



MDRP

DISSEMINATION NOTE

Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program

No.1

September - October 2007

The Social and Economic Status of Beneficiaries of the Burundi Child Soldier Demobilization, Social Reintegration and Recruitment Prevention Special Project¹

Following ten years of civil war in Burundi, it was estimated that thousands of children had been recruited or used by the armed groups party to the conflict – including national armed forces, pro-governmental civil defense militias and the various armed opposition groups. To date, the release, family tracing and reunification, and community-based socioeconomic reintegration of over 3,000 of these children formerly associated with fighting forces (CAFF) has been supported through the Burundi Child Soldier Demobilization, Social Reintegration and Recruitment Prevention Special Project.

This project had three major objectives: to demobilize; to support social reintegration; and to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers in Burundi. Program activities were wide-ranging and included: the preparation of communities for the return of children; support to families caring for CAFF (biological or foster); promoting access to education and skills development opportunities; support for those CAFF requiring specific care; strengthening psychosocial support at the community level and; supporting youth participation projects such as community service initiatives, training, small business support, sports, cultural activities, etc.

How are the beneficiaries of this program faring? In 2006, the MDRP commissioned a beneficiary assessment of the children and young people assisted under the framework of the Burundi Child Soldier Special Project in order to be able to better answer this question. The study, undertaken by independent consultant Ratiba Taouti-Cherif, examined the social and economic status of these former child soldiers in relation to other children in the community and probed their family and community relationships, level of social inclusion, and economic opportunities and vulnerabilities. It also assessed the contribution of the project to the socioeconomic wellbeing of its child beneficiaries and their families.

A sample of over 280 children and young people, randomly selected from the 11 provinces of the country with the greatest concentration of project beneficiaries took part in the quantitative and qualitative interviews which formed the basis of this study. Interviewees included both boys and girls, children who had been associated with the full range of armed groups active in Burundi as well as their peers

¹This Dissemination Note is based on the report: "Beneficiary Assessment of the Social and Economic Status of the «Child Soldier» Special Project Beneficiaries in Burundi", prepared for the MDRP Secretariat in June 2006 by Ratiba Taouti-Cherif.

The Burundi Child Soldier Demobilization, Social Reintegration and Recruitment Prevention Special Project was launched in 2004 – as part of an action plan for child protection agreed between the Government of Burundi and UNICEF. UNICEF implemented the project in collaboration with both the National Structure for Child Soldiers (SNES), which UNICEF helped to establish in the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, as well as with local NGOs and CBOs throughout the country. The project was funded through a grant from the World Bank/ Multi Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program for the Greater Great Lakes Region (MDRP). In June 2006, the project closed as planned, and the project's activities and objectives were transitioned to the Burundi National Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration Program (NDRRP). With a team of child protection specialists, the NDRRP has carried on the activities of the special project, and now leads CAFF release, reunification, reintegration and recruitment prevention work in Burundi.

in their communities of residence. As many children demobilized in past years are now above 18 years old, the sample included children, adolescents and young adults aged 13 to 25 – with the majority falling between 17 and 19 years old, as illustrated in the graph below. Community stakeholders were also included in the study, and participated in focus groups on issues related to the socio-economic wellbeing and reintegration of beneficiaries.

This note summarizes the main findings of the beneficiary assessment and their implications for reintegration programming – particularly around social reintegration, economic reintegration and safety and security. It aims to stimulate discussion on support for children associated with fighting forces and to identify ways to strengthen current and future programming.

to their families and communities and that most measures of their social wellbeing are consistent with those of other civilian children in the community.

In terms of living situations, for example, over 90% of both former child soldiers and civilian children who are not themselves the head of their household live with their biological parents or other members of their biological family. Compared to other countries with reintegrating CAFF, foster families and independent living arrangements are very rare in Burundi. Interestingly, however, the proportion of CAFF who are heads of households, caring either for their own spouses or children, or their siblings, is considerably higher than for civilian children – about one in four as compared to one in fifteen.

This may partly be due to the younger

of reintegration assistance from social and educational aspects to economic and livelihood support.

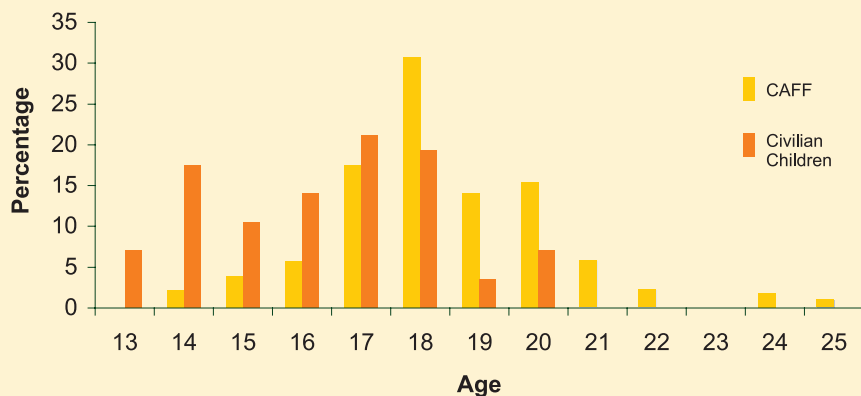
“In the army I was not well treated, I did not get enough sleep. Now I am feeling good with my family”
“I am adapting to my family. I am more and more accepted.”

- Young man, 17 yrs

Family reintegration has been successful for the vast majority of beneficiaries. Indeed, over 80% of the CAFF interviewed said that their family relations were good or very good, and over 90% classed them as neutral or good – slightly higher than the results for civilian children. A greater proportion of former child soldiers also reported that they were happy or very happy where they lived. Finally, while domestic exploitation of reintegrated CAFF can be a concern in some country contexts, interviews in Burundi found that respondents had the same amount and type of household chores as their peers and had the same perception of the amount of work that they did. Overall, former child soldiers seemed to be well accepted into their families and well treated within them after their return from armed groups.

CAFF also seemed to share a similar level of social wellbeing with the other children in their communities – though this was often low in absolute terms. For example, while over 90% of both groups of children had access to housing, most felt that their house was of a lower quality than others. Utilization levels of health services were also consistent, though extremely low. Only about one third of respondents used health services which were identified as too expensive by the majority of respondents.

Age Distribution of Respondents



Study Findings: What did we learn from the study?

1. Social Reintegration

The social reintegration of former child soldiers in Burundi seems to be progressing well. Interviews suggest that children have been able to readapt

skew in ages of the control group – as the proportion of respondents who were heads of households corresponded exactly to the proportion of children in the CAFF sample and civilian children sample which was 20 years of age or older (26% and 7%, respectively). Nonetheless, it is an area that would merit further consideration and possibly a programming response, to better equip reintegrating CAFF for the responsibility of running a household by shifting the main focus

The study similarly found no significant overall difference between the perceptions of former child soldiers and their civilian children peers on the food sufficiency of their households. These results are notable, however, as over three-quarters of respondents from both groups said that they did not have enough to eat. This situation was particularly aggravated in provinces in which there was a high degree of food insecurity and drought. These issues around access to adequate housing, health services and food point to the need for wider community-based support for all vulnerable children and youth as a natural continuation to targeted assistance to former child soldiers in Burundi.

In terms of access to education, 70% of the former child soldiers interviewed were not enrolled in school – whether formal or vocational – though a similar proportion had attended school in the past. However, 63% of the control group were also not in school, though this difference may partly be due to the lower age range of the control group, a much greater proportion of which were children under the age of 16. Of those CAFF who were not enrolled in schooling, the two most common reasons given were: (i) that schooling was too expensive or they lacked the means to enrol (43%) and; (ii) that they were too old or had already completed school (19%).

This is consistent with the most recent national survey of development indicators, which found that 43% of children between 13 and 19 did not attend school because of the cost.² Particularly interestingly however, of the CS sampled, 91% felt that they had equal or greater access to school as compared to only 75% of their peers, suggesting that former child soldiers do not feel excluded from educational opportunities. CAFF who were currently in education were almost evenly split between formal schooling and vocational training, for which tailoring and construction were the trades most commonly learned.

“The community accepts me. I am alive, I could have died during the war.”

- Young man, 18 yrs

The dynamics of relations between former child soldiers and their communities again suggest that former child soldiers are reintegrating

This suggests that fostering interactions between child soldiers and community members, encouraging community leaders to facilitate these children’s participation in community life and combating the stigma that former child soldiers may face continue to be important activities for reintegration programs and other stakeholders to pursue.

Do you feel isolated in your community?		
	CAFF	Other children in the community
Often	11.9%	5.5%
Sometimes	26.5%	14.5%
Never	61.5%	80.0%

well, though they also highlight some complicated issues around perceptions and feelings of belonging. On the one hand, the majority of these children take part in community events and community life (events such as marriages and funerals, associative and religious activities), and they are even slightly more likely than their civilian counterparts to participate. Close to three-quarters of the former child soldiers sampled felt that the community had a good or neutral perception of them – also a positive trend, though this proportion was lower than the 85% of civilian children who shared this perspective. Finally CAFF seemed to exhibit healthier behaviours than their peers – alcohol use, for example, was lower among this group in the sample, despite their being much older on aggregate than the civilian sample (57% alcohol use, compared to 67% among civilian children). Yet despite these encouraging findings, reintegrated children worryingly felt isolated twice as often as their civilian peers, as illustrated by the table above.

2. Economic Reintegration

Reintegrating into a country with high poverty levels and a per capita GDP below than \$150, the economic opportunities available to former child soldiers in Burundi are often limited. Yet despite this difficult context, the data collected suggests that while poor, former child soldiers are often much better off than their civilian peers. Almost half of the former CAFF interviewed reported having at least one source of income (as compared to less than 30% of the civilian children), including working for someone else, running an income generating activity, participating in an economic association etc.

“My husbandry project prospers,”

- Young man, 18 yrs

²ISTEEBU 2003. « Enquête sur les Indicateurs de développement, QUID 2002 ». Bujumbura, Burundi.

