

# An uneven Battlefield where Gender Matters: A Critical Analysis of the Reintegration Programme of Girl Child Soldiers in Global Armed Conflicts

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## Abstract

The enactment of a ground-breaking resolution 1325 by the UNSC on women, peace, and security in 2000 acknowledged the diverse effects, war particularly has on women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, addressed the grave situation of girl children in armed conflict as one of twelve essential global concerns, which further was endorsed by 189 UN Member States in 1995 strongly agreeing that peace is closely related to gender equality and development.

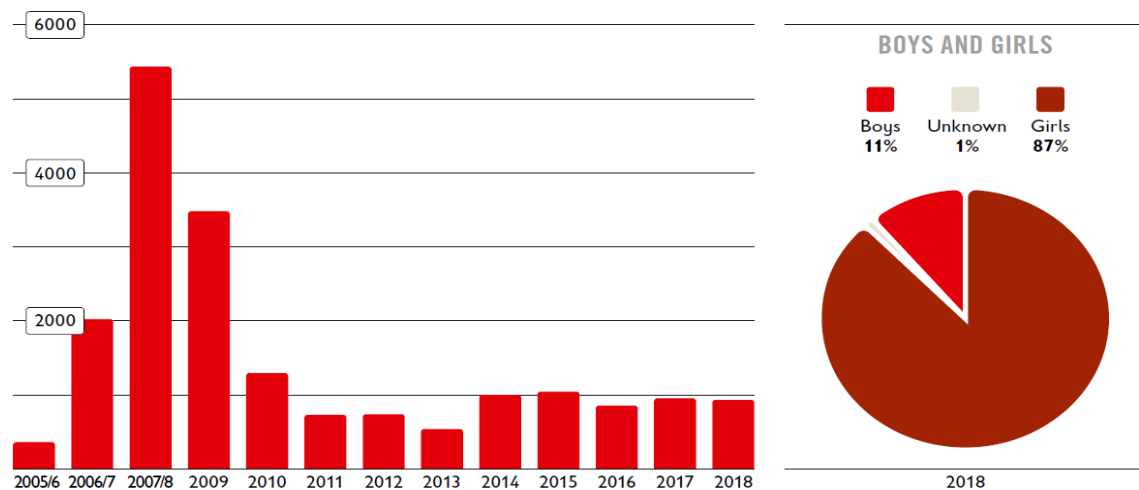
The researchers through this study take into account a variety of sequential disturbances and tensions in conflict-affected nations, including poverty, criminality, intoxication, medical issues particularly faced by girl children involved in armed conflict. The study also illustrates the unethical practices, natural catastrophes, and allied factors, that lead to a gendered differentiation in rehabilitative processes of girl child soldiers in society due to their specific gendered needs. Considering these dynamic and intersecting inequalities, the researchers aim to address the gender differentiation issue by guaranteeing war-sensitive, risk-informed design of guidelines and programmes in ways that address lack of a girl child soldiers right to be rehabilitative in society from a violent situation.

**Keywords:** Armed Conflict, Girl Child Soldiers, Reintegration, Rehabilitation, Sexual Abuse.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The exploratory mapping of youth involved in combat affected countries has had severe policy changes and academic implications till date. Researchers and global policy analysts that aim to address and minimize the impacts of conflict on children, have researched in depth on understanding the base aspects about varied forms of abuses experienced by children in war wherein direct and indirect killing, maiming, sexual exploitation of children especially of girls further causes grave health hazards. However, studies have broadly illustrated that re-integration of these children involved in warfare back into the social environment may be impeded, particularly by societal responses of vengeance, stigmatisation, and even alienation of the child (Betancourt et al., 2010) Girl child soldiers particularly face

additional discrimination as a victim of sexual abuse, severe permanent reproductive issues, or infection of many STDs like HIV/AIDS and this has been verified by 933 incidents of sexual assault documented in the 2019 Secretary General Report of the UN on Children and Armed Conflict (Brett, 2004). The report depicts that only 1.5 percent of the documented complaints were crimes against boys and rest were sexual crimes against female children (Annan et al., 2009). Sexual assault has been confirmed in 12 of the 20 nations studied, with the majority of incidents happening in Somalia (Approx 90% were abuses against girls) and DRC (100% abuses against girls) (Fox, 2004). Similarly, 2018 UNSG report on Children and Armed Conflict as demonstrated statistically below depicted that 87% girls are the victim of sexual abuses. (Figure 1)



**Figure 1:** Statistical representation of the children used as sex slaves in global conflict zones

Source: (UNSG Report on Children and Armed Conflict, 2018)

These statistics though match global patterns, in which girls account for the vast majority of sexual assault survivors. However, these statistics do not take into consideration of the wider problem of under-reporting, which is connected to shame and societal obstacles - particularly, but not solely, among boy child soldiers.

## II. SAFEGUARDS PROVIDED BY GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMUNITY AND ITS PRACTICAL RESPONSE

The Machel study highlights the gender-specific consequences of armed conflict on the female child soldiers and reasons of their favoured enlistment over male child soldiers (Machel, 1996). Being additionally productive at a number of jobs, young girls involved in warfare are often involved in roles of cooks, porters, sex slaves, wives of other combatants, (Denov, & MacLure, 2006) and also act as rewards to the best combatants (Mazurana, 2004). Not only is sexual abuse, slavery and rape, a common weapon used in warfare against female adult and child soldiers (Razdan, 2012), prolonging gender-based violence, increased risk of dying during the unwanted and unmedicated childbirth and its termination, living further with the stigma and being frequently neglected in the post-conflict rehabilitation with the lack of funding for their reintegration procedures, results furthermore to

the brutality that child soldiers endure in general (Haer & Böhmelt, 2018 & Bosch, 2012).

With the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CEDAW Convention, the United Nations in its resolutions came to a realisation that State reports have voiced significant concerns for lack of regional legal systems to explicitly take measures to prohibit violence against child soldiers and/or enactment of gender positive policies that reduce women's susceptibility to harassment. Issues with current policies, such as extent and accessibility of a particular legislation to protect women or a girl child, depict discriminatory practices that coexist with the legal code (Haer, 2019). The scenario of Girls children being simply left unattended on the roadway after destruction house of the insurgent troops encapsulates the issue of abandonment wherein a large percentage of such children do not even recover due to the failure to identify young girls post-combat (Floyd, 2013).

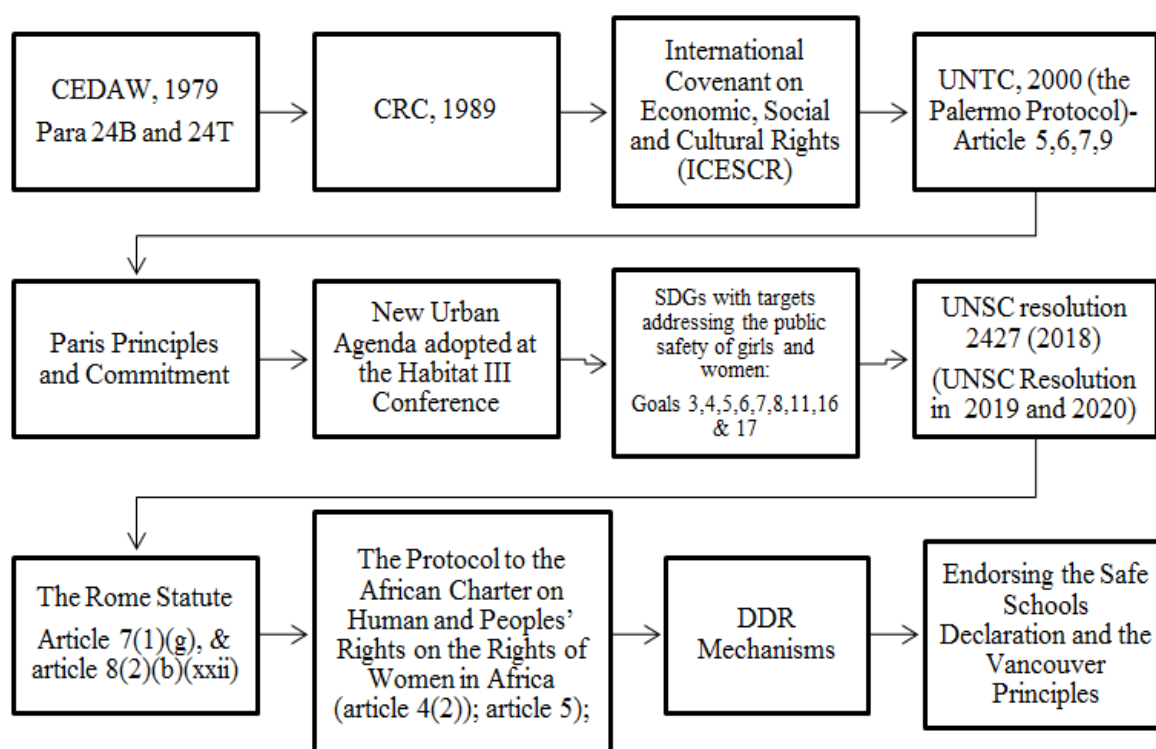
"*Child Reintegration*" according to the Paris Principles and Commitment, is defined as the procedure and practice by which children are rehabilitated into the civil and societal life. They acquire meaningful identities and roles as individuals and are acknowledged by their family and community in the framework of local and national unification. UNICEF is responsible of reintegrating Child soldiers into

society under the UN mechanism of providing assistance to the child of any kind; psychological, academic, and/or skills training. It is therefore critical to try to reconnect these children with their societal groups through sensitization activities.

The UNSC resolution 2427 (2018) and the Paris Principles stated that reintegration training must include training of a child from all walks of life and it should be systematically organised for an overall development of the child wanting to reintegrate from warfare. A minimum of 3 years, if not longer, the reintegration initiatives should last, rather than the current 6 months

programmes on field with creative and unique method, which currently is missing in the unstructured Disarm, Demobilise and Reintegrate (DDR) Programmes which are essential to tackle the gender-divided reintegration process effectively.

However, despite existence of numerous laws, policies and frameworks as mentioned below in Figure 2, implementation of rehabilitation projects for conflict-affected female children is not only an ethical and practical imperative to protect children and put their best interests first, but also a critical component of achieving long-term peace.



**Figure 2:** Summarized table of laws specifically dedicated for female safety in warfare

Failure to adhere to the DDR programmes has long-term consequences, negatively impacting the economy of a nation and social cohesiveness. When DDR programmes are not effectively suited to the communities, stigmatisation of returning children can lead to greater segregation and abuse. While sexual assault is certainly proved to be prevalent against girls among child soldiers/ armed groups, the susceptibility may differ considerably on an armed groups customs and beliefs about women. For instance, female

troops were treated equally to male soldiers by the Marxist-leaning Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia, although right-wing Para- militias were known to uphold sexist stereotypes (Sivakumaran, 2010). Although there have been significant advancements in recognising the graveness of the issue, preventive mechanisms and regulatory safeguards are required to cater to the needs of girl child soldiers.

### III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Girl child soldiers, being victims of sexual abuses, is established that particularly face additional discrimination in the reintegration programmes due to their gender specific needs like unwanted pregnancies at a young age, the severe permanent damage caused to their reproductive health due to unmedicated abortions in the unhygienic armed zone, and /or susceptibility to many sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. Increasingly, the global community has begun to acknowledge the significance of effectively acknowledging and assisting reintegration of the female child soldiers. Unfortunately, there is still work to be done on the below mentioned points:

#### *A. Endorsing of a survivor-centered strategy to prevent war rape or other forms of sexual abuse of girl child soldiers*

Endorsing of a survivor centered policy which recognises victims as common civilians and strives to encourage and support them by prioritising their diverse requirements, outlooks, and desires keeping in consideration varied parameters of Race, faith, Ethnicity, religion, migrant status, deformities, age, and political allegiance, will provide for an overall high-quality multi-sectoral assistance for girl child soldiers. Along with the above, frequent health check-ups, psychological and behavioural development, and legal assistance needs to be provided to the girl child soldiers for them to make informed decisions post reintegration in society.

#### *B. Allocation of funds specifically for Left out girl child soldiers of the reintegration programme*

Mobility of varied resources along with high funding to support increasingly greater challenges with long-term benefits is one of the key components that the policy makers should keep in mind whilst framing reintegration policies for every state. From the analysis of the global studies and secondary data available, it is observed that allocation of greater resources

and funding to the collection and management of data on children and armed conflict throughout time and location is essential along with supporting peacekeeping operations in conflict-affected areas. Therefore, using of current financing channels to accomplish outcomes, and build additional structures as needed specifically for left out girl children is an essential component to look at while reintegrating them in the society.

#### *C. Increase of humanitarian aid by global community*

Increase in aid to combat affected regions by stabilised nations for rebuilding of infrastructure and health system. Also, encouraging expressive and meaningful contribution/ involvement of women in peace negotiations with a strict adoption of a zero-tolerance policy against child sexual violence in the regional laws will help in creating a difference in the position of abandoned girl child soldiers.

#### *D. Regulation of one cohesive reintegration policy with assessment methods and metrics and Appointment of a Special Advisor on conflict-related sexual violence issues*

Regulating of one cohesive reintegration policy with assessment methods and metrics that can be utilised across the continuum will also heavily reduce the burden of the DDR Programme workers in sorting out the populace of left out girl child soldiers. The government also should uphold their dedication to end all forms of sexual violence, as outlined in regional laws and should appoint a special adviser on conflict-related sexual abuses. The advisor should be appointed in the higher office for fast-tracking the adoption of an action plan intended to implement tackling the issue of girls left out of reintegration programmes.

#### *E. Transparency and Accountability linked with severe monitoring and evaluation*

Steps must be taken to guarantee transparency in DDR programmes, notably in the eligibility requirements for children participating in the

programme and exiting the same. Further, transparency will aid to effectively monitor and assess notable outcomes such as what happens to fighters after they exit DDR programmes, does violence reoccur, etc.

#### *F. Awareness Creation*

Lastly, awareness and promotion of Girl child soldier programmes gender specific programmes should be done at and by all level tier shareholders across the state and centre by the administrative, judicial as well as the legislative wing of the nations.

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