaning for the peace process, demobilization, and reintegration. Without support, the surge in unemployment following these children's return from the frontlines may increase the rate of crime caused, in part, by the exclusion of this cohort of young people who know nothing but violence. This social ripple effect could be preempted if the mechanisms are in place to help children become productive citizens, improve their self-esteem and change their attitudes toward civilian life.

Most of these children want nothing more than to make a decent wage and provide adequate income for themselves and their families. The challenge is to make economic opportunities available to them, through economic development programs, especially those in sustainable agriculture, business development, and micro-finance. These children need more than symbolic projects that showcase the happy experiences of a very few. They need opportunities that can provide for them today and in the future.

A. Learning from Other Programs

The assessment has concentrated on lessons that can be capitalized on in future activities, allowing program planners to learn from past experience. While many of these have been stated in other sections, the following are most important because they affect program planning in a fundamental way:

1. Child Soldiers are not necessarily displaced children.
2. Integration is preferable to segregation.
3. Programs can be implemented, even in the absence of a comprehensive peace.

4. Communities and military authorities need to understand the benefits of child soldier demobilization.
5. There are no programs for victimized girls.
6. The CTO is an expensive model and has limited outreach.

While the CTO has been an important mechanism for serving the needs of some child soldiers, it may not be the most appropriate or cost effective. Demobilized child soldier programs have developed out of activities for displaced and refugee children, resulting from the logical assumption that children returning from the military need temporary living accommodations. However, according to the DRC experience, most demobilized child soldiers do not need housing. This was evidenced by the fact that most went home directly (700 out of 1200 in Bukavu), and more than 90% of those housed in the CTO were reunited with their families. Further studies could confirm whether this is representative of a majority of demobilized child soldiers throughout DRC or is unique to this Province.

Although the benefits of CTOs for abandoned is clear, they may not be the most cost effective way to address the problem of child soldier reintegration. They are not effective because children stay for only a short time (on average about two months) preventing services from fostering tangibles changes in their skills development or psychological and social reintegration. Because most of the effort and resources are focused in the center, the approach cannot provide for the tens of thousands of children who will return if peace is achieved, both in terms of geographic outreach or the availability of resources and infrastructure. CTOs also risk segregating children into a miniature military society, where their negative attitudes and social behaviors negatively reinforce each other.

For these reasons, ECACL suggests that reintegration activities are focused in communities of origin, though this does not displace the need for CTOs, especially along borders with high rates of international migration. The education and reintegration approach needs to strike a balance between supporting former combatants, and having them return home; and providing them with quality services and reaching enough of them to make a difference. The following approach strives to achieve this balance by focusing on reintegrating them into the institutions of education, family, and the local community.

B. Potential Activities Under the ECACL Task Order - Building the Capacity of Community Education

Based on the foundation of the lessons learned, ECACL proposes the following strategies to demobilize, reintegrate, and educate child soldiers. These should be developed in the context of a pilot project to learn more about child soldier reintegration and the most cost-effective mechanisms for (1) governmental, (2) non-governmental, and (3) international organizations to deliver support. Only through this tripartite cooperation can sufficient financial, technical, and human resources support participatory interventions at the community level. The following activities are designed to be building blocks of what we consider to be an effective program.

While its entirety is beyond the scope of a single pilot project, ECACL is prepared to offer assistance in one or more components according to the needs of USAID.

The centerpiece of this strategy is the promotion of participation by community-based organizations (CBO) -- local NGOs established by community members who have a stake in the success of the initiative. From this point forward a distinction will be made between CBOs that work at the local level and NGOs that work on a national or regional level, usually through a centralized headquarters and/or a network of CBOs.

Research and Assessment

Practical research is needed to design and implement useful programs. It is important to identify the factors that have the greatest effect on the situation of the children and their potential for reintegration. Important areas of inquiry include: understanding where populations of child soldiers are located, sociological profiles of their characteristics, and economic opportunities that exist in their war-affected communities. Research should not merely document the extent of the problem, but should be a tool to develop proactive solutions for child soldiers and victimized girls.

Mapping

There is a lack of information on the situation of child soldiers in the East. Very little research has been done on child soldiers, and most existing data are not based on reliable statistical methods. Given security concerns, and transportation and communications problems, it may be logistically difficult to conduct a rigorous study of the situation of the children in outlying areas of the Eastern Provinces. For this reason, the program should use state-of-the-art mapping techniques to fill the information gaps for purposes of planning. Community groups and military sources may be in the best position to locate pockets of potential beneficiaries, since they know the level of recruitment in specific municipalities. This assessment has contributed to some degree to this goal—of mapping known child soldier populations around the three focus areas—but more is needed.

Production and Market Survey

There is a need for an economic or labor market survey to determine the productive capacity of the Eastern region, taking into account the effects of the war. This would help plan an economic recovery program following the cessation of violence. The study would concentrate on agriculture and small businesses in the regions. While the purpose of such a survey would be broader than just assisting child soldiers, this is crucial information that needs to be incorporated in the strategy for their economic reintegration. In addition, research needs to be conducted as to the feasibility of their participation in economic growth programs in sectors such as agriculture, microcredit, and business skills development.

Participatory Needs Assessment

A participatory needs assessment workshop should be organized at the local level to assess the capacity of NGOs and CBOs involved in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration effort. It would focus on existing capacities, strengths, and weaknesses, and the mapping of their

distribution, activities, and impact in the region. The results from local assessments could then be incorporated into an assessment of the province.

At the provincial level, a workshop could be co-sponsored by civil society (i.e., CRONGD), the government (i.e., BUNADER and the Inter-Departmental Commission from the Kivus), the international community (i.e., UNICEF or OCHA), in addition to International NGOs, bilateral, and multilateral institutions. The agenda of the provincial workshops could include:

- Survey of existing CBOs involved in local community development, their activities and geographical impact in terms of child protection, reintegration, human rights, education, and health.
- Understanding of how communities have adapted the national DDR strategy.
- Distribution of activities and resources according to geography and sector.
- Assessment of resource needs at local and provincial levels.
- Developing a capacity building strategy for existing agencies and organizations.

It is important to involve CBOs in the needs assessment phase, especially in the decentralized environment in DRC where communities have taken responsibility for most community services. Participation is a guiding principle, but should be structured and guided. Focus groups should answer basic questions about the child soldier and other child labor problems in the community and what the community is prepared to do about it, including:

- How many demobilized child soldiers are in the community?
- How do their needs differ from other war-affected children?
- What are the other child labor problems that exist within the community?
- What are the available infrastructure and materials available to serve them?
- What are the community and the local government prepared to contribute?
- What is the status of available education services?
- Who is willing to help?
- How will the status of the children be monitored?

The requirements for program participation should be stated clearly early in the process so that communities know what to expect from the program. For instance, the program would provide training but not infrastructure; or would require a 25% in-kind contribution, etc. To ensure it is cost effective and facilitates outreach, it may be more feasible for the program to provide support for existing CBOs or NGO networks, as opposed to establishing new institutions.

Capacity Building

The program would need to build the capacity of organizations to implement community-based programs. These would include organizations responsible for administering and managing the program (International NGOs, National NGOs, and NGO networks) and those that would deliver services (CBOs and teachers). It is important that funding mechanisms are not lopsided, where more resources go to the administration and planning of education programs (i.e., to International NGOs and National NGOs) than to those groups that deliver the program (i.e., CBOs).

We strongly recommend that USAID strengthen the capacity and assist in the coordination of NGOs, especially networks and organizations involved in reintegrating child soldiers at the community level. Children need services now, and preparations should be made for peace and the large-scale demobilization of child soldiers. Unless institutional capacity is established, the following needs will remain unmet:

- Institutional capacity to handle large-scale reintegration.
- Personnel, facilities, and expertise to operate CTOs, bridge courses, and vocational training programs.
- The knowledge, experience and human resources to provide effective psychosocial counseling.

The active and dynamic civil society organizations encountered during the assessment indicate that NGOs have the capacity and interest to help these children, and can achieve a great deal with limited resources. The groups on the ground need help, but it should be targeted and appropriate based on the planning and assessment method outlined above.

Supporting Community-level Activities

When communities with a significant density of at-risk youth are located, CBOs can be strengthened to develop non-formal education services or bridge courses (provided there are formal education opportunities to bridge to). The program would focus on community service providers, and ensure that they have the capacity to: (1) plan and implement the project, (2) contribute appropriate facilities, (3) work as teachers; and (4) effectively manage financial and other resources.

International experience shows that women's groups (either standing alone or attached to CBOs) are the most effective and motivated members in non-formal education and the most likely to develop sustainable institutions and programs. They have a vested interest in providing services for their children, and, for this reason, it is important to make participation by women's groups a prerequisite for involvement in the project.

The main component of the capacity building program is to ensure that local teachers and volunteers have adequate training and materials to do their work. These could include teachers from formal primary and secondary schools or organizers of non-formal education classes. A primary component of this capacity building will be the establishment of a program capable of training, evaluating, and monitoring their performance.

The products of capacity building are active community programs. The types of local interventions are varied and numerous, depending on the needs of the community and the method most active to meet that need. Education activities could include, but are not limited to:

1. Non-formal education programs such as literacy and numeracy classes.

2. Rehabilitation of school infrastructure.
3. Training of local teachers.
4. Childcare facilities or nursery schools.
5. Formal or non-formal vocational training.
6. Business development skills programs.
7. Agricultural training programs.

Non-formal Literacy Classes

It may be more sustainable and appropriate to develop a program operated from a community member's house, possibly with the assistance of DIVAS, where children can learn literacy, numeracy, and/or basic vocational skills. An educated community member, who may work on a volunteer basis or for a small fee, would operate the program. The project would help the community locate facilities, teaching materials, and offer training for teachers and community groups.

Programs for Victimized Girls

Communities could sponsor programs tailored to the needs of adolescent girls victimized during the war. Services could include classes that teach literacy, life skills (including gender awareness), and job skills. Combining the two would help to improve the reach of both. Gender subjects would include preventative healthcare, reproductive health, and rights awareness.

Agricultural training

Since most economic opportunities in the Kivus involve agriculture, programs in production training and credit could provide viable opportunities for demobilized child soldiers. One model could be the development of a demonstration farm used to train farmers on agricultural techniques to improve the quality of their products and the productivity of their land, such as integrated pest management and post-harvest processing.

Strengthening the CTO System

The creation, staffing, and equipping of more CTOs is essential before beginning a massive demobilization. We believe that many child soldiers who have maintained contact with their family will want to go home directly (perhaps through auto-demobilization and auto-reintegration), and may not want to pass through a psychosocial counseling and orientation phase. However, other children are not as fortunate. These children cannot go directly to their families and cannot expect to be cared for, such as the 26 child soldiers staying at the home of the RCD President.

Thousands of children, once demobilized, will immediately need the services provided by CTOs because the children need to find a place to sleep, a source of food and physical protection. There are very few centers now operating, and even those supported by SCF-UK are poorly equipped. The number of centers needed in each province will depend on the number of child soldiers to be demobilized, distances between the camps, distances from home communities, health and

psychological status, and the percentage of children able to reintegrate into their family right away. Activities to support centers could include rehabilitation or construction of CTO facilities or the training of staff, particularly in the areas of psychosocial counseling and non-violent conflict management and resolution.

C. Other Activities Requiring a State of Peace

The development of a long-term strategy is complicated by the situation of war that is ongoing in the East. Given obstacles encountered in the Inter Congolese Dialogue, the direction, feasibility, and timeframe of the peace settlement is still uncertain. The continuing state of conflict affects the potential in a number of important ways, by:

- Affecting the security of project personnel. This may place the lives of children and staff at risk, as with the UNICEF program in 1998.
- Decreasing the level of investment that the government is willing to make in infrastructure.
- Decreasing program outreach and mobility in rural areas where the war is most active.
- Increasing the likelihood that project beneficiaries will be remobilized.

These place serious, but not insurmountable, constraints on the program. To overcome or mitigate these factors may require more innovation and coordination at the local level. However, there are some activities that can only be done during a state of peace.

Community-based Child Assessment and Support System

A monitoring system needs to be developed at the local level to assess the physical, social and psychological needs of the children to serve as a baseline for delivering services through the project. The primary purpose of the system would be to ensure that children have community support and the protection from abuse and discrimination after they return home to their families. The project should maintain information on key social indicators such as disease burden, nutritional status, level of education, and health status. Such information could be managed manually or through a computerized database, provided that the information is not used to compromise the rights of the child. This project could be initiated at two or three sites, depending on the size of the province and the number of children in the program.

Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure

The whole formal educational system has collapsed, and essentially all of the formal schools (both primary and secondary) lack equipment and furniture. UNICEF is providing pedagogical materials and teacher training to some schools, but there are hundreds of schools that need to be rehabilitated. The renovation and restoration of these buildings is a good method to promote the active participation of child soldiers in community life and to improve overall educational opportunities in the village. Child soldiers could work alongside other community members and help repair the buildings and the furniture, simultaneously developing skills in carpentry,

plumbing, and electrical repair. The program could use existing resources such as IRC school construction capacities, PAM dry food and food for work programs, church school curricula, and school materials developed by the government in collaboration with UNESCO, etc.

The focus of a pilot project would include the rehabilitation of existing schools and health facilities so that they respond more effectively to the needs of child soldiers and victimized girls. A second objective is to build the capacity of these institutions so that they can better cope with the large-scale reintegration following a comprehensive peace. The infrastructure program could be implemented using a food-for-work methodology, though this would probably need to be implemented in cooperation with a larger development program.

- *Rehabilitate and equip existing bridging schools.* This would include building construction or repair, providing furniture, equipment, school supplies, reviewing curricula, and teacher training programs, and developing programs for psycho-social counseling and non-violent conflict resolution skills.
- *Strengthen health centers that respond to the needs of ex-child soldiers and victimized girls,* such as providing furniture and equipment, sponsoring or supporting literacy and counseling activities, and staff training programs, particularly in the areas of psychosocial counseling (such as rape counseling) and STD and HIV/AIDS awareness and counseling.

D. Synergy with Other USAID Objectives

A demobilized child soldier and victimized girl program should be integrated, to the greatest extent possible, with other existing USAID strategic objectives (SO), intermediate results (IR), and funded programs. Coordination helps to establish the synergy and cooperative relationships needed for a sustainable approach. According to the IRs for DRC as presented to Congress, this section will describe how an education program for demobilized child soldiers, victimized girls or CEDC could impact the achievement of other USAID objectives.

Health

Six of the DR Congo's IRs refer to health related issues, such as HIV/AIDS. The ECACL pilot project could address any number of those issues through a Life Skills Education component designed for demobilized child soldiers and other war-affected children. Their empowerment is crucial to all aspects of the country's development, from increasing the health status of children to fostering the demand for education. Previous USAID projects, especially those in child survival and maternal health, have shown that education programs targeting girls help lower family size, increase the immunization rate, and increasing the earning potential of the mother. In these ways, initiatives to assist victimized girls directly enhance the goal of USAID to build human capacity through education and training.

Education may also indirectly improve the ability of USAID to promote the other major goals of constructing long-term democracies, stabilizing the world's population, protecting human health, long-term environmental management, humanitarian effort to save lives, reduction of suffering, and reinforcing human development potential. Education gives people a voice and allows them to make informed decisions in all aspects of their lives.

Democracy, Legal Information, and Human Rights

The reintegration of demobilized child soldiers and war-affected children will directly impact IR # 6 for democracy and legal information by increasing literacy of children and youth, the future leaders of the DRC, and improving the possibility for democracy and peaceful governance.

Reading materials for the ex-combatants need to be relevant, including materials on democracy and governance. Ex-combatants are also natural recipients of human rights training, so that they can place their experiences in context of a peaceful civil society that respects basic human rights.

Environment

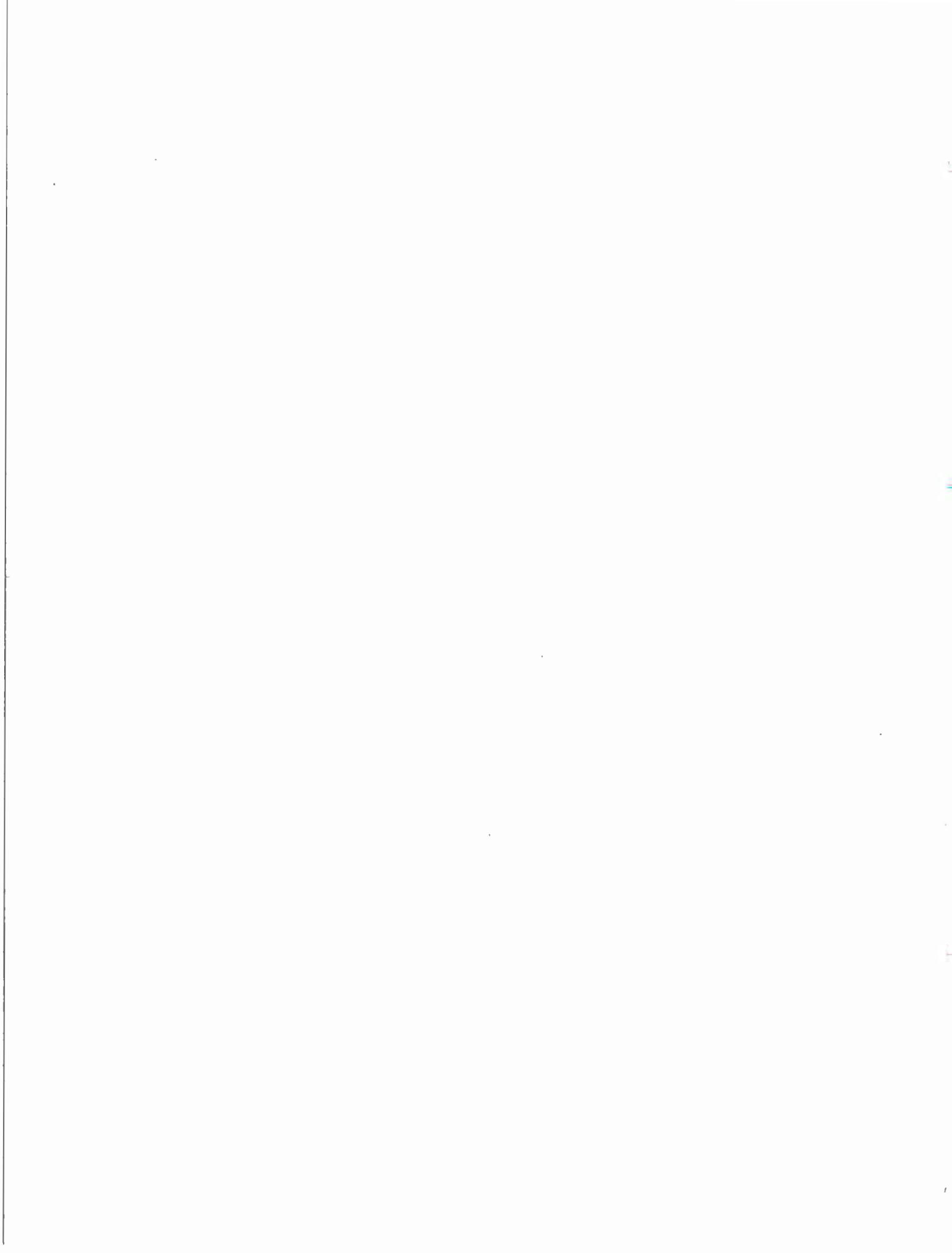
The program can work with the framework of IR #10 (access to environmental education and information) and IR #11 (strengthening environmental NGOs). USAID-Congo believes that the best way to address environmental problems is to strengthen the constituency for environmental protection and conservation within the DRC. The ECACL pilot activity will support the necessary program of social marketing and community mobilization that will be necessary to accomplish this goal. The skills training provided can include environmental health education, and agricultural instruction related to soil conservation and air and water quality.

Rural Credit

IR #12 (rural credit unions accessing viable credit providers in target areas) has direct implications for vocational education, and provides an opportunity to work on the development of apprenticeship programs, labor projections, and sustainable agricultural development.

Apprenticeships are particularly suitable to youth such as ex-child soldiers and war-affected children, since formal schooling opportunities may not be suitable for them. Also, many of the youthful ex-combatants will have come from rural backgrounds and may wish to return there to make their lives. Through combining basic education and vocational training with economic development activities, ex-child soldiers can be prepared to return to the rural areas and taught how to access credit. The ECACL approach will therefore have contributed to basic education and avoided the trap of urban migration.

The BEPS ECACL activity team stands ready to work with the USAID-DR Congo mission to undertake initiatives and activities that will address the serious problem of child soldiers, victimized girls, CEDCs, and other child laborers in abusive working situations.



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