1. INTRODUCTION

Nearly three generations of Angolans have been at war for 41 years. Together with the destruction of most of the country’s infrastructure, the social capital of Angola’s communities was damaged during one of the longest wars in Africa, a war that was preceded by 500 years of slavery and colonialisation. The war resulted in 500,000 to 1 million war-related deaths; hundreds of thousands of people were directly affected by the armed conflict; there were major internal population displacements of approximately 4.5 million people throughout the country, and approximately 400,000 thousand people fled to neighbouring countries as refugees. Throughout this process, people suffered enormous physical and emotional damage, families were separated; communities were repeatedly fragmented and dispersed. The institutional capacity to design and implement projects of collective interest was crippled. The infrastructure to deliver social services such as health and education was largely destroyed. There are an estimated 2-7 million landmines scattered across Angola; the road network is in tatters, and food production remains below minimum levels of food security.

The level of vulnerability among the general population in Angola is one of the highest in the world. A greater percentage of Angolan people are at risk of disease and destitution than in virtually any other African country. In January 2004, more than 20 percent of the entire population (4 million) was still displaced and at least 10 percent dependent on external assistance to survive. Of the displaced peoples, 65 percent were under the age of 15, with women and girls forcibly involved in the armed struggle in Angola.

1 Henceforth referred to as the Formerly Abducted Girl Soldiers project, from Meninas Envolvida a Forca no Conflito Armado em Angola
2 This report was researched in Angola from November 2003 to July 2004 by Vivi Stavrou (National Programme Manager), Josefa Dombolo (Field Manager), Natalia Pinto, Ana Samuel, Penina Chiltula and Christina (interviewers and field workers). The report was written by Vivi Stavrou and edited by Mary Daly (Country Director, CCF Angola).
3 From the 16th to the 19th century, Portuguese colonial forces along the Angolan coast profited from a large slave exporting system, to the extent that Angola became the largest source of slaves for many Western hemisphere countries, including Brazil and the United States of America. Within Angola mass forced labour replaced formal slavery by the end of the 19th century and continued until it was prohibited in 1961 (United States Department of State. Background Note: Angola. 2003, in, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children. Angola Country Report. New York 2003).
children making up more than 80 percent of the total\textsuperscript{6}. Displaced and refugee/returnee women and girls are particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence and poverty. Amongst the most vulnerable in this group, are the girls who were separated from their families during the armed conflict. In this group, the formerly abducted girl soldiers are the most excluded and most vulnerable.

The use of children as soldiers has become a common feature of armed conflicts in every region of the world:

> A child soldier is any person under eighteen years of age who is part of any regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other that purely as family members. Girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage are included in this definition. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.” (UNICEF, 1997, pp 1)\textsuperscript{7}

Those who use children as soldiers deny their existence. No record is kept of their numbers and their ages are falsified. Many are not part of the formally claimed strength of the forces to which they are attached, but they are unacknowledged members. Child soldiers are invisible because they spend most of their time in remote conflict zones away from the public eye and media scrutiny. They are invisible because they vanish - they often never return from the battlefield because they are killed, or are abandoned because they have been injured. They are invisible on their return because they are never formally acknowledged in demobilization processes, because they were never formally acknowledged in the first place. They continue to remain invisible because they all grow older during the war and during the initial return and resettlement period. The very fact that the soldier survives, means the child disappears and becomes an adult soldier or an adult ex-soldier\textsuperscript{8}. For girl and women ex-soldiers, their invisibility is further guaranteed because communities, national governments and multi-lateral demobilization programs are complicit in ignoring their existence.

Child soldiers are usually recruited because not enough adults are available or willing to become soldiers. Children are forcefully recruited through conscription, press-ganging or individual or group abductions. Some are forced to join armed forces to defend their families. Other children volunteer, often driven by cultural, social, political, or more often, economic pressures. Hunger, poverty and social pressure often drive parents to volunteer their children. The problem is further compounded by the fact that many children in conflict zones have no civil documentation of age.

Children are especially valued in long, drawn out conflicts, where adults and other resources are in short supply. And as conflicts drag on, soldiers tend to get younger and younger\textsuperscript{9}. Wars that last a generation or more have children who have grown up surrounded by violence and see this

\textsuperscript{6} The United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Angola, 2002.
\textsuperscript{7} UNICEF. Annotated principles and best practices adopted by the Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilisation and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, Cape Town, April 30 1997.
http://www.thirdworldtraveller.com/Life_Death_ThirdWorld/Child_Soldiers.html
\textsuperscript{9} Machel, G. The Impact of War on Children. UNICEF, 2001.
as a permanent way of life. Alone, displaced, separated from their family, orphaned, frightened, bored and frustrated, they will often choose to fight. For the children who have grown up in areas under military control where active war has lasted for a decade or more, becoming a child soldier is a matter of fact.

Despite the shortage of data in Angola, reports indicate that a large numbers of girls were abducted during the war\(^\text{10}\). Interviews with the girls and young women who were abducted, describe their work as transporting food and arms, foraging for food, looting from farms and villages, cleaning, cooking, dancing and entertaining the soldiers. They were used sexually by the soldiers and given as ‘wives’ to the soldiers. Girls were also voluntarily and involuntarily conscripted as combat soldiers. No one knows the magnitude of the problem. Globally, research on child soldiering has focused almost exclusively on boys. Similarly, intervention programmes that promote the social integration of former child soldiers have concentrated on boys and neglected girls.

Little information is available regarding the nature of the abducted girl’s experiences and the impact of their experiences on subsequent integration into community life. The anecdotal evidence gathered by the CCF team which currently assists war-affected children in five provinces and in Luanda, is that these when these girls return to their communities, they lack the emotional, social, legal and economic support needed to reintegrate and move ahead in building their lives. Their position of exclusion and vulnerability facilitates continuing gender-based discrimination, making it extremely difficult to provide the support and assistance to which formerly abducted girls are entitled. On a personal level, this neglect serves to deepen their suffering and sense of worthlessness: painful experiences remain hidden, health problems remain untreated, their legal status remains unclear, and no acknowledgement and social support is forthcoming.

For young girls who were in combat zones, the risk factors were greater because soldiering more often than not involved sexual abuse. Women and girls living in and around military quartering and reception areas\(^\text{11}\) and the IDP camps are vulnerable to harassment from soldiers\(^\text{12}\). Such abuse leads to a high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and the dangers of pregnancy and abortion. The majority, over 90 percent, of girls in Ugandan rebel army camps have STD’s, against 60 percent of boys and men\(^\text{13}\). With the exception of a small group of girls who had been married or had sexual intercourse before their abduction and may therefore have been carrying STD’s, the vast majority was infected during their period in captivity.

The dream of going home and rebuilding their lives after the war is seldom easily achieved for former child soldiers and separated children. In Angola, long stays in IDP camps and military

---


\(^{11}\) Formerly known as the ex-combatant quartering areas.

\(^{12}\) MSF, op cit.

gathering areas have interrupted returning home. Many of the separated children can never hope to find their families, because the families have died or because the children were abducted so young that they have no memory of an identity prior to abduction. In an ideal world, the child or young person’s return to community life is a slow process of healing that requires a network of ongoing support from parents, teachers, religious and other community leaders. The vision of this research project is to help create the conditions for war-affected communities in Angola to provide a more supportive, safe and receptive environment for formerly abducted girl soldiers when they seek to return to their families, or to communities where they can try to rebuild their lives. The abducted girl soldiers experienced the most extreme violations of their human rights and distortion of their personal and physical development. Thus far, their existence and special needs are being ignored by the formal peace process and largely neglected by the agencies and programs working with demobilized soldiers. The glaring gaps in the protection of girls in conflict should be addressed through systematic research leading to better focused humanitarian relief and development assistance.

Child soldiers need reintegration and rehabilitation programs that are sensitive to their specific needs. The gender knowledge gained from researching the particular experiences of girl soldiers is necessary to develop and implement policies and programs which recognize how the social construction of gender affects both girls and boys and can limit or expand their options and affect them in every aspect of their lives. This includes accessing opportunities to secure an economic livelihood, to receive adequate health care, to access education and vocational training.

Angola’s war is over, however peace does not automatically enable people to claim their human rights and benefit from democratic civic and political representation. The shape and form of a future Angola still lies in the balance and will depend upon the nature and form of the democratic culture which will develop in the years to come. Sustainable peace will only become possible with the strengthening of democratic processes from below – building the capacity of civil society to organise to make their voices heard, express their needs and concerns, and participate in the political process.

Critical to any future changes, are the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the largest demographic group in Angola – over 60% of the Angolan population is under 24 years old. Developmentally adolescents are at the psychological phase where they are forming their identity and making key decisions with regard to their future and their relationship to society. Depending upon their opportunities and experiences, they have enormous potential to either contribute positively to the development of their communities, or to become destructive forces in society.

The challenge for Angola as it currently negotiates the peace process, is to lay the foundations for a lasting peace. Appalling conditions and humanitarian needs coexist with substantive recovery opportunities. Affected by war trauma and growing up amidst normalised violence,
many child soldiers cannot conceptualise that peace is the rule rather than the exception, and are at risk of continuing cycles of violence. To build a lasting peace, it is vital to protect all children and young people’s rights and promote their effective integration into civilian life.
2. WAR AND PEACE IN ANGOLA: THE PERIOD 1961-2004

| POPULATION: (UNICEF End of Decade report) | 13,134,000 |
|                                           | 7,800,000 under 18 |
| 2003 UNDP HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX:        | Ranked 164 out of 175 countries |
| GNP per Capita                            | US$ 220 |
| VOTING AGE (GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS):        | 18 |
| COMPULSORY RECRUITMENT AGE:               | 20. |
|                                          | Age 18 for registration |
| CRC RATIFIED:                             | 1990 |
| CRC-OP-CAC:                               | Signed - awaiting ratification by Parliament |

War of Independence 1961-1975
The majority of Angolans have known nothing but war and conflict over the last four decades. War started in 1961 as a liberation struggle against the Portuguese colonial regime. The 1975 military coup in Portugal marked the end of colonial rule.

In 1975, after 14 years of fighting for independence from the colonial power Portugal, the three main liberation movements that had fought the Portuguese - the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola), the FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola), and UNITA (Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola), embarked on a power struggle for political control of the country and its lucrative natural resources. Angola became embroiled in 27 years of civil war that also became a proxy battleground for the Cold War superpowers.

The Cold War fuelled the civil war as the movements adopted different ideologies. The MPLA, formed primarily by the coastal, urban elite, adopted a Marxist ideology and received massive military aid from the Soviet Union and Cuba. The FNLA had historic support from Zaire and the United States but was soon overshadowed by UNITA. UNITA adopted an anti-Marxist position, and was against the dominance of the mestico urban elite. UNITA won the support of the United States and South Africa.

By the late 1980’s Cuba had some 50,000 troops in Angola but events were pushing for peace. In 1988, the Angolan army defeated the South African troops supporting UNITA in Cuito
Cuanavale, in the south of Angola. This major defeat made the South Africans reassess their involvement in the proxy war. The emerging Perestroika in the Soviet Union removed the impetus for continuing military engagement in Africa, which in turn reduced the available external military assistance for the MPLA. As part of the resolution of the Namibian conflict on Angola’s southern border, the Cuban troops agreed to withdraw under UN verification in late 1988. The Cubans completed the troop withdrawal ahead of schedule in late 1990, laying the groundwork for the completion of the Bicesse Peace Negotiations.

**Bicesse Peace Accords, May 1991**

In May 1991, MPLA and UNITA signed the Bicesse Peace Accord and Angola experienced 18 months of peace. The ceasefire stopped a conflict that had killed between 100,000 and 350,000 people in combat. The Bicesse Accords called for the demobilization of the armies and the creation of a bi-partisan Angolan Armed Forces (FAA - Forcas Armadas Angolanas), the holding of democratic elections, and the establishment of a UN mission to observe the process. Elections were held in September 1992, to elect representatives to a National Assembly and to elect the first directly elected President for Angola. The MPLA candidate, President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, received 49.6% of the vote, while Jonas Savimbi, who had led UNITA since 1966, received 40.1%. The Angolan constitution stipulated that a majority of 50% was needed to achieve victory and a second round of elections was planned. But UNITA denounced the election results as fraudulent and withdrew its forces from FAA. Rising tensions led to another round of war, which began in October 31, 1992.

**Post-Electoral Civil War 1992-1994**

Within six weeks of the start of the post-electoral war, more than 70% of the country was a “no-mans” land. UNITA progressively controlled and exploited some of the countries richest diamond fields, bankrolling the war effort; the government sustained its military expenditure with profits from offshore oil deposits. Angola’s natural wealth served to fuel its descent into vicious conflict and abject poverty.

The post-electoral war from 1992 to 1994 was more violent and destructive than previous phases of the conflict. Fighting centered on the main cities, with both sides bombarding civilian populations and starving them in a bid to take control of the provincial capitals. The situation was at its worst in the major cities of Huambo, Malange and Kuito – which each party controlled equally and where they shelled each other for months in a bid to force the opposition to abandon these cities. In Huambo this shelling lasted for the notorious “55 Days” during which an estimated 15,000 civilians were killed. An estimated 25,000 people were killed during the nine-month siege of Kuito town.\(^\text{17}\)

There were very heavy civilian casualties, summary executions and tortures, and recruitment of child soldiers.\(^\text{18}\) The rate of killing rose as high as 1,000 people per day, and fighting led to anarchy and hunger in much of the country. Millions of people were displaced as they abandoned

---


their homes in desperation, some walking hundreds of kilometers to reach relative safety.\(^{19}\) The number of people internally displaced rose from 344,000 in May 1993 to 1.2 million people by September 1994. Most of the displaced lived in desperate circumstances. It is estimated that approximately 500,000 children died as a direct result of the 1992-1994 war and that 15,000 children were “unaccompanied,” separated from their families and without adult supervision. By 1993, UNICEF estimated that nearly 840,000 children were living in “especially difficult circumstances”, and that 320 out of 1,000 children died before they had reached the age of five years. Throughout Angola, hunger, disease, landmines and severely limited access to basic services increased suffering, morbidity and mortality.

The Lusaka Peace Protocol, November 1994: “Neither war nor peace”, or the “lying peace”
A stalemate in the fighting, coupled with international pressures, led to the signing in November, 1994 of the Lusaka Protocol which provided a framework for on going negotiations between the warring parties. The negotiations produced an agreement on a Government of National Unity and Reconciliation, which was sworn in, in April of 1997. In spite of apparent progress politically, tensions continued to rise throughout the country. Though many UNITA officials entered the government, the U.N. continued to document repeated UNITA failures to comply fully with the terms of the Lusaka Protocols and access to UNITA-controlled areas continued to be severely curtailed. The flawed Lusaka peace process lasted three and a half years, from 1995-98. In September 1998 the MPLA government broke of all dialogue and contact with UNITA. Full-scale war erupted again in December 1998.

The international community imposed UN sanctions on UNITA making it illegal to trade and talk with UNITA. From then on, and for the duration of this phase in the conflict, all humanitarian agencies were unable to work in UNITA-held areas. There was no information on the status and condition of civilians in areas controlled by UNITA.\(^{20}\)

This last phase of the war, which lasted three years, ending in February 2002, was characterised by violence directly aimed at the civilian population. The civilian population was caught between the military advance of the FAA and UNITA’s desire to maintain control over sections of the population. Both sides were accused of human rights violations including abduction and forced conscription.\(^{21}\) Populations caught between the fighting forces were forced to flee their lands, as the government sought to cut off all potential sources of support for UNITA in a scorched earth and counter-insurrection strategy. Complete villages were moved and emptied, crops burned, and populations forcibly displaced in areas controlled by the government.\(^{22}\) The populations they forcibly displaced were herded into towns and cities where many thousands starved because they had little access to land, with no alternative food source. The people left in the bush with UNITA, constantly on the run and cut off from their source of food, also starved. UNITA forcibly displaced and took civilians with it, using them as porters and logistics support for the

---


\(^{20}\) Médecins Sans Frontières. *Voices from the Silence: Testimonies from Angola*. Toronto, 2004


fighting forces. This strategy became particularly well developed when UNITA officially announced its return to guerrilla tactics.

Most Angolans during the decade of 1992 to 2002 had few means, or were denied means to support themselves with dignity. They received little or no meaningful assistance from the Angolan government or from UNITA. Everyone who could afford to escaped the hardships of the rural interior and moved to the coastal cities that were relatively untouched by the fighting.

By the beginning of 2002 the FAA had taken the upper hand in the fighting by depopulating vast areas of Angola’s countryside.

**The April 4 2002 Luena Memorandum**

The death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, at the hands of government troops, in February 2002, gave new impetus to the peace process. The two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding in April of the same year. This established a ceasefire and laid the groundwork to complete the political process as defined in the Lusaka Agreement. With the exception of the northern enclave of Cabinda, which produces 60% of Angola's oil and where separatist rebels have been fighting for independence, the rest of the country was finally at peace.

The April Memorandum of Understanding provided for a series of steps aimed at demobilization parts of FAA and UNITA, and integrating a part of UNITA’s forces into the Angolan army and the rest into civilian society. This process included the establishment of Military Quartering areas and Family Areas (FQA’s) in June 2002 in various locations around the country. The FQA’s signaled the beginning of a huge population shift as the ex-UNITA military and their families gathered in transit camps and FQA’s, pending registration and demobilization for the military. This process was paralleled by people moving out of the remaining IDP camps, and the spontaneous and abrupt return home of an estimated 80,000 Angolan refugees.23

**Post-war period of Transition and Rehabilitation 2002-2004**

Since the signing of the April 4th 2002, Luena Memorandum of Understanding, there have been no outbreaks of fighting between UNITA and the MPLA, and both sides as well as the general population, appear committed to peace.

By September 2003, it was reported by the government of Angola (GoA) that more than 2.3 million people had returned to their ‘areas of origin’ since the cessation of hostilities in April 2002. The areas that received the largest number of resettled were the provinces of Huambo, Benguela, Bie and Kwanza Sul. The GoA declared the FQA’s closed and the demobilization process complete as of the 24th June 2003. However it was only in December 2003 that the last of the demobilized soldiers from UNITA were leaving the few remaining transit camps. Some of the ex-military and long-term Dip’s did not return to their areas of origin but opted to settle in areas close to the FQA’s, or move to other communities where they know people or had family. Many young people moved to the peri-urban areas of the major cities.

The war had resulted in the widespread destruction of social infrastructure in the rural areas. Few of the designated and non-designated areas of return had minimum conditions to sustain newly

arriving populations. There were limited sources of drinking water, no latrines, no primary schools or health posts. Most of the teachers and nurses had fled the interior during the war. Most areas had no established local government and much of the arable land was mined. Even with the gains made by peace, Angola moved down on the 2003 Human Development Index. Out of 175 countries included in the survey, Angola ranked 164.

- By 30 Dec 2003 nearly 3.8 million Dip’s returned home and roughly 467,000 Dip’s remained to be resettled.
- In April 2002, nearly 467,000 Angolan refugees were reported to be living in other countries.\(^{24}\)
- Angola is ranked among the top 3 countries in the world contaminated by landmines. As many as 2-7 million landmines were planted.\(^{25}\).
- In January 2004 at least 10 percent of Angolans were dependent upon external assistance to survive.

Hundreds of thousands of children suffered enormous physical, emotional and social damage during the war. Most teenagers in Angola today have been directly affected by the war, either because they were directly and indirectly involved in the armed conflict, or because they spent their childhood in an IDP camp or in a refugee camp bordering Angola. Displaced and refugee/returnee women and children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence and poverty. Amongst the most vulnerable in this group, are the underage soldiers, disabled children and those who were separated from their families during the armed conflict.

- Approximately 50% of Angolans are under 12 years old, and more than 70% are under 35\(^{26}\).
- Angolan children are amongst the most vulnerable in the world. Infant mortality at 250 per 1,000 births is said by UNICEF to rank the third worst in the world\(^{27}\).
- At the end of 2002, 76% of Angolans did not have access to any form of healthcare\(^{28}\).
- One mother in every 50 dies whilst giving birth.
- 10% of children 0 to 14 years old are not living with a biological parent; 11% of children 0 to 14 years are orphans of one or both biological parent.
- Only half the children of primary school age are enrolled in school; 35 percent of enrolled children reach fifth grade. Angolan children spend an average of only two years in school.
- At the beginning of 2004, 50 percent of Angolan children were affected by moderate malnutrition and malnutrition was the underlying cause in 55 percent of child mortality cases\(^{29}\).

\(^{26}\) UNICEF. Country Statistical Table: Angola. Luanda 2002.
\(^{27}\) This and the following figures in this paragraph are taken from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Assessing the Situation of Angolan Children and Women at the beginning of the Millennium. UNICEF and the Angolan National Institute of Statistics (INE), Luanda, Angola 2003.
\(^{29}\) OCHA briefing, January 2004
- Grinding poverty means that school costs are unaffordable for most, and children are expected to earn a wage or helping in the home as soon as possible, while other family members go to work. A conservative estimate of the number of children aged 5 to 14 years who are currently working is 30 percent.

- Child trafficking, prostitution, pornography, forced labour, sexual slavery and other forms of exploitation exist in Angola. Angola is reported to be a country of origin for trafficked persons.\(^{30}\)

3. GIRL SOLDIERS IN ANGOLA

It is not known how many children under the age of 18 served in the armed forces during the 41-year period from 1961 to 2002. Anecdotal accounts and personal testimonies suggest that underage soldiers have been used throughout the war. The majority of the people in the FQA’s, almost 80% of the total, were women and children. Approximately 40,000 women and 85,000 children were settled in the FQA’s established following the ceasefire agreement in April 2002. It is estimated that in general, women represent between 10 percent and one third of all regular armies and armed groups worldwide. The numbers in the FQAs and the girls narratives would suggest that each soldier had formal dependents plus a minimum of two forced porters/logistics support people who were women or children.

The issue of child soldiers cannot be viewed outside of the role and place of adolescents in the Angolan Bantu society. Traditionally in Angola, soldiering has been the work of adult men. Normatively, the passage from child to adult for many social and cultural groups in Angola occurs at around 13-14 years of age. In Angolan Bantu culture, especially in the rural areas and amongst the more traditional communities, there is no concept of adolescence. Young women are eligible for marriage and becoming parents from 14 years old; young men from 14 -16 years build their own houses and begin to prepare for independent adult life. Adolescence is defined more as a pre-adult phase and young people of this age are defined as the ‘youth’. Whilst they can start their own families and work for a living, there is no tradition of youth participation in community decision-making. Youth are pre-adults and are expected to comply with the decisions of the elders. There is no tradition of the elders consulting young people and most of the national languages have proverbs, which reinforce the notion that young people cannot possibly have useful knowledge because they have not yet experienced life.

The term ‘underage soldier’ was adopted by the GoA and humanitarian agencies during the Lusaka Protocol demobilisation process, and proved very useful in assuring a common understanding of which child soldiers are. The term ‘underage’ considered societal as well as military reactions to the term ‘child’. It was defined in relation to the legal recruitment age of 18. ‘Underage’ better reflects the prevailing cultural norms when referring to the use of youth under 18 years old as soldiers.

The 1994 Lusaka Protocol recognised underage soldiers as one of the Special Groups to be demobilised, and their demobilisation and reintegration was declared a priority in the first resolution adopted by the commission set up to implement the peace agreement. The subsequent program, in Angola, is cited internationally as a successful case study in the demobilisation of child soldiers. Within the context of the Lusaka Protocol, a study of vulnerable groups was commissioned, based on lessons learnt from the Bicesse process in Angola, and similar processes in El Salvador and Mocambique. This study concluded that demobilization of children should be

31 Correspondence with OXFAM Angola, 28 March 2003.
included in the peace process at the highest level or they will be excluded from benefits packages and miss essential opportunities for family and community reintegration\textsuperscript{33}.

Whilst priority was given on paper to the demobilization of children, Verhey points out that advocacy needed to be consistent, persistent and on going. It was 18 months after the 1995 resolution before the first child soldiers were demobilized - highlighting how the larger political processes of a peace agreement often overshadow children’s rights. Furthermore, it was clear that it was imperative to include both parties’ political and military leadership in discussions, at an early stage, on the impact of the war on children and the impact of political and military decisions taking during the war and immediately following a ceasefire. Simple reliance on the legal obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child or the Geneva Conventions was likely to result in a poor protection outcome\textsuperscript{34}.

The Lusaka Protocol demobilization commission oversaw a formal program for children, registering 9,133 boy soldiers under the age of eighteen; 5,171 of those were demobilized. Boy soldiers were placed in the military quartering areas, given a monetary subsidy, a return kit of food and clothing, and transported to their area of origin within a targeted six-month period\textsuperscript{35}. A program strategy emphasizing community-based psychosocial support was established and this program linked in with the existing national tracing program for these and other children separated during the war\textsuperscript{36}. The 1995 to 1997 program strategies and partnerships were seen as largely successful in achieving family reunification and the beginning the process of reintegration for male ex-child soldiers.

However, the Lusaka demobilisation process did not recognise girl soldiers and made no provision for girls and disabled children. Girls had participated in both active combat and support roles throughout the war but no commander of either armed force identified or presented girl combatants for demobilisation programs. This situation is not unique to Angola. Machel\textsuperscript{37} reports that in some countries up to 40 percent of child soldiers are girls, and in most cases they receive no support from Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDRR) programmes. For example, girl soldiers were excluded from DDRR programmes in Sierra Leone because they were registered as ‘dependents’ and ‘camp followers’. In Mocambique the demobilisation package for girls included men’s clothing. Many girls, who had between three and five children, were released without skills training or other support.

\textsuperscript{33} The study, “Study of the Vulnerable Groups in Angola within the Perspective of the Peace Process”, identified child soldiers and the disabled as priority groups most lacking of a specific project framework for their assistance. The consultant team met with several organisations including UNICEF, SCF-UK and CCF. In Verhey, B. \textit{The Prevention, Demobilisation and Reintegraton of Child Soldiers: Angola Case Study}. World Bank Africa Region, . July 2001..

\textsuperscript{34} Verhey, B. \textit{Angola Case Study}, 2001.


\textsuperscript{37} Machel, G. 2001.
The April 4th 2002 Luena Memorandum recognized some 100,000 (edit: see numbers) adult combatants from UNITA (aged 20 and above), 5,000 of whom were integrated into the national police and armed forces, and the rest into a formal de-mobilization program. A number of teachers and nurses have been integrated into the health and education services but a number of those listed for integration into the social services are still waiting for the process to be completed. Most adult fighters were demobilized with photo identification cards, a travel authorization certificate, a five-month salary based on military rank, food assistance and a transport allowance to facilitate return. Some received a reinstallation kit upon return to their area of resettlement.38

In 2002, boy soldiers twenty years of age and younger, were not included in the demobilization program; they received an identification card and were transferred to the family sections of the quartering areas where at most, they received food aid distributed by the Angolan government and the international community to the dependent families of the ex-soldiers of UNITA.39 Again, there was no formal recognition of the role played by women and girls who were simply considered as dependents of male ex-soldiers. The demobilisation and disarmament of ex-combatants was designed and executed by the GoA. This had positive implications for the national ownership of the process, but did mean that it was executed with significantly less resources compared to the UN supported process during the period 1995 to 1997.40

The GoA drew up a demobilisation and reintegration program that has been supported with a World Bank loan of US$ 180 million, financed through the Demobilisation and Reintegration Program for the Great Lakes Region. The primary target group in this program is the demobilised ex-combatants of twenty years and older. Women are not recognised as having combatant roles and no provision was made for ex-soldiers, under twenty years of age, at the time of signing of the April 4th 2002 Memorandum of Understanding. The proposed assistance package, which includes a supply kit, US$100, six months of literacy and or vocational training opportunities and access to micro-credit goes strictly to male ex-combatants (assistance limited to 100,000 UNITA and 33,000 government soldiers).

Following active and persistent lobbying by civil society groups and international NGOs, a provision was made in the final document for a US$30 million package to support specific vulnerable groups which were defined to include women, children and underage ex-combatants. There are no specific programs for former underage soldiers. Women and girls abducted by the armed forces, which worked as soldiers, provided the logistics for the guerrilla army and were often taken as ‘wives’, have thus far been excluded from direct, targeted assistance. In other post-conflict situations, lack of attention to the rehabilitation of women and girls, has resulted in women and girls, with no family or community support network, often with dependent children, being obliged to fend for themselves in an environment of exclusion and exploitation.

Since April 2002, parallel to the demobilisation program, UNICEF, civil society partners and the Angolan government have been working to assist children affected by the war and to support children separated from their families during the conflict. All partners reaffirmed the importance of supporting former child soldiers in March 2003. The Ministry of Assistance and Social Reinsertion (MINARS) formalised its commitment to intensify efforts in birth registration, family tracing and reunification, education and training. The policy specifically identified the needs of children in the FQA’s, the newly accessible areas and the areas of return and resettlement as having a priority. The strategy includes support to former underage soldiers through access to identity and citizenship, family reunification, education and vocational training opportunities. UNICEF stated at the time that healing psychosocial wounds of former underage soldiers and reuniting them with their families was important for Angola’s long-term recovery. Despite the apparent commitment, interventions to date have been piecemeal and have occurred outside the framework of the formal demobilisation program.

---

41 IRIN 10/03/2003.
4. METHODOLOGY: THE FORMERLY ABDUCTED GIRL SOLDIERS RESEARCH PROJECT

The aims of the research project were to:

1. Define the dimensions and characteristics of the problem of formerly abducted girl soldiers in Angola, through the generation of baseline data on war experiences, social support and reintegration strategies and to identify barriers preventing access to support and social services.
2. Identify ways of facilitating the social support and reintegration of the formerly abducted girl soldiers and war-affected girls in general.
3. Design strategies aimed at influencing public policy on child protection and children’s rights issue in relation to children who were directly involved and affected by the conflict.
4. Disseminate the results of this research locally, nationally and internationally to generate policy dialogue and suggest mechanisms for best practice in demobilisation.
5. Identify the gaps in research on children’s rights and child protection in developing countries entering a post-war phase.

4.1 Data Gathering Process:
The research was started with no specific hypotheses or particular lens with which to analyze the data. The aim was to seek, hear and document the voices of the abducted girls, their opinions on how the war affected them and how the embryonic peace process is impacting upon their lives in order to better design support and intervention strategies specifically for this group.

Preparation for the project included an intensive five-day workshop for the four-person research team, the project manager and the three interviewers. CCF Angola staff who had conducted previous research into war-affected children and underage soldiers conducted this workshop. The main themes of the workshop included focus group and individual interview methodology, data organization, security and integrity; transcription, recording and registration techniques; ethical and cultural issues; psychosocial and child protection issues; management of psychosocial stress and its manifestations both for project participants and project team; self care of the interviewers.

The project team were all skilled psychosocial workers and interviewers, all of whom had previously worked with underage soldiers. Two of the interviewers had themselves been abducted as children and spent time with the UNITA armed forces. During the course of the research, the team requested and received additional training, supervision and regular debriefing to cope with the work, the stress inherent in the listening role and the complexity of their responses to the stories told by the girls.

Staff support included monthly, structured team de-briefings facilitated by CCF staff (a clinical psychologist and two social workers) experienced in psychosocial program work in conflict and post-conflict situations. An additional two-day staff support and debriefing meeting was held while the team were conducting the fieldwork in rural areas in Huambo, where the extreme vulnerability of the women and young girls was most marked. This consistent and structured support was considered essential to enable the team to fulfill the role of listeners to the girl’s
stories. Not only is this type of research difficult in terms of the war content, but the research team also experienced the extreme vulnerability of the young women interviewed as very stressful. The following are the main areas of stress experienced by the research team:

- Feeling powerless and exploitative, taking the girl’s time and confidence, and not being able to respond to explicit or implicit requests for very small amounts of material assistance.
- Anger and denial as they struggled to interpret the exploitative reality of the post-war situation as described and lived through by the young women. Struggling to find meaning, value and security in the emerging peace and the type of post-war society, which exploits the already traumatized and vulnerable.
- Re-living their own war experiences.

The preparation and pilot phase included the identification of two levels of implementing partners:

- Partners in Luanda and Huambo, who helped to assess the dimension of the problem, provided logistical support to identify key informants, facilitate community entry and identify community resources and other resources with a view to future support for the formerly abducted girl soldiers. These included the Ministry of Social Reintegration, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the family, church groups, NGO’s Development Workshop and Save the Children/UK in Huambo, UNITA political structures in Huambo.
- Partners from church groups, community-based organisations, political party organizations, local authorities, government programmes, NGO’s, UN agencies who will support and enable the formerly abducted girl soldiers to access services provided by their own or other organization or institutions.

The study group consisted of forty formerly abducted girl soldiers. Twenty were interviewed in a peri-urban area of Luanda and twenty in rural areas of Huambo province. A young sample was planned, with no more than 20 percent of the sample consisting of young women over the age of twenty years. However, because many of the girls were abducted at different periods during the war, the ages of the women interviewed ranged from 13 to 34, with an average age of 21 years. The age range provided a more complete picture of the problem and its evolution over the duration of the war. All the young women interviewed had returned from the war within the previous three years, and all were under the age of eighteen at the time of their abduction.

An attempt was made to interview as many girls as possible who were active combatants, as well as those who worked in a supportive role in the fighting forces.

To obtain an appropriate sample, the research used iterative sampling as far as was possible. This process involved the use of known and trusted key informants to identify the formerly abducted girls and their older female relatives, who then identified others, who then become potential interviewees, and so on. Random sampling was not feasible and nor ethical because of the implicit lack of anonymity. At the other end of the spectrum, convenience sampling risked a focus on a subset of the population that may be less affected, better integrated, or both. Iterative sampling has outreach capacity, enabling contact and the seeking of informed consent with more than those who present themselves initially.
Our experience during the pilot in rural Huambo indicated that iterative sampling as we had planned, could not take place. At the project sites, the research team first met with the local *soba* (community leader) and presented the research project - first in general terms re all war affected children and youth, narrowing it down to finding out the experiences of girls involved by force in the armed conflict. It was hoped that once permission was granted to conduct the research, the process of iterative sample would occur through focus group discussions and individual interviews with three main groups of key informants. However, traditional authority is such that once we spoke to the *soba* and presented our research, the *soba* immediately identified a couple of young women, set up the interviews, and gave us carte blanche to confidentially interview them in private. The key informants interviewed in the villages did not identify the individual girls, but confirmed that the girls and young women identified by the *soba* had indeed been abducted by armed forces during the conflict. This experience was repeated in all of the four rural areas accessed in Huambo.

In the rural villages of Huambo, access was easier in terms of swiftly identifying the young women and the willingness of the young women to sit for hours and speak with us. The people who participated in the research appeared to know who all the former abducted girls were. The participant communities did not appear to be hindering access. There appeared to be a collective recognition of the girl’s particular experiences. This recognition seems to exist because the girl’s experiences are part of the shared, collective experiences of much of the population who was forcibly or otherwise involved in the Angolan armed conflict. These young women appear to be seen as a part of the whole community’s experience of the war. It is acknowledged that they suffered extremely, as did others:

...all that suffering we are speaking, it is for all of us. (Boys FGD, Luanda).

*Before 1992 maybe you could say that there was a difference between men and women in the way that they experienced war. But from the siege of Huambo up until the end of this last war, men and women suffered equally and in the same way. It affected everyone.* (Boys FGD Huambo)

It was more difficult to identify the young women in Luanda and to subsequently secure a safe and confidential interview site; the girls were also more reluctant to spend hours talking to the interview team without getting something in return. Initial access made through contacts with church groups, community nurses and NGOs and iterative sampling followed. The iterative sampling was possible in the peri-urban areas of Luanda and Huambo. Incidences of discrimination against the ‘ex-bush’ and ‘ex-UNITA’ girls were reported in the urban study areas, and the urban-based participants guarded and valued their relative anonymity in the city. It appears as if the looser and freer networking process, and the perceived security granted by the formerly abducted girls’ anonymity, facilitated the urban-based iterative sampling. *(edit: needs clarification and explanation...how did iterative sampling work in the peri-urban areas and why)*

For demographic information of the young women interviewed, see section 3.1.
Fieldwork was carried out in two phases. Pilot research was conducted from January to March 2004 in the two fieldwork locations of peri-urban Luanda and rural Huambo. This period was used to test sampling methods, to pilot strategies of negotiating access and contacting traditional leaders in rural areas, to probe the communities and girls understanding of the war and the impact it had on their lives and to develop the research tools. The second phase of the research, from April to August 2004, took place in the same field locations, with the adapted and refined research tools.

The following research instruments were developed:

1. Consent Form
2. Ethical guidelines for interviewers
3. Field and interview guide for CCF interviewers
4. Participatory Focus Group Discussion Guides: women, adolescent boys and girls
5. A semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interview schedule with formerly abducted girl soldiers.
6. Interview schedule for community leaders and traditional leaders.
7. Interview schedule for Traditional Healers
8. Interview schedule with catechists and church leaders.
9. Discussed but not written: protocol on iterative sampling methodology. (edit: are there any do’s and don’ts)
10. Demographic profiling for each formerly abducted girls soldiers
11. Thematic and Coding categories
12. Analysis table for summarized data
13. Feedback and advocacy workshop plans.

The content and structure of the in-depth, semi-structured interview schedules were based on lessons learnt from CCF’s previous experience working with underage soldiers. This included but was not exclusive to the 1995 ‘Province-based War Trauma Training Project’, the 1996 Reintegration of Underage Soldiers’ project, and in particular CCF’s involvement in the 2002 Four Nation Quaker study on “The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers”.

The individual interview consisted of three sections:

1. ‘Life Before the war’, and The Abduction/Capture: exploring some of the young women’s life history before she participated in the armed conflict, her abduction experience
2. The ‘War Experiences’ focusing on the girl’s life as an underage soldier: in the army, in the camps and living and traveling in the bush
3. Return, the Destination and Re-Integration: return process, her post-conflict experience – demobilisation (if any), reintegration, the meaning she is able to make out of her experiences, a clarification of her perceived social role, future plans and dreams, and what she needs to get there. This included questions about the current coping strategies used to seek and attain different forms of social and economic support.

The original title of this research project was: “Breaking the Silence: Girls Abducted during Armed Conflict in Angola”. During the pilot however, we found that the term ‘formerly

---

abducted girl soldiers' was strictly interpreted by the participating communities to only include the girls who were plucked from the fields where they were working the land, the wells from which they were getting water, and not girls who were forcibly incorporated into the armed conflict in any other ways. The research team responded by changing and broadening the title to 'girls forcibly involved in the armed conflict'.

In-depth interviews were chosen as the method of inquiry because interviewing is “most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community collaboration. Finally, it is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in other’s stories” (Seidman, pp 7-8, 1998).43

The issue of a negotiated access and informed consent was crucial. The interviewers discussed the research, expectations and confidentiality issues with each of the formerly abducted girls soldiers, and they each signed a consent form.

The team first met with the formerly abducted girls soldiers, introduced themselves and the project, and made a time suitable with the young women for the interview time and place. Each interview was conducted in the early mornings before the formerly abducted girls soldiers went to work, and in the afternoons after work and lunch, over a period of two days. The interviews took place in the offices of the implementing partners, and the interviewers and the young woman most often sat comfortably on the floor. It was more problematic in Luanda to find a conveniently located, confidential interview site, and complicated transport arrangements had to be negotiated. The interviewers worked in pairs, with one interviewing and in the case of the Focus Group Discussions (Fad’s) facilitating, and the other managing the tape recorder, taking notes, matching body language, non-verbal communication and any interruptions with the narrative and generally managing the situation and ensuring privacy. Interviews took longer if the young women had their babies with them.

The interviews were conducted in the girl’s mother tongue, Umbundu, Tchokwe and Portuguese. The 3-4 hours interview schedule used in the pilot did not yield sufficient data. The interview schedule was deepened and extended to approximately 3-6 hrs over two days. This schedule yielded about three times as much information. It appears as if the extended interview time increased the opportunity for the interviewed person to establish trust and rapport with the research team and thereby enabled the girls to reflect on their past experiences, resulting in a greater depth and disclosure, yielding more personal narrative and less use of the third person, facilitating more disclosure of sexual abuse and of relationships with war husbands.

(\textit{edit: did the three person team rotate roles while they worked in pairs? What was specific role of senior field research officer?})

Focus group discussions (FGD) were held with three different groups: female relatives of formerly abducted girls, adolescent girls and adolescent boys. The Field research manager had been previously trained in AED’s systematic participatory analysis approach to focus group discussions44, and used that system to develop the FGD guide, take field notes, organize the

transcriptions and summaries of the taped discussions. As with the individual interviews, note was taken of non-verbal communication and any interruptions.

The FGD’s with the adolescent girls and boys gathered data on how other youth view the formerly abducted girls, collected information on the adolescents own war and return experiences and established contacts useful in identifying formerly abducted girls who might agree to be interviewed.

**Key informant interviews** were people knowledgeable at the local level regarding war-affected girls in general, and formerly abducted girl soldiers in particular. Key informants included political party officials, church workers, international agency and NGO workers, government officials, IDP, refugee/returnee camp personnel, military personnel, health workers, teachers, key women and elders.

The strategy in the meetings with the *soba’s*, the key informant interviews and the Fad’s was to begin by discussing the effect of the war in general, before focusing on the experiences and problems faced by children and by formerly abducted girl soldiers. This appeared to be a successful attempt to defuse any hostility that may arise through a focus of time and resources on one group of people, where there are many potentially competing vulnerable groups. These discussions served as *sensitization exercises* to enable relationship building, awareness raising and prepare the groundwork for joint agreements between CCF and the local community should future collaboration take place on work to assist the formerly abducted girls soldiers and other war-affected children and youth.

The key informants, in particular the key women and the military officers, were able to talk and to advise on the formerly abducted girls soldiers situation. The key informants and the adolescent boys and girls who participated in Fad’s provided a community perspective on the problem, for example, how the community regards the girls and to what extent it is aware of the problem. They helped to identify locally perceived issues of risk, where an issue had ethical implications, and what norms, practices and values in the community might influence the girl’s reintegration.

The interviewing and group facilitation was conducted in a highly supportive manner. Time was given for **reflection and support**. Where relevant, the research team paid the transport costs of the participants. Juice and biscuits were given during the interviews to replenish energy used during the draining process of discussing difficult, often traumatic material. This support was seen as critical since previous research and experience shows that in-depth interviewing and the research process itself can increase vulnerability by reminding the girls of their traumatic experiences, by resulting in loss of income, and by bringing the girls into public focus thus possibly placing them at risk.

A **field de-briefing** was held after each interview and FGD. The field team organized all their materials (labeling tapes and notebooks, checking the recording) to ensure data integrity. They discussed logistical issues, their impressions of the meeting while it was still fresh in their minds, and documented any of their impressions in their field notes. The field notes were judged inadequate despite repeated pleas from the project manager to the field research team. It seems
that the interviewers did not take their own opinions and impressions seriously enough to view them as valid observations that merited documentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Luanda</th>
<th>Huambo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-Depth individual interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research body</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(852 pgs typed and organised data)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group Discussions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Body</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(186 pgs typed and organised data)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1x teenage boys 13-18 yrs N=10, 1x teenage girls 13-18 yrs N=9, 1x women 23-55 yrs N=12);</td>
<td>(1x teenage boys 13-18 yrs N=11, 1x teenage girls 13-18 yrs N=12, 1x women 23-55 yrs N=13);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key informer interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Body</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(102 pgs typed and organised data)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback workshops and Advocacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Meetings with potential implementing partners</td>
<td>7 Meetings with potential implementing partners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Community sensitisation meetings</td>
<td>4 Community sensitisation meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Body</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (Meetings with World Bank and GoA re the Angolan Demobilisation Programme, ADP)</td>
<td>2 Feedback workshops with provincial level GoA, implementing partners and civil society organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Feedback workshop with national level GoA, implementing partners and civil society organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of **feedback and dissemination of the key findings**, three feedback workshops were held: two in Luanda and one in Huambo. The feedback workshops served as an opportunity to for **sensitization and advocacy** among the implementing partners, government officials, military
personnel, political party officials, church groups, university and research institutes, local and international humanitarian agencies, donor agencies and the diplomatic corps. The feedback exercises aimed to highlight the experiences and needs of all war-affected girls in the immediate post-conflict scenario and to place the issue with priority on the development and protection policy agenda of the Angolan government and the international agencies and multi-lateral bodies for the longer-term reconstruction phase.

The research took place in an era of fragile peace emerging from 41 years war, broken peace efforts and the internal displacement of millions of people. An atmosphere of political sensitivity, fear and denial surrounds the issue of girls abducted during the war. The challenge was to conduct the research within the limits of people’s perceptions of risks and threats and in a way that did not further stigmatize and endanger the girls. Based upon the research process, recommendations are made to improve research capacity around children’s rights and child protection in Angola, and for developing countries entering a post-conflict phase.

4.2 Data Management and Analysis:
The interviews and FGD’s, including those of the pilot study, were transcribed verbatim, first by hand, then checked with the field notes written during the interview, and then typed up and rechecked against the handwritten transcripts and the tape recording. Note was taken of all the non-verbal signals such as coughs, sighs, crying, pauses, and interruptions that are recorded on tape. All of the Umbundu transcripts were then translated into Portuguese, and then 15 of the Portuguese transcripts were translated into English. All of the coded and analysed summary tables were done in English. Time and budgetary constraints did not allow for more Portuguese to English translations.

Identifying information was changed to protect the people interviewed. Three people knowledgeable about the local culture reviewed the narratives to provide perspective on aspects of the language and culture that might not be clear from the transcription. A selection of narratives and coded transcripts were peer reviewed by two child protection specialists outside of CCF Angola, both of whom have extensive research and work experience with ex-child soldiers.

The decision to lengthen and deepen the pilot interviews resulted in 3219 pages of raw data, and 1140 pages of typed data, constituting a daunting and costly volume of information to manage and analyze. The process of transcribing, typing and translating the data from Umbundu to Portuguese, and then to English proved expensive and time consuming. Two Umbundu-Portuguese translators/transcribers, and one Portuguese English translator were hired full-time along with a typist.

The interviews and group discussion narratives were subjected to thematic content analysis. The reduction of the data was done inductively rather than deductively. The material was not approached with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context with which to then match the collected data. The narratives were read and re-read, seeking what emerged as important and of significant from the text. Common themes from each of the interviews were identified, verified across the research team members, synthesized into codes and categorized. Six summary tables were made of the coded transcripts: two for individual

interviews sets, two for focus groups discussion sets and a further two for key informant interview sets; each set had a table for Luanda and one for Huambo. The summary tables included illustrative quotes. Attempt was made to chose quotes because they powerfully characterize a common theme, rather than purely for their dramatic, possibly idiosyncratic value. The common themes and summaries served as the basis for analysis, developing conclusions and recommendations. The following commentary reflects the experience of this research team:

“The narratives we shape of the participants we have interviewed are necessarily limited. Their lives go on; our presentations of them are framed and reified,…Moreover, the narratives that we present are a function of our interaction with the participants and their words….we still have the possibility that other interviewers and crafters of profiles would have told another story…We have to allow considerable tolerance for uncertainty in the way we report what we have learnt from our research.

Every research method has its limits and its strengths. In-depth interviewing’s strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people’s experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experience interacts with powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work, and we can discover the interconnections among people who live and work in a shared context.

‘In-depth interviewing…has led me to a deeper understanding of the amazing intricacies and, yet, coherence of people’s experiences, of the complexities and difficulties of change” (Irving Seidman, pp 111-112, 1998).
5. KEY FINDINGS

The findings are reported under the thematic categories used. The quotes are used to illustrate points made, rather than representing the actual numbers of respondents who made that point.

5.1 **Demographic Profile of the 40 Formerly abducted girl soldiers interviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Date of Interview</td>
<td>All in the 4-month period including April, May, June, July 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Location of interview</td>
<td>20 in peri-urban Luanda (Viana; Estelagem, Campo de Descolados, Bairro Miru, Zonas A &amp; B, KM 9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20 in rural areas surrounding Huambo city, Huambo province (Campo de Deslocados de Cantao Pahula in Caala; Cachiungo; Tchicala TcholohanFQA; Huambo bairros and city).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Age of interviewee</td>
<td>Average age at present: 21 (Luanda 22; Huambo 20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45% (N=18) formerly abducted girls soldiers were 18 yrs and younger at the time of the interview (7 Luanda; 11 Huambo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Age range of sample at time of interview: 13-34 (Luanda 13-34; Huambo 16-32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Province of origin</td>
<td>Majority from Huambo (N= 50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Luanda interviews</strong>: Huambo: 10, Lunda Norte: 3, Uige: 2, Benguela: 2, Malange: 1, Kwanza Norte: 1, Kwanza Sul: 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Huambo interviews</strong>: Huambo: 10, Bie: 5, Benguela: 2, Kuando Kubango: 2, Kwanza Norte: 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Age when Abducted/captured</td>
<td>Average age captured: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45% (18) did not remember their age at time of abduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Luanda</strong>: average age 11.5; 12 did not remember, one was 6 months old when mother was captured, one born in UNITA area during the war;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Huambo</strong>: average age 12.7; 6 did not remember, one born in UNITA area during the war).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Abducted/captured by which armed force</td>
<td>22.5.% (9) captured by FAA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72.5% (31) abducted by UNITA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5% (5) experienced multiple abductions both by FAA and by UNITA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>No. of years spent with armed forces</td>
<td>2-18 yrs <em>(edit: what was average)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45% (18) did not know how long they spent with the armed forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>No. of children</td>
<td>80% (32) had children (Luanda 16, Huambo 16).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- 17.5% (7) pregnant on return (Luanda 4, Huambo 3).

|   | Age of children | Average age of children, some of the formerly abducted girls soldiers did not know their children’s ages: 3.9 yrs  
Luanda: 4.5 yrs, Huambo: 3.4 yrs |
|---|---|---|
|   | Average number of surviving children: 2\textsuperscript{46}  
Luanda: 2.6, N=42. Huambo: 2, N= 33 Huambo |  
\textsuperscript{46} |
|   | 3 of the Huambo formerly abducted girls soldiers had children that died during the time spent with the armed forces\textsuperscript{47} (2 had 2 children that died, and one had one).  
On average girls were 16 yrs old when had first child (subtracting age of oldest child from formerly abducted girls soldiers age). |
|   | Level of literacy/level of education | 60% (24) no formal and informal schooling whatsoever.  
Luanda: 7 studied, average 5.5 yrs in formal education  
Huambo: 9 studied, average 4 yrs in formal education |
|   | 16 of 24 who had studied, had 3 yrs and less education and were functionally illiterate |
|   | 12.5% (5) Currently at school (Luanda 4, Huambo 1) |
|   | Marital status | Single because abandoned by war husbands: 50%  
(N=,20 10 Luanda and 10 Huambo).  
Single because never married: 20%  
Women in this situation are almost always very young.  
Married: 22.5% (N=9, Luanda: 5, Huambo: 4)\textsuperscript{48}.  
Widowed: 7.5% (N=3, Luanda:1, Huambo:2). |
|   | Who do they live with | Living alone, with or without children: 32.5%  
(N=13, Luanda: 6, Huambo: 7)  
Living with husband: 20%  
(N=8, Luanda: 4, Huambo: 4)  
Living with family members other than own children: 27.5%  
(N=11, Luanda: 7, Huambo:4) |

\textsuperscript{46} MICS 2003 data: on average, each woman gives birth to 7 children in her lifetime.
\textsuperscript{47} Difficult info to collect, unclear how many children died during the war, whether formerly abducted girl soldiers are looking after children other than biological children.
\textsuperscript{48} MICS 2003 data: On average, women are 21.4 years old when they first marry, and men are 24.7 years old.
- Living with other formerly abducted girls soldiers: 20% (N=8, Luanda: 3, Huambo: 5).
- 53% (21) are living in female-headed households (national average is 27%)[49].

12. Living conditions

- 80% (N=32) of the sample were living in conditions of extreme poverty
- 20% (N=6/20) of the Luanda sample, and 10% (N=2/20) of the Huambo sample reported meeting their own and their children’s basic needs re shelter, nutrition, clothing; are currently able to work and/or accessing formal education, report being able to follow-through with future plans re work, education and training.

13. Livelihood, work and means of income in areas of return

- 87.5% (35) working, and 12.5% (5) not working (Luanda: 4, Huambo 1).
- Do occasional odd jobs (Luanda 8, Huambo 13), most do more than one job: buying and selling on the streets, including making and selling traditional drink, cutting wood and making charcoal.
- Agricultural labourers on other people’s land (Luanda 3, Huambo 8)
- Domestic labourers, water carriers, one works in her family’s lanchonette, one is at school and one is a church guard.
- Other means of financial support (ranking order): 1. Family members (family of origin). 2. husband. Amount and type of support received not defined.

14. Income – daily or weekly

- Difficult to calculate, sometimes paid in kind, e.g. 3 to 4 kgs of maize meal per working day, old clothes, in exchange for rent.
- When paid in cash, average 100 Kw per day for odd jobs, do an average of 3 days of paid work per week. Weekly income for working formerly abducted girls soldiers: 300 Kwanzas/ $ 3.50 per week/$15.00 per month/50 cents per day.

[49] MICS 2003 data.
5.2 Life Before, Capture/Abduction:

Life Before

Key Findings:
1. Most of the testimonies discussing war experiences take place during the period 1998-2002, as experienced by a cohort of girls aged 13 to 18 years at the time.
2. Little information given for life before the abduction, especially for the under 18’s and those who experienced multiple abductions.
3. The war-related experiences of abducted girls, and the constant movement from place to place across the countryside, lead to some losing their sense of time, sequencing of events, and parts of their own identity.
4. The deliberate identity suppressing the girls underwent diminished previous memories of identity, relationships, place and community.
5. Adolescents living in the frontline villages, not under UNITA or FAA control, report how difficult it was to be subjected to constant harassment, theft, forced recruitment and abduction from the marauding armed forces.

Life Before

The information in the life before the abduction section was sparse in the individual interviews, the focus groups and in the key informant interviews. Possible reasons for this could be that:
- Structurally and in terms of facilitation the interview was biased towards the abduction and war experiences,
- The war experiences are so dominant that they overwhelm the narratives,
- The field team reported that recollection and concentration was difficult for the 18 formerly abducted girls soldiers who were 18 yrs and younger at the time of the interview, (Luanda: 7 ; Huambo: 11),
- Recollection was difficult for the formerly abducted girls soldiers who experienced multiple abductions (N=5), were abducted at a very young age, for the two who were born in the military zones, and for those who lived in the military zones from a very young age,
- The constant moving from place to place, especially during the last phase of the war, 1998 to 2002, made it difficult to identify and retain points of reference regarding continuity of time and place, of friends, parental figures and community.
- During captivity, the girls underwent deliberate identity suppression; this diminished previous memories of identity, relationships, place and community. Reported examples include being forbidden on the threat of death to talk about the past in case it signified plans for alliances and escape; being separated from family and community members on abduction; the girl’s choosing to change their names in the hope of confusing UNITA and possibly making it more difficult to be found if they escaped.
In two cases, girls abducted by UNITA girls were given a number, rather than a name, after being abducted:

*They started calling me number 7* (EM 2, Huambo, pp2)

*My name never changed, it is the same. But there my name was 12.* (EM 12, Luanda).

*They said that you no longer need the names that your mothers gave you.* (EM 7, Huambo, pp1)

*I changed my because the others told me - You cannot give your true name, you must give a false name because if you escape .... they will not find you; when they search for Maria, they will show them a person that is not you.* (EM 3 Luanda, pp 8)

*Is like this: there, when you are speaking, sometimes they hear what you are saying about your past, how you lived, then they say that you are preparing to escape and they control you all the time. We knew because when you talk about the past they stay alert listening: these girls have a program to escape. We saw that they don’t like when we talk about the past.* (EM 2, Luanda, pp 10)

Brett50, based on research done in Angola with girls soldiers in 2001, writes that the experience of abducted girls, especially those who experienced multiple abductions, can lead to some loosing their sense of time, sequence of events, and their own identity.

*I came with 9 years, and now I am 10 months old* (EM 1, Huambo)

*In the first days we didn’t speak but, after a while we could understand each other. There, we couldn’t speak about our pervious life* (EM 16, Huambo)

*They didn’t let you speak because they thought: those are thinking too much on their homes and speaking about life with their mother, so they will escape soon. So, they did not let to speak about the past, and you forgot about all of that* (EM 11, Luanda).

Adolescent boys and girls from the Huambo focus group, a rural area outside of Huambo town, report how their villages were subjected to harassment, robbery, forced conscription and abductions from both UNITA and FAA51: It was stressful and dangerous to live neither on one side or the other. Participants of both the adolescent focus groups had been captured either by UNITA or by FAA; many had lived in places that were attacked and some places were attacked frequently and repetitively.


51 Chipipa was a “front-line” area between areas controlled by the Government and by UNITA. Chipipa was near the front line from the Lusaka agreement of Nov 1994 until 2002. It is probably the end of this period that adolescents of this age are talking about (1999 – 2002).
All we did was run. Some flee that way, others flee the other way, some hid in the mountains others hid in the banana trees. (Girls’ FG Huambo, pp 2)

In the bairro, all that happens is robbery; they even take your blankets and clothes off you. (Girls’ FG Huambo pp 2)

5.3 Abduction and Capture

Abduction/Capture

Key Findings:
- Two of the young women were born in the UNITA areas during the war.
- 90% (36) abducted by UNITA, 22.5 % (9) of the 40 by FAA. However, there is a crossover of 5 of the 40 (12.5%) who experienced multiple abductions both by FAA and by UNITA.
- All the young women were separated from their families when abducted by the armed forces.
- None of the young women have returned to intact family groups.
- All have lost family members to the war.

1. The abductions appear to be directly related to the guerrilla forces need for regular supplies of food, constantly available labor to construct shelter and transport arms and supplies.
2. There appeared to be a deliberate strategy, mainly because of the decreasing resources over the course of a prolonged armed conflict, of targeting young children that were then used as a pool of forced and compliant labor for the military.
3. On attacking and entering a settlement, the old and often women with young children were left behind, men were captured or killed, and young children aged 10 and above and adolescents were targeted and abducted.
4. In areas controlled by UNITA, village leaders were sometimes obliged at the risk of death, to provide children and adolescents to the armed forces.
5. Family members and people from the same community were deliberately separated on or within a day or two of abduction.

Abduction/Capture

The reasons for the abduction appear to be related to the provision of labour to the armed forces to supply food, shelter and transport.

Five of the forty formerly abducted girls soldiers experienced multiple abductions both by FAA and by UNITA. Both the opposition UNITA forces and the government FAA forces forced groups of people to be involved in the armed struggle through abducting groups of people to

52 For example EM 22, Huambo was abducted at 9 by UNITA, and 14 by FAA., EM 15, Luanda was abducted twice by UNITa, at 9 and 15 years old
work and fight for the armed forces, and through coercing villagers and townspeople to supply the armed forces with food, livestock, tools and implements, clothing, people and shelter. Post 1998, it was part of the government military offensive on UNITA, to clear the countryside of people thus depriving them of food, shelter and labour.

When referring to the girl’s original abduction, the interviewees tended to use the terms “abducted” or “captured” to refer to UNITA’s abduction of girls and young women, and referred to FAA as “rescuing” the young women, even when this involved enforced work within FAA, or forced displacement to IDP camps and towns. When the formerly abducted girl soldiers talk about their capture by FAA, they talk about being forced to walk and carry for long distances, about experiencing attacks and working to support the soldiers, and eventually walking to a town, an IDP camp or in 2002, to a military gathering area. When probed, “rescued” referred to the fact that the children, regardless of the circumstances of their journey, were taken by FAA from the bush to the perceived safety of the urban areas, where food was often available. FAA was largely based in urban areas, with UNITA in the countryside. Thus the use of the term ‘rescued’ and not ‘abducted’, is an indication of the different meaning attached to the final destination of their FAA forced marches: to get out of the bush and into an organised camp or a town.

EM 7, Huambo describes her capture by FAA:

*The day I was captured I can remember very well. But I can’t remember the date because at that time I was a little girl. My feet were all swollen and inflamed from the walking. Thanks be to the person who carried me on their back. Carried me all the way there.* (EM 7, Huambo)

*Well (...) it was barely dawn when FAA captured us. The rain was falling lightly as we left there and I said, ‘O mother, it’s raining, lets go’. Yet we were already surrounded. I called out; it was utterly dark down there. ‘Oh mother the government is coming!’ At that time we didn’t know the government. ‘The government is coming. Yes, the government people. Today we’re finished. Let’s not run, if we run someone will die. They’ll kill us.’ We stayed still. We stayed like that for a while, and then suddenly we saw them- all of them saying ‘Stop there, stop there’. We froze. ‘Grab the goats!’ We grabbed the goats, and right then they tied them up. We thought they would take us all. Yet in the end they only took the youngest people”.* (EM 14, Luanda, pp 1)

One of the key informants, a UNITA colonel in the reserves, whose nieces were abducted during the war, reported that at some phases of the war when UNITA troops withdrew from a place they would take the civilian population with them to protect them, and later the captured population would go back to the town or would stay with UNITA. He claimed that if the population was not “...withdrawn from the towns, government troops would come and rape and pillage and then say that it was UNITA” (KI Luanda 3, pg 14).

The UNITA colonel goes on to report that at another phase of the war when it was a ‘long-term guerrilla war’ (pg 13), it was necessary to have the population inside UNITA territory as a support to the soldiers to cultivate and perform activities that are necessary to support a guerrilla army. He states that for the Party to evolve there had to be structures and there had to be people.
The people had to go to the areas that UNITA dominated in order to be able to create party structures. The UNITA colonel goes on to report that there was never a formal plan to take only girls or children, the plan was to withdraw all the civilian population. But the men did tend to escape first, and there was a tendency to take more often those who were able to support the long walking, the marches with carrying heavy weights.

A woman key informant (KI 1, Luanda), an older woman, a teacher who was with UNITA from 1976 and throughout the war, noted that during the various military campaigns, UNITA found abandoned children in the bush and in the villages, and took them in and they were adopted by families in the base. She denies knowledge of children taken under any other circumstances.

However the formerly abducted girls report a more deliberate strategy of targeting young children that were then used to work for the military. It is described that on abduction, the old were left behind, men and women were captured or killed, especially women with babies, and young children aged 10 and above, and adolescents, were targeted. Family members were deliberately separated on or within a day or two of abduction.

_On that day they separated us from our mothers – the mothers going back and we going forward. We were not allowed to look back. It was just that, to separate and to cry. The abducted girls were together for a day; there were five of us. The second day they started separating us, each one allocated to their chiefs that they called elders. Every one of us was given to a different house._ (EM 4, Luanda).

_FROM the day we were caught we never saw each other again. I don’t know where they were; I just know that since they separated us we never saw each other again until now. I only met (my cousin) in the gathering area and we met my sister here in Luanda_ (EM 1, Luanda, pp 12).

_Maybe because they knew that we were sisters, they thought that we would have contact and would want to escape, and they separated us, if we are in different places the possibility to meet and escape would be less. That’s why they separated us._ (EM 2, Luanda, pp 4)

EM Luanda 1 and EM Luanda 2 say that many people from the village were abducted by UNITA but were then split up and joined with people from other places so that they were not with people they knew. For a few days they were together with their other sisters but then they were separated.

Children were especially vulnerable for abduction when working alone on the outskirts of their village. Respondents EM 2, 4 and 6 from Huambo were kidnapped when young (2 and 6 do not remember their age, 4 was about 13) when they were sent to pound and prepare maize on some rocks outside the village. Like EM 6, EM 4 was kidnapped alone; the other children had already left when UNITA came. EM 4 reports that she was taken for three days with her hands behind her back to a base and then kept tied up for a week in a bunker. She later escaped and then was kidnapped again along with four other girls.

EM Luanda 3 says only the children from the village were abducted, and they were used to carry weapons that UNITA had captured from FAA.
EM Luanda 9 says that only the children from the village (aged 10 onwards) were abducted by UNITA. The older people were left in the village though some had died in the attack (her grandfather died in the attack). Then after two days the group of children were split up and sent to different parts of the country. They could take nothing of their own except the clothes that they were wearing, and the group attacking the village eventually received what was stolen from the village: later they (the abducted girls) got other clothes by participating in attacks on other villages.

*They took us all and we had only the clothes that we had on. All the personal stuff we had they took for them; they divided it between them. Later on, when they sent us to carry material to the frontline, to attack the districts, and I don’t know what more, then we also took things for ourselves.*

(EM 9, Luanda, pp 3)

*We walked three days to arrive there and then I noticed that my mother was no longer there. I saw that there were many abducted girls, but there weren’t others that were abducted with me in the same day. In the same day, we were the only ones, my three sisters and I.*

(EM 2, Luanda, pp 1 – 2)

A Luanda based key informant, describes how four of the nine to twelve year old girls from his family home were abducted by UNITA:

*These soldiers hit my mother and said: you stay here, we do not want old women we only want children. So they took them to the bush and they stayed there. Four girls were taken from my house. And they distributed these four girls to the houses of important people there.*

(KI 1, Luanda, pp 1)

*All you old people can stay. We’ll only take the young.’ And so they took me and my three children, my teenage sister, another brother of mine, and another; in all seven people from my house. Just like that and off. If your sister says, “I don’t go” she dies right there or they make her suffer.*

(Boys’ FG Huambo, pp 6)

EM 14, Luanda was first abducted by UNITA and then by FAA. She states that UNITA forced people who had children of a certain age in the villages to let their children go with them to the bush. She was the only one from her family taken at that time, as she was the only one of the right age. Anyone who did not accept that his or her children be taken was beaten.

*Yes there was this. They had help a public meeting to say that “all those parents who had a child above nine years old, except those that were married, they could not now be with them because they had to come to, had to join with, all the JURA to help with the movement of the troops”. So there they became conscious that that was how it was, we have to let go of our children to help the troops.*

(EM 14, Huambo, pp 8)

---

53 The respondents speak of the JURA (Juventude UNITA Revolucionaria de Angola), a political organisation for youth transformed in the bush during war into a collective workforce of adolescents aged approximately 12 – 16 years old. The JURA supported the military, behind the front-line taking food and materials to the troops, removing captured goods, scavenging for food and acting as look-outs (the latter mainly boys). From about sixteen the boys join the armed troops. From about sixteen, or sometimes younger, the girls often have babies.
Respondent Huambo EM 14 was in Bie in 1987 because her mother was already with UNITA when she was born. She says nothing about how her mother came to be with UNITA. In 1999, when the war began again and came to her area, she was eleven years old and was forced to join JURA, that is, to leave her parents and live with JURA as a group. She talks about this as “capture”. Then in 2001 she was captured by FAA when she was doing her work for JURA, i.e. scavenging for food.

EM 1, Luanda states that the reasons for abduction were:

*only to serve as Jura, to help them (UNITA) with the material transportation. After we arrived there, they told us: you will stay here with us to help us to transport the material. I was really scared because I knew I wouldn’t see my mother again”* (pp 13).

5.3 War Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Findings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Most the narratives are about war experiences related to UNITA, reflecting the fact that 90% of the girls interviewed were abducted by UNITA, and 22.5% (9) by FAA, with 5 (12.5%) multiple abductions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Military organization regarding allocation of captured people reflects age and sex norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The use of the abducted girls indicates that they worked as child and later as women soldiers. Three of the 40 (7.5%) worked as armed combatants; the rest worked in logistics and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sex labour was an integral part of the function of the girl worker-soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The abducted girls received no formal or informal schooling, and sporadic health care whilst involved with the armed forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The formerly abducted girl soldiers were treated differently from the children living in the war zones who were not abducted, or who were children of the soldiers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Military Organization

There are some differences in the discussion of the organization of the areas in which the respondents were, depending on whether they were in bush camps, base camps, camps close to towns (differences regarding well supplied towns, towns controlled by the enemy or not), or had lived in base towns like Jamba.

Likewise, the ages at which different types of work was expected of the children may have varied at different times and places, depending on what type of war was going on, how much pressure UNITA was under and the nature of the military commander in charge. During periods

54 In a 2002 MSF survey in Malange, 154 out of 197 (78%) of women questioned, had been Abducted by UNITA. In MSF *Voices from the Silence*, 2004.
of calm the bases could remain in one place for months or years. During periods of fighting the bases could be constantly attacked and people relocated. The people who remained in the base were called “the State”. When goods were brought back from attacks, half had to be given to the State. A “campaign” is when the abducted girl soldiers and some men soldiers went looking for food.

There appear to have been between 3 or 4 girls in the house of each leader and 10 or more of such houses in each camp. There were also abducted girl soldiers who did not work in the houses and were allocated to live and work with the Secretariat, which organised the logistics and transport of material which was brought in from attacks.

...thirty six lived in the houses of the elders. Everyone had three girls to work in their house, and then the others were living in a room together, their job was just to transport the material. So when they go to attack and they find material, their job was to carry the material, to take it from there to another place to keep it there. Material, munitions, mines, bombs and sometimes guns were found and carried by the JURA. The JURA did not go with the combatants. (EM 1, Luanda).

When they were not being pressurised by FAA, it appears that UNITA families lived about two or three hours from the base, in an area organised for families with “structures”. The soldiers, the Party structures and the JURA stayed in the base. The children and the baggage were some way from the base because the children make noise and could attract FAA. The respondents speak of a central organisation where they are completely dependent on the camp administration for food and clothes. Individuals did not take decisions.

The people were separate, at some distance ... two or three hours away from the base because of the children who make a lot of noise, and then in the base there was the secretariat of the Party, the troops and JURA”. (EM Huambo 14)

Living conditions during the war depended upon where the respondents were living. Huambo EM 14 speaks of a period in a rural UNITA area in Kuando Kubango as normal, likewise for Huambo EM 11 living in Andulo town. However all respondents speak of two other different situations: those who were with UNITA families spent the 1999 - 2002 period on the move and conditions were extremely difficult. In many cases, those who were older or had children were sent to refugee camps in Zambia during this period. The conditions were always very difficult for those who had been abducted.

The interviews refer to the following departments:
- Engineering Department, which laid mines.
- The BRINDE (security) and the REC: counter intelligence and reconnoitring, which usually went first into an area to act as ‘the eyes’ of the army. Often they went with engineering, and if they saw many boot marks in an area they placed mines there (EM 1, Luanda).
- The Battalion front that carried out attacks. They had girls who stayed with them, cooked for them, and reloaded their firearms during battles in the ‘red zone’. There were also other girls working for the Battalion who camped behind the
frontlines in the bush. Their role was to wait and clean up after attacks: remove dead bodies, tend the wounded, raid for clothing, food, any left over goods.

- Secretariat: Transport of material. This department also had soldiers that defended the camps. They were trained but did not go to the front. EM 2, Luanda says that she was in such a base called Canfundanga where there were soldiers’ wives and widows and a few soldiers stayed to guard them.

- The Commission: which called meetings, but the interviews have little information about what it actually did.

EM Luanda 2 says that the people that they describe as elders - os mais velhos, os chéfe’s are those that have ranks like major, colonel or lieutenant. When someone has a security guard they are called an elder. Some are active soldiers, but some are too old so they stay in the base “controlling the women”.

On arrival at the camps, the abducted groups of people were divided by the leadership along the following lines:

1. The adult men became soldiers, and were prepared for the frontline work ...the men had to go straight to the war. They had to go straight to the front and the women and children and young girls had to go and carry material. They were behind the front lines and but had to move up to take material to the troops. And the troops were not interested in whether they were children or not; as long as they had a physical constitution that allowed them to carry a weight they made use of them in this way. (KI 1, Luanda, pp1)

2. Children 9-10 years old, boys and girls, were allocated to the children’s organisation Alvorada\(^{55}\) (Dawn) and were allocated to houses of important people. These were the houses of high ranking military officers and the women belonging to LIMA\(^{56}\) who had no husbands. They stayed there working as servants until they were 14-15 years. However, depending upon the intensity of the war and the availability of resources, nine year olds were perceived as being able to work and go on marches. The respondents who were young when abducted and worked in houses of leaders doing their housework, all say that they were badly treated, beaten and did not eat properly. They had to follow the man of the house carrying his rucksack or the women of the house in the fields (if there were fields in that area). The Luanda KI 1 confirms that his young, female relatives were carrying material from the age of nine, and that one of thirteen was forced to marry.

Respondent Huambo EM 11, whose mother was abducted in an attack on a train by UNITA in the 1980’s, and she was subsequently born into UNITA in 1988, describes that:

\(^{55}\) in “Alvorada” (Dawn) a youth organisation that organised sporting activities and political meetings and celebrations for important days (such as Savimbi’s birthday). Transformed in the bush during the war into a collective work force of children aged approximately 9-12 years old.

\(^{56}\) Unita’s women’s orFQAanisation, the LFQA Independente das mulheres Angolannas (Angolan Women’s Independent League is the women’s political arm of the party that played an active role following and supporting UNITA troops during the war, as well as grouping together the captured women into a workforce.
The more important people, the Generals and Colonels. It was these that had the right to have children in their houses. It was to help their wives, to wash, to do the food and look after the children. We did not have these girls in our house because my uncle gave us young boys from his house to help us. (pp 5)

3. The adolescent boys then went on to become active combatants soldiers or to support the frontline troops.  
From sixteen years to twenty-five they were in the troops. Those boys who were ten or twelve or fourteen or fifteen were also in the JURA. (EM 14, Huambo, pp9)

The boys, those whose age was a bit more advanced were in the troops and those whose age was a bit less helped this group (of JURA, EM 14, Huambo, pp 5)

4. The adolescent girls either went in the JURA where they worked to support the base and the frontline troops, or into the Secretariat.
In the base we were in that structure of JURA because at that moment there was no JURA who was still in the house of the mother or the father, all who were of a little more advanced age were abducted to help the work of the troops. We were all of us, all the JURA, in one house. And there we were doing the work of the soldiers. (EM 14, Huambo, pp 8)

When the JURA accompanying the troops arrive at a base and find other young people there, they will eat and then begin to practice (dancing). But this is on the way to the front line. When going to the frontline they might pass through other bases. Yes, that is what they would do. Practice and then begin dancing to a record player. If they arrive at the front so as to attack, they will not dance. They will only then dance when they get back to their own base. (EM 2, Huambo, pp 7).

These young girls who were taken all went to the JURA. The work of those in JURA was just that, to go with the troops. Their work was to go with them to the battles and bring back all the things that they found from those houses where they had passed. (EM 2, Huambo, pp 5-6).

......the kidnapped girls carried munitions’ boxes and wore away the hair in the middle of their head. (KI Huambo 3:) 

Sometime the food ran out but the troops are holding out and do not want to return even though the material has run out. They cannot leave there to come back to get material so they have to send an order to the JURA to go and fetch the material, this being for the defence of everyone. (Girls FG, Luanda, pp12).

So as soon as we arrived there (in the frontline) someone communicated to the troops that the JURA was coming bringing them food..... And so after they had finished eating everything that we had brought, the JURA picked up all the material that they (on the other side) had dropped and straight away took it to where we had come from. (EM 14, Luanda, pp6).
We were always ordered. The women in charge of JURA ordered us to do things: “you, do this” and we had to carry it out or else we were hit. (EM 14, Huambo, pp 18)

EM Luanda 9 says that she was a JURA leader and thus had a uniform and a military rank. She had to motivate people to transport material, take care of ill people, take drink to ill people and try to raise the morale of the ill and wounded. She was a second lieutenant but did not have a gun. She became a soldier when she was 15.

5. Some of the girls, either while working in the elder’s home, or working within the JURA, got ‘married’/entered into unions with the elders. Falling pregnant usually signified this union, and if the man took responsibility for the girl, she went on to live in his house, usually as his second or third wife and had babies. The respondents reported girls getting pregnant at fifteen and - either because they were abused or because they saw pregnancy or a relationship with an older man as a way of avoiding the suffering and danger on the long marches. This strategy was seen to have implications later when the relationship or protection does not last, and being a single mother, with children, hinders post-peace re-integration.

Yes, when someone sees that that suffering is too much, because a person never has a chance to rest. Some, when they look at the others, who are pregnant or have children, then they begin to think that if I do that then perhaps the suffering will be less because the others who are pregnant or who have children do not go anywhere. They do not go to the marches to collect food.

Now those who have children do no go because they have children. And those who are pregnant do not go far; they stay in that place or do work close by. They go to collect wood for the jango where the older people often stay and nothing else. But those who have nothing, when the elders thinks that someone has to go and collect something then it is they who are ordered to go. They choose the older ones who have houses but do not have children or are not pregnant, and join them up with the girls and boys and send them to bring the food. You have to go collect that material if you are not pregnant or do not have a child. So I accepted the father of my child because of that suffering. (EM2, Huambo, pp13-14).

6. Older girls joined the women in Lima and worked to build houses, support the base, grow vegetable gardens, and collectively look after the young children. EM Luanda 9 says that the work of the LIMA was to make sure that the bases were clean, find out who was ill, take the clothes of the ill and make sure that they are washed. EM Huambo 6 says that the work of LIMA was to perform dances when there are important visitors to a base; this is called “agitation”. (agitação)

Those that had children were no longer allowed to be with the troops. They were with their parents or with the women in where there was the “structure”. When a child was two or three years old then it might stay with the grandmother and the mother would go back to work.

The “structure” is … there are women who would stay with children who could not be with their parents who were with the troops on the line of combat: they were there with
the children, little children, babies and with the baggage. They were with the children from two to seven or eight years’ old. That is what the “structure” was. (EM 14, Huambo, pp 9)

**Differences between abducted children and other children living in war zones**

The research clearly indicates that the formerly abducted girl soldiers were treated differently from the children living in the war zones who were not abducted. The children who were not abducted did not have to do hard labour, except that in the post-1999 period, many groups were on the move trying to move eastwards away from FAA and into Zambia, and there was no transport and fuel, so everyone had to carry something.

Girls from the Luanda focus group, who were not abducted but had been born to families in UNITA, report that the abducted girls did the following ‘work’:

- they worked in houses at the base and in the camps, including their homes, that is the focus group girl’s homes,
- they transported heavy material on the marches while some people carried nothing,
- they were sent to cross mountains just to get some food for them (the non-abducted girls and their families), and
- the abducted girls did not eat well.

EM Luanda 1 describes how the spoils of the attacks would go to the daughters of the elders:

> Every time they do an attack they take the people also, just like they did with us. They (the chiefs) make people carry things, and those things are for their wives and for those who did not go. The daughters (of the leaders) did not go on the attacks. If there is a material transportation we have to go but their daughters didn’t go. When you return, they start dividing between the daughters who did not go. (pp 4).

> Food without oil; no salt, no soap. If you can find some, they take it away and give to their daughters (EM 4, Luanda)

This was the majority opinion in the group, however one of the girls in the focus group said that these girls were well treated and that she knew a family who took a girl back to her family in another province in 2002.

> What happened to the other girls (the abducted ones) was that they were sent out to forage for food and fell into ambushes and were killed. And got ill through carrying heavy weights (Girls FG, Luanda)

The Huambo focus group of adolescent girls consisted of a group of girls who lived in a “front-line” area between areas controlled by the Government and by UNITA near Chipipa from the period of the Lusaka agreement in November 1994 until 2002. They are now aged between 14 to 17 and so were born between 1987 and 1990. Much of their testimony is about living in their villages near the front-line, being harassed by both sides especially after 1999. Some were abducted by UNITA when they were between 9 and 12 years’ old. At that time the Government also decided that the villagers ought to withdraw from the area. The girls have since come back to their own villages. The girls from the Huambo focus group who were not abducted, said of the abducted girls:
They sent them to a place called 50. If you say that you are tired on the way they kill you on the way. They say, “Rest if you want” and bury you alive (Girls FG, Huambo, pp 8)

**Food**
The respondents spend a lot of time talking about food - all mentioned the problem of eating food without salt, and eating whatever was available, taken from people's fields, taken from the houses of the dead after attacks, forcefully taking food from the villages. The best food would be for the soldiers in the base and their families. It always hurt the formerly abducted girl soldiers when they were given leaves with no salt to eat and the daughters of the elders in whose house they were living, ate good food. EM Huambo 6 talks about a “centralised economy” but where the young girls doing the housework and food preparation got the least and worst food, so sometimes they had to do extra work for some other person in order to get some food. Some respondents reported that individual families could have a field to cultivate extra food: the food of the “State” came from what was taken in attacks.

We were not accustomed to the life we found when we got to Jamba (in 1981). ... It was a centralised economy. ... For your food you had to depend on the administration. ... You had to forget everything about your house and your family .... It was about survival, it was about living for that moment only. (EM Huambo 18)

In 1995 my mother and myself went from Jamba to Andulo. .... We were living well there in Andulo. We stayed there four years. Then we retreated to the bush. We went by foot to somewhere near Moxico. We ate food without salt, and sometimes we ate only some mushrooms that we found. (EM Huambo 11)

EM Huambo 2, working as an abducted girl soldier in somebody's house in a base "We brought back food from the marches. ... There was a house where the food for everybody was kept. In the afternoon they called everyone and distributed the food. .... But sometimes it was only for the more important people .. and we only saw it when we were pounding it."

**The labor of girl soldiers**
In the bush it is like being a slave, it’s real slavery, such suffering. The girl must cook, fetch water, sometimes for the aunt and the elder to take bath, she cooks but also must go to the hut to serve the elders, sometimes she doesn’t sleep, she sleeps very late, at 7 or 8 PM she must dance, they must dance through the night; sometimes from one minute to the other they decide she must go then she has to take the bundle, if is too heavy somebody must help her put it on her head and then, she leaves to bring food, it doesn’t matter if is night, time doesn’t exist; it is pure suffering’. (Boys FG, Huambo)

Girls were used in many different ways by the armed forces:

1. **Types of labor in the bases and camps**: house servants, buying & selling, barter, scavenging for food when food was in short supply, pillaging villages for food and clothes following attacks, food preparation for the camp residents and to be taken to the frontline troops, farm labour, portering/carrying heavy material for long distances (the respondents mention from 4 days to several months, at 20 kms per day), setting up the base, getting water, housework, washing clothes for sick and wounded soldiers,
welcoming and servicing visitors, rousing/morale boosting/motivating the soldiers through dance, providing sex to the elder in whose house they were living, sex with soldiers after the dancing, and with visiting soldiers.

EM Luanda 3 says that her work was in the houses and she listed washing clothes and dishes, pounding corn, practicing (songs for presenting on commemorative and festival days like 18th June and 13th March), working for the secretariat, collecting and distributing mandioca. She was also sent to the markets where commercial exchanges happened between the two sides.

EM Luanda 9 says that there was frequent bartering and exchange of goods at markets with traders who had brought goods from Luanda and other towns on the coast. To go to the market, they had to leave the relative safety of the camps and walk across contested territory in the ‘enemy’ areas. Many girls lost their lives in mine accidents and they constantly risked attacks and rape doing this job.

Respondent Huambo 2 was born in 1986 near Kaala, abducted by UNITA when young, she does not remember her age at the time, was put to work in an elder’s house, but was soon sent out on campaigns transporting material. She reports being sexually abused; she became pregnant and had a child. She chose no to go to go to the FQA with the father of the child, her ‘war husband’, because she discovered that he had three other wives so she returned to her home village where she discovered that her parents had died. She now lives in abject poverty with her young child in a former displaced persons camp:

At that time there were small girls and bigger girls, and the chose the bigger girls and slept with them. They say that they small ones should sleep alone. We are not talking about their wives; they have left their wives at home. They are sleeping with completely different girls. The troops take the girls out with the pretext of searching for maize but when they get there they become their women. After they have made their funge they say that the time to sleep has come but they do not want them to sleep alone. Because when you are out with the troops, if you say that you are tired and want to sleep they call you and kill you straight away. So one older man said that it is better to stay with me (marry me) and this was the father of this child. But in the end he was only lying, so last year I left him, in the month of January. He already had three wives in the village. (pp 2-3)

In the bush you could not complain. If you complained they killed you or do some harm to you. …… You have no one else to complain to. I was sexually abused three times, twice by one person and once by another who had caught me. (EM 2, Huambo, pp26-27)

2. Types of labour during the marches and attacks: accompanying male soldiers on marches & attacks, usually being just behind the frontline troops keeping them fed and supplied, carrying munitions, food and other supplies (weights of 30-35 kgs, including parts for field guns and tanks) to bush camps from the centralised stores, undressing the dead and looting from people’s homes and fields after an attack, carrying looted supplies and war spoils back to base after the attacks, gathering and preparing food, making and clearing camp, keeping watch and spying (although this was a duty mainly for the young
boys), agitating (rousing and mobilizing the troops, dancing and singing to prepare the troops for battle, to keep the troops alert during the long hours of the night in case if an attack, encouraging the troops during battle, boosting their morale), irritating/irritacao (making noises to frighten and intimidate the enemy), sex labour, re-loading of arms, sabotage, caring for the wounded and sick, preparing and burying the dead. *Motivating means the JURA behind the soldiers making a noise while they were fighting “ulula ulula”. “* (EM Luanda 14 page 14).

EM Luanda 2 says that after attacks the men took things like bicycles and men’s clothes and the girls took food and women’s clothes. The main work was keeping the front line troops supplied and doing “campaigns” to find food or other material. The campaigns would involve a few male soldiers and many girl soldiers to take mandioca from fields (they did not expect resistance, therefore they did not take many soldiers). Also the girls would go with elders when they had to go somewhere (e.g. for a meeting) because they had to have someone to prepare their food, clean their clothes, service their needs including sexual needs.

EM Huambo 7 says that sometimes members of JURA were chosen to stay with wounded and disabled soldiers, and they were often forced to marry them – which seems to mean that were obliged to stay with them as ‘wives’. EM Huambo 18 says that girls were obliged to go to the dances and that it was an implicit understanding that they would have sex afterwards.

*We carried the ammunition, the dishes, and pans and did the food. When they finished the attack, we carried to the next place we went. We took clothes and food from inside the houses where the people were. First you are scared but then you see that they are dead, you take the things you went for and go away. Then you were not afraid anymore. When they finished that attack, they passed each house and checked all with guns, shooting under the bed, and opening the closet to see if there was a person inside.* (EM1, Luanda, pp13)

*No, they were sent long distances. They were children and they had not even grown up and they were given heavy loads of 35 kgs to take to the mill to be ground. One day they sent me to carry 25 kgs of salt and I fell in a hole and sprained something. And I said that I could not get up and they said “we will put you in a hole if you do not want to get up. Now an uncle who was with us said, “She is a child”. And they responded, “If she is a child, why does she not go where her father is”. It was the kwachas (UNITA) that ordered me to carry the salt .... At the time I was only 13.* (Girls FG, Huambo)

EM Luanda 1 describes taking mandioca out of people’s fields at night when the food at the base or camp was nearly finished. There were also frequent attacks to take clothes and to kidnap more people. Clothes were needed to wear and to be exchanged:

*Every time they do an attack they take the people also, just like they did with us. They (the chiefs) make people carry things, and those things are for their wives and for those who did not go. The daughters (of the leaders) did not go on the attacks. If there is a material
transportation we have to go but their daughters didn’t go. When you return, they start dividing between the daughters who did not go. (pp 4).

3. Three (7.5%) worked as armed combatants (EM 12 and 18 Luanda, EM7 Huambo); two of whom received training as armed combatants (EM Huambo 7 and EM Luanda 12). EM Huambo 7 says that she was not a fighter, though her testimony does show how close the girls were to the frontline giving the troops close support. She says that some of the older girls who trained with her became women soldiers. A common role of the frontline girls was to reload the guns of the soldiers in the heat of the battle. EM Luanda 1 says that there were some trained women fighters but they did not go to the front, they were more like police or they stayed in the camp:

Military women just stayed there as LIMA’s, they did nothing. ( pp 9)

4. Types of training: the interviews mention the following types of training, welcoming, rousing, dancing, loading guns, accompanying male soldiers, sabotage, and midwifery. Only EM Huambo 7 provides clear information about training. She claims to have been trained on a number of occasions in Jamba by South Africans in mounting and dismounting arms, defending herself against someone with a pistol (between 1993 and 1998). (edit: review the interview, there are unlikely to have been S. Africans in Jamba in the period mentioned). She also specifically mentions training in singing and dancing for the special events of UNITA. She had a position of responsibility in JURA, “controlling” a group of JURA girl soldiers on the marches.

EM Huambo 7 says that she was specifically trained to disarm men pointing pistols at her. EM Huambo 14 refers to training in being agile, in being able to run quickly to help the troops or to pick up something that the enemy has dropped. EM Luanda 14 says that she was often behind the soldiers at the front line. When a soldier died, her job was to grab the gun and run (to save the gun), but not to shoot. EM Huambo 4 refers to 2 months of training that started as soon as she was captured, and involved practicing at walking on her knees and jumping in the air. EM Huambo 6 says that there was training in how to take things from a town or village after an attack.

The journey: military campaigns, marches and attacks

The walking, the moving from one bush camp to another, from and one attack to another - the interminable, treacherous journey, always carrying heavy weights, is the most abiding image emerging from the interviews.

Suffering is lack of clothes, lack of salt, to sleep in the leaves without clothes under the rain, sleep seated near to the fire because of the cold, blemishes on the skin due to the dry skin. I hate my memories most of the rain showers and the walking. My children were so young and shouldn’t have been walking like that, but had to walk because you can’t do otherwise, and on the back you have another one. Life was just walking from one place to another, by day and by night. At first you were crying, but then you had no more tears left. (KI 5, Huambo)

When the government comes to attack, even in the night, we had to walk. And when we walked it was real walk, during the night, during the day, all the time. If the trip took us
one month, it was one month walking, night and day until the month completes. (EM 16, Huambo)

Many of them got pregnant and had to keep on marching despite the pregnancy. Sometimes the baby would die with so much suffering. Or the kidnapped girl was so angry that she would try to provoke an abortion......anger from the weight of the stomach and weight on the head ...(KI 1 Huambo)

Living and working conditions on the campaigns were brutal. The abducted girl soldiers were killed in attacks, during attacks by UNITA or attacks by FAA. Abducted girl soldiers died from exhaustion during the marches. Often burial was impossible, and ceremonies were impossible. The bodies were just left, or there was burial in a shallow hole or in a mass grave.

On the way people died, crossing the river or of cold or of hunger. The river was crossed at night, and then you walked a bit and rested and had nothing to cover you. And no fire. When the morning came you saw that some people had died." "The bodies were put in a hole if there was one, but if not they were just left. (EM Huambo 2)

There were also many people with anemia that couldn’t run, so they died. Those who had children couldn’t take them all when escaping, so the children left behind died there also. When escaping over a big river those who don’t know how to swim just jump in the river and die, only those know how to swim can go to the other side. It was always like that, in every trip people died due to the walking, the war, famine, the river. It was always like that. (EM 16, Huambo)

Whilst abducted adolescent girl and boy soldiers were the favoured logistical and military support on the campaigns, women with children sometimes went on marches. A number of interviews mention killings of children on marches, when the children were making a noise and giving away the position. EM Huambo 4 says that when they were marching but were detected by FAA they had to hide and had to find a way to stop the children from making a noise. Sometimes they had to hide in the water with children.

They were killed by hitting them against a tree. (EM 2, Huambo)

There is too far to go and sleep gets in the way for them. Whoever is too slow they shoot; suffocated the slow children not to waste bullets. We had to carry too heavy loads, 30 kg each or even more. We slept every three nights, with the children on the back, in the bush under the trees (EM 19, Luanda)

Sexual Abuse
All but one of the respondents agree that there was sexual abuse, with even quite young girls "whose bodies were hardly formed". This mainly occurred on marches, but it might involve older, more important men in the camps and military visitors to the camps, and often happened at dances. EM Huamb0 18 says that abducted girls were frequently abused, and reports that a girl who lived in her house was raped and died.

57 EM Hb 07 says that this did not happen. This might be true in her case, she was the leader of a group of JURA and that may mean that her group was better organised and the leader prevented this from happening.
Some of the formerly abducted girl soldiers found it difficult to talk about sex. Some of the girls initially spoke in the third person about how it happened to other girls, but not to them. However by the time the interview ended, during two days of interviewing, all but one of the formerly abducted girl soldiers spoke about the wide-scale sexual abuse during their abduction and war experiences. One of the respondents said that it also happened to some of the boys.

‘In the bases they used to take advantage of us, the girls and boys’. (EM 1, Luanda)

They spoke about sex as an inevitable part of their lives as girls involved with armed forces, including their forced unions with the elders. They differentiated this form of work/sex from other forms of sexual abuse. Sex labour tended to be differentiated from the following types of sex:

- The rapes of girls younger that 12/13 years old (younger than the normative age to begin sexual relationships), the rapes that took place during enemy attacks, the raping of girls by soldiers from other battalions whilst they were working in the fields/collecting food and water/walking to markets to barter. Rape was said to be frequent where there were large concentrations of troops.
- Sex the girls chose to have with soldiers they fell in love with.
- Sex the girls chose to have for strategic reasons with male soldiers; protection strategies, usually to avoid being sent on marches, attacks and to become pregnant and/or a wife and be based in a base camp.

EM Huambo 14 says that there were people in JURA and around her who protected her, so she was not abused. There was an aunt in the JURA group to protect them, and also she could call her male cousins. This is an example of protection against sexual abuse, especially if there was another family member in contact. But the abducted girl soldiers were all expected to work, there was no protection against being sent to work. And working meant marches and sexual abuse was most likely to occur during the marches.

EM Luanda 14 says that that the majority of young girls from the villages or who had been abducted slept with the elders. She was raped. She also speaks about the dances where the girls were forced to go and where they were sometimes raped. However EM Luanda 14 says that on the marches her commander was strict and there was no rape:

It seems that was their law. In their village they would see a girl and say that she was ripe to go into the JURA. They saw her age, saw she was getting big and it was time to go. Once there she simply had to be raped (pp 36) …yes my sister was raped, by the other old men as well. Anyone living at the base can be raped anyone living at the base can be raped by other men. (pp 30).

There appeared to be age and rank norms related to sexual relationships. The chiefs/elders were entitled to have sexual relationships with the abducted girls first. If this was contested by the girl or by a younger soldier, they risked killing or physical punishment.

He was a young boy and so I left him, he was not old enough to have a wife. He was around 20 years old, yes. (Smile) Before that, we knew each other, but all the boys were afraid to speak to me because of the elders. They would be beaten; they knew that the elder of the camp wanted me. And, when I was his girlfriend (the father of her child) they
beat us. It was the elder of the camp that gave the order. When a boy loves a girl that the elder likes he is killed; yes, they used to say that this is a betrayal because there they have a tradition that if a girl is courting a soldier, she cannot to court anybody else, because if they go to war if one is hurt the other can come and kill him. That’s why they didn’t let the girl has more then one. It must be just that one. (EM 1, Luanda).

EM Luanda 2 said that a soldier cannot force a girl to have sex but an elder can:

*By obligation it was only with the elders. If he is a soldier he cannot oblige you.* (pp 14).

A girl soldier’s refusal could be met with violent beatings leading to death. EM Huambo 2 has extensive testimony about forced unions and sexual abuse during the marches. She was forced to sleep with a man at gun point several times when she was fifteen and sixteen years of age. After being raped once she had to be treated in a hospital. Then she stayed with a man so as to have a child to try and reduce the suffering of the marches. EM Luanda 1 testimony illustrates the contradictions often found in the narratives - she says that it was common for the elders to sleep with the abducted girls, threatening to hurt them if they did not. But she says that there was no rape or abuse on the marches because each soldier went with his own formerly abducted girl soldier to carry the food and have sex with……..

The elder that liked me, was the big chief (the commander of the military camp). They were three; the big chief, his assistant and a chief from another department, they used to complicate my life (she left the head fall and starts rubbing the hands in the skirt). (She smiles). They forced me to sleep with them, each elder when they called me to sleep with them, if I didn’t accept they sent the guards to beat me. (EM 1, Luanda).

And afterwards, because of the life there (lack of food, hard work) my niece’s body was only just beginning to change but she was obliged to have a husband, so she was given to a husband when she was 13 or 12. She was given to a man who was about thirty years old to stay with him, even though she did not want to. And when she did not want to be with him she was hit and beaten and obliged to stay with the man. But this man showed very little interest in her, so she began to go around with a man who was a bit younger and had this child with him. (KI 1, Luanda, pp1)

Yes this happened to me. If you do not accept they put a bullet in their pistol and point it at you. ...In the bush you cannot complain. If you complain, they will kill you. ...When you are out with the troops, if you say that you are tired and want to sleep they call you and kill you straight away. So one older man said that it is better to stay with me (marry me) and this was the father of this child. But in the end he was only lying, so last year I left him, in the month of January. He already had three wives in the village. With all that suffering that I had: when it rained I asked someone for some shelter in their house but when it stopped I had to go outside and stay under a tree and make a fire. I thought that if I had a husband it would possibly be better. Even though I was only a child I would put up with that suffering. But actually he had his own wives (EM 2, Huambo, pp2-4).

EM Luanda 9 says that often a soldier would be beaten if he flirted with another man’s wife.
Within a context of war, the women made choices to increase their chances of survival:

*Well some were forced, they tell them, and from now on you must marry this man. Others are the girls themselves who decide, they see an old man, even really old, but because he has a little bit (food, clothes) and she doesn’t have to go on missions, she accepts to live together with him.* (EM 16, Luanda).

There are many references to competition between the first or older wife of the “elder”, especially if they were married before the war, and the new war wife. However all of this occurred ‘under cover’ because the women were beaten and ‘put out on a mission’ if they showed jealousy or sadness:

*They didn’t like to live in the aunt’s houses, those aunts were too jealous, they beat... they prefer to have their own houses. But when they went to the campaigns (when the whole base or camp had to move), they had to carry like us, even if their husbands were there.* (EM 16, Huambo).

EM Luanda 3 says that a JURA living with an elder will not sleep with the elder in the camp where the elder has a wife, but will sleep with him when they go on a journey.

*When they return to the base the wife cannot know about this. The umbundu woman, when she hears about this, she will inject the girl with piri-piri.*

(EM Luanda 3, page 14)

**Love Relationships and Strategic Unions**

There is evidence of control of spontaneous relationships. People fell in love, most often at risk of being separated, suffering severe corporal punishment or death. EM 1 and EM 9, Luanda, report that the elder’s beat young couples that the elder’s thought should not be together.

*She went with the elder because she was forced to and with the youth because she liked him. She loved the young one but had to go with the elder when he called because it was an obligation; But the elder should not know that she had another man.* (EM 1, Luanda, pp 110)

The elders were involved in organising for soldiers of lower ranks to have their own ‘wives’.

*When a boy loves a girl that the elders like, he is killed.* (EM Luanda 1 page 11)

*They decided who stayed with a person because normally the girls served the soldiers they carried the material and more.* (EM 9, Luanda, pp 18)

*So I accepted the father of my child because of that suffering* (EM 2, Huambo, pp 14).

EM Luanda 3 did not live with a family when she arrived in a camp after she was abducted. She was handed over to a man. She eventually entered into a union with this man and was not integrated into the JURA. She is still with this man and has a daughter but says that she has a difficult relationship with his sister.

*They put me in the hands of a boy and said to him, now your wife is here.* (EM 3, Luanda, pp 3)
EM 6 Huambo says that the elder in whose house she was staying, arranged a marriage for her with a young man, without any discussion with her. She became pregnant immediately. This young man abandoned the union and his whereabouts are unknown.

The girls to reduce their suffering and increase their chances of survival formed relationships. Becoming pregnant or being a mother, or seeking a union for protection reasons, was seen as resulting in less suffering - a better proposition than being a young girl in the house of some elder and being bullied, or being constantly out on marches and attacks. EM Luanda 14 says that she first married the man who was the head of the JURA. She did that to escape from the work of the JURA. This husband died in 1996.

EM Luanda 9 says that she married of her own free will, mainly because she saw that those who were pregnant or had children marched less. She and her husband were kept apart for one year. It was said that he was too young though he was 25. She was pregnant with her second child when her husband stepped on a mine.

EM Luanda 2 married someone in the camp, of her free will. The boy approached the elder who accepted because he already had another girl to do the work in the house. There was a party for the marriage.

**Children and Pregnancy**

Girls got pregnant because they had no access to birth control; the pregnancy often forced them into longer-term relationships. Sometimes they decided to enter into longer-term relationships because they thought that they would have to work less if they were pregnant or had a child. Falling pregnant was a risky protection strategy because some male soldiers did not recognise the pregnancy or the baby as their baby, or they simply abandoned the mother during the war or the women were abandoned on return. Other women returned to the “elder” after the war. The women who were pregnant and gave birth whilst the recognised ‘husband’ was on duty elsewhere, had to cope alone with the birth, with arranging for food and shelter for themselves and the newborn. Pregnant women outside of an acknowledged union were the most vulnerable, and babies born out of recognised relationships are the most vulnerable children.

*If she gets pregnant she stays alone, nobody assumes the responsibility. So, the girl stays alone and takes care of the child alone* (EM16, Huambo)

*If a girl loved many boys, if she loved elders then she loved another soldier that child must be taken out, or it can be born but it can’t survive. That child must die*\(^58\) (EM 4, Luanda)

The elders got girls pregnant but their wives could not complain. There were girls who were having sexual relationships with a soldier that they liked but at the same time were being forced to have a relationship with an elder. The belief was that this might lead to a child being born small and dying from “husse”, an illness in the baby caused by the mother committing adultery or having multiple sexual partners.

---

\(^58\) This is a common taboo in Angolan Bantu culture - that children of adulterous unions will not survive, and is not specific to a war setting.
Some of the prospective fathers did try and support and protect the formerly abducted girl soldier, even when the girl was the second or third wife. EM Huambo 4, had two children from a stable union contracted in the bush. But they hardly had anything to look after the children, and managed with difficulty to get a few clothes and a few articles for a house. She says that her husband was stupid, he went on attacks but did not bring back much booty from the attacks, and so they never had very much.

EM Huambo 6 says that she got pregnant immediately through a forced marriage organised by the owner of the house where she was and the young man immediately disappeared. She claims that she continued to be badly treated in the elder’s house and did not get enough food when she was pregnant. She says that there were no pre-natal consultations and treatments in the base camps.

EM Luanda 2 says that there was a girl who was forced to have sex by an elder, she became pregnant and tried to stop the pregnancy and got very ill. The elder put her out of the house and friends looked her after. Elders were never sanctioned for such behaviour.

EM Luanda 9 says, “being pregnant liberated the person from work even if there was work to do” (pp 13). She says that there were consultations during pregnancy:

> The suffering reduced (if you had children) because there were places that children could not go.” (pp 9)

EM Luanda 3 says that when a girl was pregnant she did not have to go to the front line. She only had to go to the dancing and singing practice, go to markets, and cook.

There were some family planning lessons about natural methods. But the girls were in no position to practice this. All sex could lead to babies. It was reported that there were midwives in camps, but they were only called if there was a complication in the pregnancy.

Some commanders felt that ‘the abducted girls duty is to work, not to have babies’. In some camps, abducted girls who fell pregnant without the acceptance/protection of an elder man/husband’, had abortions in the military hospitals or with herbs in the bush.

EM Huambo 2 says that many girls had abortions: they took a root that caused an abortion, because they did not even have a cloth to carry the baby and could not see how they could look after it. EM Huambo 18 says that there was an underground hospital for doing abortions but the girls often died. She reports that the girls had to take their blankets with them in case they died during the abortion, and then they would be wrapped up and thrown away there and then. EM Huambo 2 reported that doctors did not do abortions:

> Doctors who helped girls stop a pregnancy? I never heard of this. I only know of girls who end their own pregnancies, of their own free will (EM 2, Huambo).
Some testimonies reported that it was taboo to have sex with a pregnant woman, unless the man knows he is the father; an adulterous relationship would cause the baby to die.

‘During the journeys, in the night they take the girls and they sleep with them. ...in the night every soldier is with one, they just don’t sleep with you if you are pregnant or have a baby’.

The information is divided about pregnant girls and women on the marches. Some girls say that being pregnant was a way of avoiding much suffering on the marches. Others say that there were pregnant girls on the marches, who gave birth by the side of the road. Other parts of the testimonies suggest that there were stillbirths because there was no care, there was too much work and too much stress. EM Huambo 18 reports that she transported material when she was pregnant as did many others. Her husband was still alive at the time but he had been sent somewhere else, implying that if he had been there he could have protected her from the work.

The soldiers did not like the presence of children in the camps, they made a noise and impeded movement. They preferred the children to be distant. But the lack of birth control and the forced relationships meant that there were increasing numbers of children.

They did not like children. It was often the mothers and children that got killed in attacks. The marches with children were complicated because the children would cry. There was a special group of soldiers for killing children by hitting them against a tree. No-one could make any noise at all and they would kill children of any age like that” (EM 18, Huambo)

**Solidarity and Friendships**
The formerly abducted girl soldier’s resilience and capacity for agency can be clearly seen through their stories of secret solidarity and friendships.

*Sometimes the guards didn’t beat me because they liked me. They beat the floor instead* (EM 1, Luanda).

Many (smile) my friends were really good. There, all of us abducted girls lived as sisters, yes...we used to tell our stories: Oh! when we will find our families...so and so ...But when you are speaking like that their daughters can’t be there, if they hear they will tell their fathers and the fathers will call us and ask: “You are speaking like that because you are thinking in escape”. They didn’t let us stay together very often, everybody stays in her house because if we are together they think that we are talking about escaping...they didn’t accept. Sometimes we just sang church songs; we had nothing to do there (EM 2, Luanda).

Telling the other girl what I did in my mother’s house, how it was, I used to tell her and she told me things too. They couldn’t see us, when your elders went to the meetings and you stayed, then you speak; when they return everyone goes home. They didn’t let you speak because they thought: those are thinking too much on their homes and speaking about your life with your mother, so they will escape soon. So, they did not let us speak about the past, and you forgot about all of that (EM 11, Luanda).

*I walked together with my girl friends; we talked together* (EM 9, Luanda, pp 15)
The abducted girls were organised in JURA and those who were not working and living in the houses of the elder’s, often lived as a group.

EM Huambo 2 says that she had no friends and that she talks about "solitariness". She says that she had some friends before she was ten years of age, but once she entered JURA, she had few friends. EM Huambo 18 says that she was alone because she was suspected of something and not allowed to develop friendships. EM Huambo 6, says that you might be friendly with another girl working in the same house but unlikely to be friendly with anyone else.

On the other hand, EM Huambo 14 says that in JURA she was with cousins, and that there were men and boys who protected her. Note that EM Huambo 14’s mother was abducted and over time may have become integrated in UNITA. She says that she had lots of friendships at this time:

I had many friends. We ate together and did our hair together and even chose to go to the front together (EM 14, Huambo)

The girls talk about their tense relationships with the elder’s family - his wife and other children, especially if he had older daughters. EM Luanda 1 says that there were many friendships among the girls, but it was dangerous for daughters of the elders to see them talking because they would think that they were planning an escape and report to the elders and the guards. They liked to talk about their former life in their villages but the elders did not want them to talk about the past because it might make them think about escaping. They did not have real friendships with the elders’ daughters because there were always suspicions and jealousies.

They didn’t like to live in the houses of the aunts. Those aunts were very jealous and they beat. (EM 1, Luanda, pp 18).

One month after I was abducted I saw one of the daughters of the house putting on some of my clothes. I said “that skirt was mine”. The girls went to tell her mother and her mother beat me. After that, we were afraid to have any conversations with the daughters. (EM 1, Luanda, pp 5)

Free time and Schooling
The abducted girls received no formal or informal schooling apart for some political lectures. Some testimonies report schooling for those who were not considered captured, the children of the male soldiers. But there was no opportunity for schooling for anyone after 1999 when everyone was on the march. All respondents speak with regret about how their involvement in the war meant that they missed out on schooling. Adolescent girls and boys interviewed in the focus groups that were not abducted but lived in the war zones, talk about schooling and recreational activities in areas such as Andulo between 1995 - 1999.

EM 3 Luanda was abducted when she was fourteen in 2001 and did not study. EM Luanda 9 says that she left school when she was abducted in the 2nd class and never studied afterwards; she can write some letters in the alphabet but has forgotten how to write others. EM Luanda 9 said that there were no schools in the camps where she was, but she knew that there were some places without war that had schools. EM Luanda 14 says that she studied until the 3rd class and then
there was no more school. She had three years of school in the bush and her parents paid the teachers some corn.

_I have been prejudiced because I never studied, though I wanted to study to see if one day in the future I could be a person._ (Girls FG, Luanda, pp 3)

The abducted girls refer to talking to other abducted girls and boys and dancing as free time. But they also say that they were obliged to dance, sometimes all night and that it was connected with sexual abuse: only those who had just come back from a long march might avoid dancing.

_As a young girl you could not say that you would not dance, or they would beat you. ... And then it was dancing through to the morning. ... If you did not want to, you had to dance_ (EM15, Huambo)

EM Luanda 2 says that during free time they stayed in the houses talking, for example, about how they were abducted. Sometimes dances were organised when the JURA did not have much to do, but it is only the elders who could organise a dance. She says that she did not study, but there were some girls that studied 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} class but she had already completed the 5\textsuperscript{th} class and there was no schooling above 4\textsuperscript{th} class.

**Health**

Life in the bush was one of extreme deprivation and health risks for the abducted girl soldiers. They suffered from exhaustion on the marches and from lack of sleep at all times, from wounds to the feet during marches, from neck, chest and back pains from carrying heavy materials day in and day out. KI Luanda1 said that one of the things that distinguished the abducted girls from the other girls living in the war zones was a bald patch on the top of their head, an area rubbed raw from the carrying of heavy materials. The testimonies report that the abducted girl soldiers died from pregnancy and birth, injuries and wounds from attacks, punishments and the arduous marches, exhaustion, anaemia, oedema, malnutrition, starvation, TB and sexually transmitted diseases. The main sicknesses were reported to be malaria and anaemia. In some camps, there were medicines (western and traditional) for malaria. EM Huambo 18 got gunpowder in her eyes, which damaged them.

_With illness, we had to search for medicine in the soil. To dig, drink if it helps, you get well; but many got worse... many died like this. Because there, the medicines didn’t exist, but in Jamba (military camp) it did_ (EM 12, Luanda)

All the girl respondents talked at length about how there were no ways of dealing with menstruation, no way of washing the homemade menstruation pads. There was no time to stop. EM Huambo 18 thought that many girls stopped menstruating because of the poor diet and constant walking:

_Suffer! We washed with bran and ash, arranged ourselves with patched clothes and put on ulambo (traditional panties). Sometimes you don’t have underwear, neither the cloths necessary when the menstruation arrives. You were really suffering when the people saw...oh !_ (EM 18, Luanda)

_If you are menstruating there is nothing to put. You just have to let the blood run downs your legs" "And you have to go on the march even if you are menstruating._ (EM 2, Huambo).
I only started when I was in Luena (after the peace). In the bush the girls could do nothing. Sometimes it was unsafe to go to the river to wash or to change the clothes (EM 14, Huambo).

Escape and Punishment
Military discipline was harsh. All the girls knew that the ultimate penalty was death. They report that children who were too tired to walk more during the marches, or who collapsed under a heavy load, would be threatened with death. The slightest infraction, especially those involving non-authorised relationships, could mean a severe beating or even death.

All respondents thought that escape was unlikely. Very few people would try to escape because the punishment would be extremely severe, very often leading to death. Escape was hugely risky because they were in the middle of the vast bush, and unless there was a settlement nearby, girls often did not know where they were and where to go. Animal predators were also a danger, as well as dehydration and starvation, if they got lost. Another danger was being killed when approaching a human settlement. All agree that most people who tried to escape would be killed, and because they never met successful escapees, they believed that most people who escaped died in the bush or were killed by the armed forces.

It appears to have been standard practice that all the people in the base had to watch and/or participate in the killing of adults and children who were caught trying to escape.

There in the base where I was they caught a girl who had left a one-year-old baby behind when she tried to escape. They went after her and caught her and killed her when they brought her back. Everybody had to assist. They put a red band across her eyes and then they killed her. They did it to make the others afraid so that they would not try to escape. (EM 1, Luanda)

However even with the risk involved, some of the young women tried to escape. EM Huambo 4 says that she managed to escape by walking for three days to her own village with one of the other girls. But then she was abducted again. The better opportunities for escape were when they marched past settlements when they were attacking a target. EM Huambo 7, describes escaping whilst close to a place called Pomba, getting lost and being captured again:

The second time they caught me was when we went to Pomba. When we were going into Pomba, we ran away. When we were running we got confused and thought that we were going to a place where the other people were. But in the end we ran back to a place where they caught us. When we discovered that we were caught (silence),...yes...since then we suffered. They took us with ropes, saying that we ran away to betray them. (EM 7, Huambo).

Sometimes when walking, you find that they are coming from the front and from behind, it’s an attack. Sometimes many people died. Those who had courage escaped (EM 12, Luanda).

EM Luanda 1 said that she never thought of escaping, because she was in a place that she knew nothing about near the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those who tried to
escape were normally caught and beaten or killed. EM Luanda 2 says that nobody escaped and those who tried were severely beaten or killed. UNITA would say that it was impossible to escape because there were other bases all around. EM Luanda 3 confirms that people did not often try and escape, because if they tried and were caught, they were usually killed.

I was thinking but, if you think all the time about escaping, if they catch you they will kill you. Therefore people felt fear and didn't think about escaping. If you escape to the Government military troops they will kill you too. I was so afraid I used to cry, but it didn't matter if you cried: it was still the bush (EM 3, Luanda, pp 11)

People who tried to flee had their heads cut off.” .... There is a mountain called Moco with a valley in the middle, like it is cut in two, and their bodies were thrown there after they were killed (KI 5, Huambo, pp 2)

...but if you escape and they follow and catch you, they beat you. If they beat you it's just a favour, sometimes they kill you. No, I never thought about escaping, because I didn't know that bush.... and if I escaped the animals would take me...There were lions and Hyenas. Those animals cry during the night. There were some girls they wanted to escape. They did, but they didn’t succeed. They caught them; two small children, they beat them, 299 blows with a cane each. They didn't (die). They beat with lathes, with the big ones they used to beat. They let you lie down, some take your legs, others your head, others sit on your back so you can't move, and two men beat you; two that beat and others that stay by side counting until 200. Me they Gave 50 by two (when she didn’t accept to have sex with the chiefs). Each one counts 50 and in the end they give you 100 (EM 1, Luanda)

KI Huambo 1 says that if the girl tried to escape and the family lived nearby then the mother or father will be beaten.

KI Luanda 3 also refers to “sad scenes” of burning girls when they were accused of witchcraft. In the bush certain people were pointed out as being authors of crimes, especially those girls who tried to escape or who were suspected of plotting to escape, and those girls involved in ‘sexual tensions’. He describes how wounded people came from the front line (in Jamba) and the next day they said that their wounds had been rubbed with excrement and some people said that witches did this. They did not know whom, but someone unlucky was pointed out. Burnings were not usual but they did happen at certain times. It was usually a woman accused of witchcraft. The ‘State’ could determine who is a witch. He goes on to report that the “State” put an end to witch burnings when it was beginning to undermine the organization and moral of the guerrilla force.
5.5 Return and Re-Integration

Key Findings

1. **Three-stage return journey**: 1st to the military gathering areas, 2nd stage to an area of return where route and end point is determined by the elder’s family they lived with during the war or their war husband. Areas do not necessarily correspond to the formerly abducted girl soldier’s area of origin or to a desired destination.

2. A 3rd stage is to a **desired destination**, a stage desired and talked about but not reached by most girls. They desire to go to a city or place where they anticipate greater work and educational opportunities for themselves and their children, some want to link up with their families of origin.

3. The formerly abducted girl soldiers have slipped through the official DDRR process at every point. Only one of the 40 formerly abducted girl soldiers was recognised as a soldier and received a limited, once-off **demobilisation** payment.

4. 27.5% (11) of the formerly abducted girl soldiers have been reintegrated with their families of origin (are living with members of their family other than their children).

5. The formerly abducted girl soldiers have received very little emotional and material support on return.

6. The **family** is the main method of re-integration into social networks.

7. **Community** acceptance and assistance appears to dependant upon being accepted by a family member in the area of return, or returning with a husband.

8. 42% (17) Of the young women with husbands during wartime were **abandoned by their husband** on return to his area of origin.

9. The younger formerly abducted girl soldiers identified by the **government** in the FQA’s were given assistance largely in the form of transport to areas of return, nor necessarily areas of origin, and not necessarily areas where there are guarantees of existing family members.

10. The **Church** provided assistance is limited and perceived to be targeted to church members only.

11. There appear to be no targeted discrimination against the returning formerly abducted girl soldiers with ‘war’ babies, but reintegration is more difficult because it is more difficult to get work and accommodation for a girl with dependent children.

12. The research indicates that formerly abducted girl soldiers are not included in the **welcoming and reintegration rituals** which are aimed at men, because it is assumed women have not killed. The implications for this in terms of psychosocial reintegration at an individual, family and community level is not known.

13. Forms of **discrimination** mentioned: frequent unpleasant comments by some people about those who have come from the bush, about their links to the damage that the war did, about the differences in their ‘bush’ habits; their illnesses, especially STD’s and TB. Matriculation in schools requires identity documents, clothes and shoes, all things that people from the bush will have difficulty obtaining.

14. **Health and education** services are generally inaccessible unless subsidised by a family member.

15. **Livelihood strategies**: In rural areas the girls engage in agricultural labour, do odd jobs
and petty trading; in the peri-urban areas, the commonest source of income seems to be petty trading. All of the women doing odd jobs worked for another person and some bartered their labor in exchange for a room.

**Route of return**

Some of the formerly abducted girl soldiers, especially those returning at the end of the last phase of the war, have had a two-stage return process as set down by the ceasefire agreement and the formal demobilization process. They first returned to a military family quartering area, and then had to leave (in most cases a forced exit) to the area of origin of the demobilized male soldier. Thus for most, their first and second areas of return were determined by their war family - the elder’s family they had been living with, or the by the return destination chosen by their war husband.

Two of the respondents chose not to return with their war husband to the quartering area.

Respondent EM 2 Huambo, is a nineteen year old young woman who was born in 1986 near Kaála, She chose not to go to the military FQA with the father of her child because she discovered then that he had three wives and thought that by accompanying him, she would continue her servitude. She made her own way to her village to look for her parents, but found that they had died. She is now living in abject poverty with her young child in a former displaced persons camp. She has only one item of clothing, a dress, and often does not have food to eat.

*I know very well the kind of work that I will be expected to do there if I go there (the FQA) as a woman without a husband. I know that there will be branches to cut and houses to build. And I know well the kind of people who will be there, people without compassion, the kind of people that I have been with already.*

Some of the young women met up with family members during the war or after the cease-fire. Four girls choose to return to towns and villages with their family members. EM Huambo 8 was found by FAA before the ceasefire and was taken to a military hospital in Luena because of her condition and that of her children. A relative who was looking for her, found her there. Families seem to have made significant efforts to trace their relations abducted during the war at the time of the ceasefire; it may have been easier to trace people who returned to the FQA and family tracing programs and individual efforts may have missed many of those who opted not to go to the FQA’s.

Half of the formerly abducted girl soldiers, who were married during the war, were abandoned by their husband on return to his area of origin. For the formerly abducted girl soldiers with no war husband, and no family contacts in the camps, going to the FQA was not an option. They report receiving information that women with no military family could not go to the FQA’s. Some received assistance from MINARS particularly if they were young, in the form of collective transportation to an area of return - not necessarily one they knew or a place of their choice. Others in that situation had to find their own way back to resettlement areas.

*I know very well the kind of work that I will be expected to do there if I go there (the FQA) as a woman without a husband. I know that there will be branches to cut and houses to build. And I know well the kind of people who will be there, people without compassion, the kind of people that I have been with already.*

*They said that you couldn’t go the FQA unless you have a relative there. So they brought us by lorry here to Cantão Pahula.* (EM 2, Huambo, pp 15).
KI 3 Luanda, believes that many girls have lost their families and it is difficult for them to find them, so they end up staying with the people they knew in the bush.

_There are some people who do not know where they came from, or do not have access to the TV programmes about missing family. They forget the name of a village that they left many years ago. There are young people who were from Uige (a northern province near the DRC) but in the bush were with people from Huambo so they went to transit areas in Huambo and so are some way from their area of origin._ (KI 3, Luanda).

KI 5 Huambo, reports that there are other abandoned women in Katchiungo. This was a place where the lorries came through and some women who were not sure where to go, followed a friend who was staying here. Some women were so young when they were kidnapped that they have no memory of their identity before the abduction.

_When peace came we thought that our hearts would be high, but they are not. Because if you look behind you can see no family member, and if you look to the front you can see no family member_ (KI 5, Huambo, pp 1).

The girl’s in the focus group in Huambo came to the conclusion that the returning formerly abducted girls can be divided up into two groups - those whose were reunited with their families and those who were not. Reunification is often a matter of luck.

The formerly abducted girl soldiers interviewed in Luanda who do not have family members in Luanda and where Luanda is not their province of origin (45% / 9 of the Luanda sample originate from Huambo), made their way to Luanda for job opportunities:

_The suffering once we arrived in Huambo was too great. What with being pregnant, and with small children and other children, it was too much. I couldn’t work. And furthermore, where we were in Bom Pastor, a person working might not earn any more than 300 Kz a month. I could see nothing for myself, no advancement, so I thought I might go to Luanda. I had a friend who was in Luanda, and she told me that in Luanda you could do business. Those little business deals would earn you money, and your children would eat._ (EM Luanda 14, page 37)

KI 3 Luanda, says that many people go to Luanda after demobilization in search of livelihood opportunities. He also feels that it would be more complicated for him to go back to where he came from rather than stay in Luanda. In Luanda he says, “It is possible to pick up 200 Kwanzas here or 500 Kwanzas there”. The same would be difficult in his village that he left when he was fourteen or fifteen years old. This key informant explained that he could tap into the UNITA network in Luanda but the same network had nothing to offer him in the rural area.

**Desired destination**

The formerly abducted girl soldiers desired destination is related primarily to the need to have better work and education opportunities for them and their children, and secondly to the location of their family of origin. Most formerly abducted girl soldiers in Luanda do not know the whereabouts of their family of origin. Most formerly abducted girl soldiers in Huambo are aware of the whereabouts of their family of origin, but either do not have the means to join them, or have concerns about reunification. They report being frightened and insecure of their reception, and have concerns that they will not be welcomed because of lack of resources to support them,
and that their family’s will be suspicious of them because they were with UNITA for so long. Some of the young women in Luanda do not seek reunification because they value their anonymity and wish to keep their ex-‘bush’ identity hidden.

From the time I’ve been separated from my family, I’ve never seen anyone of them. Maybe they also think that I was killed. The problem is that I actually do not know anybody; I just remember the name of my mother and my father. (EM 9, Luanda)

The above means that most of the formerly abducted girl soldiers are not going back to reintegrate into what they knew in terms of people, place, customs, attitudes, behaviours and norms. Many have completely lost track of any family or relatives or area of origin. Most therefore have to integrate for the first time into relationships and places of which they have no or little knowledge of.

My heart does not accept to go back to my village. I’ll just stay here. Maybe I’ll find a field, or a naca (field on the river’s edge), and then I can sustain myself. When I have nothing, then I peel a potato and make porridge. That’s what I give to my child to eat. (EM 2, Huambo)

**Demobilisation and the DDRR process**

The formerly abducted girl soldiers who went to the FQA’s, reported the conditions as good - a vast improvement compared to the conditions and the insecurity they experienced in the bush. The narratives testify that there was help available in the FQA’s, but this was directed through the male soldier. Few women were reportedly recognised and demobilised as soldiers. Most of the women accompanying the armed forces were classed as dependents of the male soldiers. Furthermore, focusing help on the FQA’s missed the people who did not take that route.

Only one of the 40 women interviewed was officially recognised as a soldier. EM 7 Huambo, got a demobilisation card in the FQA, and was treated by UNITA as a soldier in her own right. She reports however that sometimes she did not get things in the FQA because ‘someone said that women should not get it’. Her demobilisation benefits amounted to a once-off payment of KZ 6,000. She did not receive the demobilisation kit, or any other material support. Her husband abandoned her on return to his area of choice. Her husband tore up her demobilisation card.

It is clear from this research that the formerly abducted girl soldiers have slipped through the official DDRR process and have little to no support for return and reintegration. This has happened because

- There was no recognition of their military status in terms of their work,
- Many girls were too young to be considered as soldiers for demobilization,
- Benefits were planned for male soldiers only and the assumption made that everybody else would benefit through their dependent status,
- The assumption seems to have been made that people would return to areas of origin. This has not been so in practice.

**Abandoned by war husbands/children’s father’s at area of return**

Fifty percent of the young women with husbands during wartime were abandoned by their husband on return to his area of origin. Of the 40 women interviewed, 9 are married, and 8 are currently living with their husband. 53% of the formerly abducted girl soldiers are living in
female-headed households. Currently in the communities of return, women who live without husbands are understood to be abandoned, as opposed to being single by choice, or divorced. Formal divorce was uncommon in the war zones because most unions were unofficial, as opposed to legal or customary marriages resulting in a legal divorce or de facto separation.

It appears that most girls interviewed, and most of the narratives lacked clarity on this issue, were the second, third or fourth wives of ‘war husbands’. The war husbands kept all their wives whilst in the military quartering areas where the demobilization benefits were dependant upon the number of dependents, only abandoning the formerly abducted girl soldier and her children on return to his area or origin or desired place of return. The demobilization package was single and fixed, dependent upon the rank of the officer. The male soldier’s dependents were fed by FAA, and the international community.

_I don’t know how to speak about my life. I can only thank God who has allowed me to talk to you right now. We walked many roads, and marched many marches since they caught us. Nobody could ever imagine that one day the peace would come and we would have the opportunity to meet our family again. But a woman is always a daughter, she is always subservient to her husband, she always follows her husband, so we came here. But when we got here we found out that actually they had other women from before the war. Now he only wants to take care of his old wives, not us. So I did not meet up with my family because I followed my husband. A person does not know where to go to say, ‘That’s my family’. So now there is a lot of suffering. People do not know who to go to for help, and don’t have money to go back to their area of origin._ (KI 5, Huambo pp 1)

Respondent EM 4 Huambo, is now living in Catchiungo and her area of origin is Cubal. Her soldier husband took her to Catchiungo, which is not his area of origin, saying that he did not want to go to his village. Upon arrival he abandoned her there and went to his area of origin. It seems that when her husband went to visit his village, his parents said that he should marry a girl from his village and should not bring his bush wife to the village. She cannot afford to travel to her own area of origin and she does not want to go and see her family with two children without a husband. She has been considering a relationship with another man, but this man does not work and has no business so she is not sure.

**Family and Community Support**

On the whole, the formerly abducted girl soldiers appear to have received very little emotional and material support on return or arrival to a chosen area. It seems as if acceptance by the community and the offering of support is conditional upon the introduction by a family member or a husband. A confluence of factors contributes to this reality:

- widespread poverty
- a breakdown of the social contract over decades of war
- deep social mistrust
- a shallow, shared institutional memory of community life
- traditional Bantu norms in terms of social responsibilities
- a demobilization programme that recognizes only male soldiers
- abandonment by a war husband, and
- limited and weak state services directed towards women and children involved in the process of return and reintegration.
When asked about help in reintegration, it is family members that are mentioned, or individual friends of parents who are considered as aunts and uncles.

*All the people that went are now returning. Maybe the problem they find is the famine. So the church gives a little, he who has gives a little, the family gives a little, and the rest she must search by herself.* (Boy’s FG, Huambo)

*They are to be received by their families and the church helps also.* (Girl’s FG, Luanda)

*The soba received them with the two hands, if somebody comes you receive, the responsibility is helping them, to find a place where to stay, a house, to know if they have food, clothes, to find a piece of land to cultivate, to find a place for the heart to be in peace. We don’t have old people, only young people...they old people all died. We need them* (Boy’s FG, Huambo)

*Those who return have been welcomed, the little we have, and we divide. It is not possible not to help when somebody arrives, how can you eat and the other stays with hunger? Just give a little bit, is not necessary too much. They came here naked, they really have nothing, neither pans, clothes, food, money, house* (Boy’s FG, Huambo)

*First we lived in a house but the owner came so my aunt asked the owner to lend us a tent.* (EM 14, Huambo)

Most of the returned formerly abducted girl soldiers do not live with their parents, brothers or sisters, or extended family members. It appears as if at least 53% are living in female-headed households; almost double the national average of 27%:

- 32.5% are living alone, with or without their children
- 27.5% are living with family members other than their own children, and
- 20% are living with other formerly abducted girl soldiers
- 20% are living with their husband.

EM 2 Luanda, says that her family gives her little direct help. Her mother died before she arrived, and she feels that those who have mothers who are alive get more help. However her family have helped her by setting her up in a small buying and selling business, so that she will have some money and lessen her dependence upon the rest of the family:

*My family thought that I should sell so as to help me. I was depending on my sisters for everything. So, they thought that I should sell, if I need something I have the money.* (EM 2, Luanda, pp 24).

Some narratives indicate that going to meet the girl’s families (parents, sisters and brothers etc) can cause difficulties with their husbands or fathers of their children. Living with or regular contact with their family of origin may mean putting at risk a relationship with the war husband. This in turn, may create difficulties in earning a living.

*It would be better if the father of my son were here. .... But he used to say that he was not going there because it is your land and your family. .... He said that he would have*
to go to their house and then be in the house of the parents in law. For a man this would be difficult. It would be better if I went first. He felt at a disadvantage and he felt a fear to stay in the parent in law’s house. (EM Luanda 3, pp 27)

In my house there is ….a girl who was in the bush with her husband and has a 2-year-old daughter. She came here but she doesn’t have family here, only her husband’s family. She came, but the husband’s family doesn’t like her, and they talk bad about her – they say that the Tchokwes (people of the Lunda provinces) don’t know how to speak Portuguese…and that the man is staying with a bad wife. So in the parent-in-law house she felt oppressed, and they don’t have a house for themselves. (EM Luanda 2, pp 27 – 28)

EM 2 Huambo, whose parents have died, found that it was very difficult to live with her elder brother and sister-in-law. She has almost no source of support, apart from occasional small amounts of money from a relative, and is in serious difficulties.

Some times families receive you well on the first few days and then begin to talk badly about it, that you do not contribute, that you just eat and do not earn anything, that the father of the child does nothing…. (Girls’ FG Luanda)

I was living with the uncle of my mother but … I did not feel comfortable because his wife made rude comments about my children … so I decided that I ought to move. (EM 18, Huambo).

Friendships amongst women relatives and women/girl friends are cited as a significant form of social and emotional support.

What has helped is talking with my mother, my sisters and my aunt (EM1, Luanda)

Now I visit my girlfriends, we talk and I feel well (EM 11, Huambo)

The boys and girls focus groups in Huambo were very clear that it is the Soba’s responsibility to assist the girls if she originates from the area and she returns to no family.

If she went too long ago and when arrives neither the mother nor the father nor brothers are there, the headman has all the responsibility. The headman is the one who gives her land “You can build here”. (Boys’ FG Huambo, pp 17)

When people come back they present themselves to the Soba and in Chipipa (presumably at the Comuna administration). In the village there is usually a party when people come back, with meat. The party is the same for men and women (Girls’ FG Huambo)

Some people got blankets from the government but not everybody. (Girls’ FG Huambo, pp 13)

But in practice, those who do not have a family, who do not find members of their family, have great difficulties in re-integration. Contrary to the opinions from the adolescent focus groups in Huambo, there is no mention by the Huambo formerly abducted girl soldiers of receiving community-based support from the Soba’s, from any non-family member or from the Church.
This seems to indicate the extent of the breakdown of the social contract and serves to reinforce the extreme marginalisation and vulnerability of the formerly abducted girl soldiers.

There seemed to be more potential for the Luanda formerly abducted girl soldiers to obtain help from neighbours in the city. Assistance appears to be dependant on having enough resources to share.

_When I got ill my neighbour helped me. He is from Zaire. He was the one that arranged the money for my treatment, to buy the medicines and do the analyses. He really likes my son, as a friend he helped me._ (EM 9, Luanda, pp 27)

_What I see in Luanda is this: though no-one will give you a hand out in Luanda you can scrape by on your own, you are your own boss, you decide when you work. And when you make a little something, you can buy whatever you want to buy. Each person works for their own household, and whether you eat or go hungry is your own decision._ (EM 14, Luanda, pp 28)

Participants in the Luanda women’s focus groups said that there should be help for girls like this because their mind must be full of things from the war and the bush and these things need to come out, and that the women should be helped as much as men. They personally experienced many of the same things. They felt that there ought to be more help for all, ex-military or their dependents from FALA or the FAA and the government should provide the help.

KI 2 Luanda, an older women who was with UNITA since 1976, opined that people coming from the war need to be assisted to reintegrate into society. “It is necessary to take the idea out of their heads that they will be spoken of badly.” She relates the story of a young formerly abducted girl soldiers who returned to Luanda with a malnourished child:

_The child became sick because the young mother started giving the child salt to eat. The young mother did nothing, and asked for no help, terrified that she would get beaten for harming her child. The older woman comments how these girls have lived for so long with the idea that they would be beaten for everything that they continue to live in fear. They have difficulties adapting as would anybody adapting in another society – like a fish out of the water. They do not sleep properly because they are used to being woken up at all hours. They feel that what they want to say is not going to be accepted by other people, so they do not speak much when they are with people of their own age. They are frightened when they hear a loud noise, having seen so much shooting in their lives._ (KI 2, Luanda)

**Government Support**

The formerly abducted girl soldiers refer positively to the help given by the army in FQA's, compared to their experiences during the war. But not all were in FQA’s and the support in the FQA’s does not seem to have followed through to reintegration. Furthermore, those who choose not to go to a FQA did not receive any support.

_The peace agreement was just between the military and so just the military context was dealt with. So aspects like re-uniting families were not dealt with. They thought only about the men, nothing else. People are supported by their family members but what happens when the family member does not want to co-operate any more?_ (KI 3, Luanda)
Some Luanda respondents mentioned that they were assisted by the government, to get to Luanda, and received some assistance in the IDP camps in Luanda. EM 14 Luanda, mentions getting help from MINARS when they first arrived in Luanda - some food, some sacking to use as bedding, a tent and the space in a displaced persons camp. She also says that there was support from the community because the community gave them odd jobs:

*When we arrived here in the refugee camp, we weren’t immediately friendly with the people there, but they were good to us and they welcomed us. They told us that if we wanted to work, we could wash clothes, or carry water, and we just followed that rhythm. We carried water, washed the ladies’ clothes, and were paid. They were good to us, and welcomed us well.* (EM Luanda 14, pp 40)

The Huambo-based formerly abducted girl soldiers do not report having received any aid from the government since their return. The following comment from the Huambo boy’s focus group confirms their marginalised status:

*The girls they suffered a lot, when they came back they suffered; the men were paid a little, but the girls soldiers until now they didn’t receive much. Those who have the WFP cards sometimes they receive some clothes or food but, some have nothing* (Boy’s FG, Huambo)

KI 5 Huambo, stated that whilst the village communities and the soba’s might be willing to help, they had few resources to allocate to the girl’s and received nothing from the government:

*The soba made a list for help from the government but there was nothing that came.* (KI Hbo 5).

**Church Support**

Participants in the focus groups mention the Church as a source of support, but it seems as if this support is directed through church networks to church members only. At the community level, it was reported by the formerly abducted girls as difficult for them to receive assistance from the church, unless they were introduced by a family or community member. Some participants in the Huambo boy’s focus group said that it is more likely that church aid will be directed to members of that particular church, rather than to anyone who is needy in that area.

Respondent EM 2 Huambo goes to church but does not receive help from the church. She says that she is not part of the groups in the church because she is ashamed to only have one set of clothes, a torn dress that she wore for the interview, and does not have more clothes to take part in the church group activities.

*Here there is no one who helps me. .... And so I go to sleep without eating. ... I have no one to go to ask, because people do not give anything. They are very tight ... I go to Church but just like this (in her one set of clothes). I go because I want to be buried; I don't want to be buried like a dog* (EM 2, Huambo).

EM 4 and EM 6, Huambo, report that they go to church but do not get help or visits from church because they have nobody to introduce them and prove that they “come from that church”. And they say that the Soba makes lists of who to help and with what, but they have had not received
any help to date. EM 2 Luanda, goes to the evangelical church and takes part in some social activities there. She believes that the church leaders do not know that she was with UNITA.

KI 1 Huambo, reports that:

‘...the churches help in certain circumstances, such as for a funeral; they ask the members to contribute a little bit. They might help a returned kidnapped girl with the funeral if her child died. There has been help from NGOs but there has been almost no help from the Government. And people have very little to help each other’.

Children of the formerly abducted girl soldiers
The interviews do not suggest any particular discrimination towards girls who come back with children. It would seem that there is a generally held belief that “we have all gone through this, and they are part of us”, and this results in no targeted discrimination against the returning formerly abducted girl soldiers with ‘war’ babies. However prevailing poverty appears to complicate reintegration and support. The participants of the Huambo girl’s focus group thought that girls who come back alone with a baby after being kidnapped, would be received by their families because the families know that it was because they were abused or because the father of the child died.

Participants in the Huambo boy’s focus group said that if a girl comes back from the bush with a child but without a husband, her parents or brothers will look after her until she finds a husband. But if she comes back and finds that she has no family left in that place, then there is a problem.

The Soba may say to build a house here but the problem will be the extra food for the child. The Soba will have to go around asking everyone to contribute a little if they can.

(Boy’s FG, Huambo)

What is clear is that whilst there might be a general acceptance and tolerance, material support is in short supply. Girls with babies tend to be taken back by their immediate family, but not by the extended family network that are worried about having another mouth to feed. Aunts or friends of their parents have looked after girls without babies; single mothers do not report being taken in by family members. It would seem that the perception is that that girls with babies cannot work so much. EM 18 Huambo, states clearly that it is much more difficult for single mothers because there is nobody with whom to share the work.

The difficulties I face are different from those of women who have come back with husbands. They can do things because they share the work. But I cannot! When a child is in hospital ... I have to be in the hospital and I have to be out looking for medicines and I have to be with the other children. (EM 18, Huambo).

EM 2 Huambo, thinks the reason she was rejected by her brother and excluded from some of the activities of her friends, is because she has a child. Her friends at Cantão Pahula sometimes eat together but exclude her.

They eat together with the others. I think that because I have a child they don't eat with me. (EM 2, Huambo).
Welcome, reintegration and purification rituals
The formerly abducted girl soldiers make little mention of any welcoming and reintegration rituals and ceremonies, even on inquiry. This indicates that most of the returning formerly abducted girl soldiers were not received in any ritualised, traditional or ceremonial manner. This could be because there was no family to receive them, or poverty preventing money being spent on such things. It does appear that formerly abducted girl soldiers who return to their own families, may have a welcoming party if the families have the resources to organise such a welcome. Some refer to the preparation of a special meal where flour was rubbed on their faces. The girls interviewed did not know the reason for the flour rubbing:

    The family cries when the girl comes home because they had no idea that it would happen. They kill an animal, though these days it is more likely to be a chicken than anything else, nobody has cows or pigs or goats. And it is likely to be a party for only the intimate family; they cannot afford a party for anyone else. (KI 2, Huambo)

*In the past when someone had disappeared and came back, the party could last two weeks and you would kill a cow. This cannot happen now. The father does not even have a goat in the enclosure, nor maize, nor money.* (KI 1, Huambo, pp 4)

Participants in the Luanda girl’s focus group mention that the main tradition when people arrive is to have a party, and sometimes they rub flour on the face of the returnee.

    On their return there was usually a special meal and party and found new clothes for them. The family had not believed that they would see them again. When someone is in a war it is better to forget them because they might not come back. (Girls’ FG Luanda)

A participant in the focus group in Huambo mentions that:

    ...when a family member returns there is always great happiness because they thought that they would not return, and there is usually a party with meat.

EM 11 and 14 Huambo, mention welcoming parties, but there was no ceremony for them or for anyone they know. The respondents were vague, they had heard of throwing flour and rubbing it into the face of someone returning, but this had not happened to them. Some had heard of throwing chicken blood on the ground when a soldier returns but had never seen it happen. EM 2 Luanda, says that there was no ceremony for her return, perhaps because there were no older people there and only the older people can organise the ceremony where you have a party all night and where they rub you with flour or with mud.

EM 4 Huambo, says when she came back her family rubbed her with flour. Her family thought she had died. She also refers to the family killing a pig and holding a party but it seems that she was referring to her first abduction when she had escaped, because she has not met her family since the cease-fire in 2002. The returnee got the best parts of the pig (liver etc) because she had come back. The older people talked about guarding the fire. At that point, the village had not dispersed and the fire was still kept burning.

    The Red Cross helped my Aunt and my aunt told my mother where I was. My mother went to bring me to Luanda. I was ill at that time. My sister, uncles, welcomed me they were very happy. They did a special lunch for me, and all the family and neighborhood was there. They danced. The family explained that she was the daughter they were searching:
everybody knew that I came from the bush and they all were very happy. They did the ritual, rubbed the maize flour in my face. I never asked why they did so (EM 4, Huambo)

The cleansing or purification rituals with chicken blood and jumping appear to be reserved for those who had taken part in killings during the war and seem to be reserved to returning male soldiers. None of the 40 formerly abducted girls interviewed had undergone such a purification ritual. EM 14 Luanda, said that she had not participated in any “reintegration treatment”, although she had heard that some male soldiers had done it. She did not do it because she has always been alone. She has nightmares about the war and thinks that possibly it is because she did not do any treatment.

With the life that I’ve had, always alone with my children. I did not think to do it. Perhaps if I had been with my family I would have done it ….. when I have dreams I sometimes think that I should do something about it. …. For men I know that if they were in the military and saw a lot of death they must undergo that treatment or they will go mad. Perhaps the same thing exists for women because women saw a lot of thing too. Maybe a dead body ahead, or we were jumping over them. (EM 14, Luanda, pp 45 – 46)

“I think that when I was a child they did it to me but. I never saw it in the bush. ... When I came nobody did anything. (EM 9, Luanda, pp 27)

Participants in the women’s focus group in Luanda say that they have heard of purification traditions but know little about them except that they apply to men. One participant said that she had heard that:

…if a soldier has been in the front line he has to do something when he goes home. The family prepares a chicken and they put the blood on the floor, then the solider jumps over the blood and goes inside the house. This is because he saw a lot of blood during the war, and without the tradition he will lose his mind, destroy his family and disturb his community (Women’s FG, Luanda).

The Huambo boys focus group stated that the different ways to ritually receive men and women was based on their different roles during the war. An other aspect brought up in the discussion below, was that if the treatment was performed for the man, it served to protect his whole family:

F: Do you think that they have different ways to receive men and women?

P10: Well, is different for woman and for man. If it was me, I would say - I am a man, now I have a gun and the woman is only following me. Not all that went to the war when returns is pure, they killed people and to clean their heads, ... now the country is free and in the head something disturbs. What we hear from the elders is that they have to do in the way, as the other participant already told. You cannot take directly to the house, first he must stay in the bush, this for the man, being there it is necessary to find some elders va kuacisoko (healers) and when they arrive there, they take the hen and kill it, and then they take the hen by the neck and make the hen turn round, after they go to eat in the party - “So and so, came back, he is already good” - after they introduce him. That’s what is being done generally. Our elders use to do that to the person that went to the war because sometimes he killed people. That is the tradition that is being done.

F: What they do to receive the woman that went to the war and now comes back?
P10: The women? But we think that for the women it doesn’t need tradition. The women don’t need such tradition; the woman in the war just follows what the man does, she just depends on her husband. So, maybe...maybe what the other said about telling that the effective of the village was X, the headman taking her to say that here happened... maybe, is what we think... that they are receiving the women under any tradition, we can not say.

F: But before you told that men ad women fought in the last war...

P10: Hahaha.

F: Then, if everybody fought...

P10: Everybody fought to help the men because, sometimes, they were not only in Unita because there were no cars or as... it depended only on the war; sometimes it was complicated, you see? Because in that war the women were treated as a transport. Where the car couldn’t go, sometimes there wasn’t a bridge; sometimes... the women always helped the soldiers. Now, if they receive with blood of the tradition a woman that went to the war and came back, we don’t know, we only know that she had gone but, to stay in the village with her is as we said before.

F: What can happen if the tradition is not made to the man?

P10: If the tradition is not made to the man can happen the following - well, those with luck in that war that finished received sorcery to protect them against the bullets, others for I don’t know what... for the bullets to fly away. They did not do the tradition, hahaha, then, it happens, it is real madness.

P7: Is the same. If he doesn’t become mad then, we don’t know what can happen to his family. Sometimes the man used to shoot the people in the villages, children of other people; for example, you find an elder person that has the same age as your own father and you shoot at him, then, they register you. If you don’t become mad yourself, if you have family, your own wife or her children, they finish. That’s what I could answer.

F: It is enough to do the treatment to the husband to protect the children or do the children have also to do it?

P7: If the treatment is done to the man all of them are treated, because if something happens in the family it is his fault, he, that did the war. So, it is all in his head, from there comes, if it doesn’t affect him it affects his family.

(Huambo Boy’s FG, pp 13-14)

Education and Health services in areas of return

It was difficult to get a sense of the health status of the formerly abducted girl soldiers. They had difficulty in finding the words to name their health problems. The main health concerns mentioned regarding current, post-war, problems were (not in ranked order):

- head and stomach aches especially when they thought about the ‘bad things’
- worries and bad dreams
- chest, back, neck and hip ‘bone and muscle’ pains
- problems from war-related wounds
- malaria
- TB
- colds and ‘flu.
Three of the five formerly abducted girl soldiers who reported being unable to work, cited health reasons: leg pains and unable to walk properly from gunshot wounds, and back and hip problems making it difficult to walk and stand for long. The labour opportunities for the formerly abducted girls inevitably involves walking and standing for up to 10 hours a day.

Many people have bad backs, TB, and rheumatism because of the rain and the cold. And there are many cases of anaemia because people did not feed well in the bush. (Girl’s FG, Luanda).

The respondent’s also talked about the psychosocial problems the young women are experiencing on their return:

The girls lived for so long with the idea that they would be beaten for everything that they cannot get rid of this fear. They have difficulties of adaptation as would anybody adapting in another society – like a fish out of the water. They do not sleep properly because they are used to being woken up at all hours. They feel that what they want to say is not going to be accepted by other people, so they do not speak much when they are with people of their own age. They are frightened when they hear a loud noise, having seen so much shooting in their lives. ...I think that people coming from the war need to be assisted to insert themselves in society. It is necessary to take the idea out of their heads that they will be spoken of badly. (KI 2, Luanda)

With little information to go on, it appears as if the above health problems are related to the psychosocial and physical stress of the malnourishment, hard labour, the sexual exploitation and the terror of war, especially on the young bodies of the girl soldiers; and the hard labour, poor living conditions and insecurity of their post-war lives thus far.

Health services are used, but most refer to the prohibitive costs. The cost of health services and medicines take up a significant part of the formerly abducted girl soldier’s meagre income:

“...on days when you have to go to the hospital you do not eat. You need to borrow money to go to the hospital or buy medicines, and you might have to work for the person who lent you money so as to pay it off.... When a person is ill the only thing that matters is money, without money you do nothing”. (EM 9, Luanda, pp 21).

Health services are one of the most important questions for returning kidnapped girls: they have to pay for medicines but where does a recently arrived person get such money? They may have to borrow 1000 Kzs and this will take a month to pay back by which time the debt will be 1500 Kwzs. (KI 1, Huambo)

EM 3 Luanda, says that they go to a Tchokwe medicine man and pay after they recover.

Only five (12.5%) the girls who have family or friends who can subsidise their education, are able to go to school. The rest do not have the time or the money to study, including the money for fees and the school material. EM Luanda 2 is at a private school where the fees are 500 Kwanzas per month. The family business helps to pay the school fees. She earns about 200 Kwanzas per day. But sometimes she misses part of the schooling because she arrives late from the market. EM Luanda 9 has two children who go to school because of the help she receives from the owner of the house where she lives, but the other three do not study.
In the camp where EM 14 Luanda lives there is no proper school. There is a teacher who teaches 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} class informally and charges 200 Kwanzas per month. There were no classes above 2\textsuperscript{nd} class in the camp. Other girls said that there were schools, but they did not go because they could not pay the school fees.

The testimonies make frequent references to the fact that the respondents, and their children, missed out on studying and have difficulty getting back into school now. This is a source of great concern for them. EM Luanda 9, thinks a lot about money and how to pay for her children to go to school. The plans of EM Luanda 2 centre on being able to study. The formerly abducted girls follow the pattern of households living in extreme poverty with high levels of illiteracy. In the future I want to study to see if my life changes. But I don’t have a chance, the school costs Kz 300 (EM 5, Huambo).

Livelihood Strategies on Return
Five (12.5\%) of the formerly abducted girl soldiers are unable to work because of health problems; the remainder thirty-five (87.5\%) are working. In rural areas the girls engage in agricultural labour, do odd jobs (casual labour/\textit{biscates}) and petty trading (\textit{zunga}); in the peri-urban areas, the commonest source of income seems to be petty trading. The FAS III Vulnerability Survey\textsuperscript{60} reports that \textit{zunga} and \textit{biscatos} are the principal means of survival for the poor in Luanda and in the rural Huambo. In addition, there is also an extensive market for farm labouring in the rural areas and the outer periphery of the cities. All of the women doing odd jobs worked for another person and some bartered their labor in exchange for a room.

Income generation activities:
- Luanda: \textit{zunga} and \textit{biscates}. References were made to selling water, bread, cakes and biscuits for other people; washing clothes; housework; school and church guard; agricultural labor on other people’s plots; one works in her family’s street diner.
- Huambo: agricultural labor on other people’s plots; odd jobs such as selling small goods for other people. References were made to selling water, bread, cakes, biscuits, vegetables, oil, rice, fruit for traditional beverages, traditional beverage, and clothes for other people; washing clothes; housework; pounding corn to make flour; transporting water; transporting wood for others to make and sell charcoal; working for others making and selling traditional alcoholic beverage (Caxi); working for others making and selling traditional non-alcoholic beverage (Quissangua); lifting and carrying for others constructing adobe houses; one works on her own husband’s land; one is a small–time diamond dealer and is the only one in the whole sample with savings.

\textsuperscript{60} Ingrid Yngstrom for FAS III. Vulnerability, Poverty and Social Exclusion in Post-Conflict Angola: Opportunities and Constraints for Social Capital Building. Volume I: Analysis of Results of Six cases Studies from Luanda, Uige and Huambo. FAS III, Luanda, 2004. The Fund for Social Support (FAS) is a government agency in Angola, supported by the World Bank and other bilateral and multilateral donors.
The only other type of support mentioned is from immediate family members or from a husband. It was not possible to quantify this type of support.

For the girls and their families, every little bit of income helps, even if they have to work whilst at school, because families are short of money. It was difficult to calculate the average income because they are sometimes paid in kind. Such payments mentioned included three to four kilos of maize meal per working day, old clothes, and work in exchange for accommodation. When paid in cash, the formerly abducted girl soldiers earn on average 100 Kwanza per day for odd jobs; they may obtain an average of three days of paid work per week. The total potential income seems to be approximately 300 Kwanza/ $3.50 per week, $15.00 per month for those that are able to work. In general, they earn less than US 50 cents per day, which is below the income poverty line in Angola, calculated as one dollar per day. An income of $14 per month is considered to be conditions of extreme poverty.\footnote{Instituto Nacional de Statistica, \textit{“Perfil da Pobreza em Angola”}. Luanda, 1996.}

One of the respondents, EM 14 Luanda, who chose to settle in Luanda rather than Huambo, claims that she is much better off in Luanda because it is possible to plan for a small business rather than relying on very badly paid odd jobs. However despite moving to Luanda, she still relies mainly on income from odd jobs and cannot save enough money to start a full-time business - only then would she consider herself better off:  
\begin{quote}
\textit{…in a job you may not get paid until the end of the month and sometimes may be paid even later. With the business you can take some money out of the business if there is a medical cost or something similar} \ (EM 14, Luanda, pp5).
\end{quote}

The situation in Huambo is similar. EM 2 and 4 Huambo, are both doing very poorly paid odd jobs because they do not have the money needed to get started in trading. EM 2 Huambo, mentions dehusking maize and pounding maize to make flour. She often cannot get work because she takes her child with her, and the child is perceived as getting in the way of work. EM 4 Huambo, has children and if they are sick she cannot work. Some families have girls in their houses to do domestic work, others may pay women regularly or occasionally to do domestic labour such as washing clothes.

**Solidarity between formerly abducted girl soldiers**

Eight (20\%) of the formerly abducted girl soldiers have come to live together with other returned formerly abducted girl soldiers, and they provide each other with mutual social and economic support. In many cases, the women had returned with war husbands, were abandoned by their husbands, became isolated within the community of return, and then linked up with other formerly abducted girl soldiers who collectively live on the margins of the community of return.

EM 4 Huambo, refers to the women who have come back from the bush and the FQA’s helping each other in that when one has food they give to another who has none, but the residents of the area do not help them. Friendships amongst the formerly abducted girls seem to provide a significant form of social and emotional support. The research team was present when a formerly abducted girl soldier, who appeared to be an alcoholic, was unable to take care of her sick child. Her girl soldier friends took turns looking after the sick child and arranged to take the child to hospital. This mutual support however, does not appear to have broken their social and
economic exclusion, and in the short term may have served to reinforce the marginalization of the group.

**Discrimination on return**
The formerly abducted girls soldiers were discriminated by the armed forces, the government and the humanitarian agencies by not being officially recognised as child or women soldiers, and not given their due benefits under the ADR programme. Armed soldiers under twenty years of age were not included in the ADR programme, likewise for non-combatant women soldiers. Women ex-soldiers, child soldiers and abducted girls are categorised as ‘vulnerable groups’ under the GoA/World Bank/UNDP ADR programme. There is a specific funding package for vulnerable groups, which seeks to support reintegration of these groups in the community - 30 million USD including monies from the European Union.

Most formerly abducted girl soldiers report receiving little if any emotional or material assistance on their return. Help was focused in the FQA’s initially which were closed forcefully within eighteen months of the cease-fire. Thereafter the ADR program concentrates on the demobilised soldiers on the assumption that they would return as dependants with the families acquired during the war, to areas of origin or other areas. Furthermore, the ADR program inherently assumes that the men will distribute and use their resources in the interest of the family group. Feedback given by an IRSEM (GoA Institute for the Social Reinsertion of the Ex-Military) representative at the Luanda Feedback meeting, indicated that the GoA, the military and IRSEM, assume that the all formerly abducted girls soldiers were and are dependents of male soldiers. This research indicates that community recognition and support of the returning girls and women, is only accessed via a family member or a husband in the resettlement areas.

Unlike the girls, the returning boy soldiers appear to access and receive education on return. The Huambo boy’s focus group reports that some of those who went to the bush have been able to go back to school, and some have even come back as teachers and are now teaching.

The following forms of discrimination are mentioned in the individual interviews, in the focus groups and also by the key informants:
- Labelling people who spent time with the armed forces, especially with UNITA, as people from "the bush"
- Aggressive and offensive comments which say that those who have come from the bush were responsible for the destruction of the war
- The insinuation and connotation that the ex-military of UNITA and their dependents are more verbally and physically aggressive; more compliant and hard working; more sexual in their approach to men
- Pupils in schools are looked down upon because they do not have documents, clothes and shoes like others.

In the first days (in the Tchicala Tchiloha FQA) people came to the place where those from the bush had built shelters and threw stones and said, "don't come here to start a war again". ... And there are still people who say "we don't want more than one party

---

62 Discussion at the formerly abducted girl soldiers project feedback meeting, Luanda, 9 December 2004.
here...the teachers ask us to find all these documents and a medical certificate and to have school clothes and proper shoes, not sandals. Life today is money. ... How will we find this money? How will we replace documents that were destroyed in the war? If there is really peace, why are there these bad feelings and resentments?  (EM 14, Huambo)

EM 2 Luanda, thinks that it makes little sense to tell people that you were in the bush. Her experience is that people only laugh about what they did (eat without salt, eat mushrooms) rather than provide any support or advice:

*Can you tell them the suffering that you have been through? They will just look at you and laugh instead of giving advice. So, it makes no sense to tell them.*  (EM 2, Luanda, pp 28)

“I cannot explain my life to someone who is insulting me: I am demoralised and sad if they cannot feel for what I went through and can only insult me”.  (Girls’ FG Luanda pp 25)

*Few people in Luanda know who they are or what their experiences have been. This is because they say nothing, because there are people who are abusive about people who came out of the bush.*  (Girls’ FG Luanda.)

None of the respondents mention that they continue to belong to UNITA or JURA. EM 7 Huambo, mentions specifically that she was asked to continue with the JURA, but she refused because she sees no point.

*They knew that we belonged to Unita and they mistrusted him. The name of Unita is very complicated and too well known. Even today, when somebody is told that a certain person belongs to Unita, he becomes suspicious of that person and, although what existed before doesn’t exist anymore, they still suspect. ...Because of the war there are many people that think that a UNITA member has the same thinking as before. There was a fear of UNITA, that’s it... people were afraid. That’s why the people from the Government and from UNITA are suspicious about each other. Most of the Unita’s people don’t show themselves. It is because there are places where you go and the people there just talk bad about UNITA so a person from UNITA, when hears it, keeps quiet.*  (EM 9, Luanda, pp 5)

*While there was war ... the people that were in the bush were always causing trouble by attacking the towns. It caused us problems with the others, because we had been with UNITA. We did not go to the bush after 1992 but, if there were an attack, they would say, “Your family is following you”. They thought that we must have contact though we didn’t.*  (EM 9 Luanda, pp 24)

It appears as if there was recognition of this type of discrimination towards the formerly abducted girl soldiers in some areas. EM 7 Huambo, says that there was discrimination in the government hospital when she first left the FQA because the hospital was always overcrowded with so many people coming back from the bush. She says that the discrimination against the ex-UNITA stopped after some high-level intervention.
Participants in the Luanda girl’s focus group spoke about differences in “marriage” habits between the countryside and the city, preconceptions and prejudices about the rural as opposed to the urban lifestyle. Participants in the Luanda boy’s focus group spoke about the fact that the formerly abducted girl soldiers have been brought up in the ways of the countryside and not the town. The boys in Luanda call them “behind the times” if these girls do not accept to talk to them. But the risk is that a boy already has another woman and a child and is not really able to look after another girl.

*Will young men accept girls from the bush? Some of the boys think that people from the bush do not know how to think, this is a preconception but might mean that they are not accepted* (KI 1, Luanda)

There was no overt discrimination or blame directed at the formerly abducted girl soldiers for being ‘sexually experienced’. The key informants and the focus group participants were clear in stating that the girl’s were ‘used sexually’ during the war and that this was not their fault, it was something that happened during war. However the discussions point to many assumptions and implicit discrimination. The boy’s focus groups, and the women’s focus groups discussed at length the formerly abducted girl soldier’s ‘sexual experience’. The Huambo women’s focus group spoke about how these young girls, for survival reasons, have learnt to use sex and their sexuality to prevent even worse victimization during the war, and now ‘to get things.’

There was a long discussion in the Huambo boy’s focus group about the formerly abducted girl soldiers having sexually transmitted diseases and other types of problems, thus making it difficult to consider marrying one of them. One member of the group said that if he was to marry a woman who had come from the bush he would take her to the hospital in Huambo for tests because he would not know what illnesses she is carrying. Another said that he would not marry a girl who had come from the bush, but could not explain why. Another said that a girl might still have feelings for someone she had met in the bush.

The Luanda boy’s focus group discussed with a mixture of empathy and bitterness how the abducted girls used their sexuality during the war to avoid death and grievous punishment. They were ambivalent about the girl’s potential as wives: they had ‘heard’ that these girls were sexually aggressive, but also believed that now on return, these girls were good potential wives because they were used to hard labour without making complaints, and would be cheaper to have as wives because they would do all the housework and not demand a maid.

There were suggestions in the focus group for women in Luanda that girls who had been in the bush were “complicated” because of the life that they had led. A participant referred to a girl who was given a home in the house of an uncle in Luanda but she started staying out at night and then left to live with somebody else without saying anything. But the group did recognise that it might have been an issue related to a young girl staying with people who are not her parents or very close relatives. Some had a question about how these girls would form a stable relationship with a man if they had never studied or learned to cook and keep house the way that the man wanted because it is unlikely that they would have learned basic life skills in the bush. Some participants suggested that the young women now needed help to run little businesses, and that would mean working together in groups with other returned formerly abducted girl soldiers.
“The worst things”
Almost all "bad things" are linked to the soldiering work:
- The length of the marches
- The heavy weights that were carried
- The cold and wet on marches
- The constant attacks and living with the threat of attacks
- The lack of sleep and the lack of salt
- The punishments and the threat of them
- Living in the elder’s houses and being treated differently from the wives and daughters of the elders.
- As well as being separated from family, and
- The death of family members.

The girls have seen many things and they think about them. My daughter (a formerly abducted girl) thinks about an incident on a march where a mother hit a child (that she had been carrying on her shoulders) with a stick simply because the weight of the load and the child were annoying her. The girls also think a lot about all the time that they lost in the bush. (KI 2, Luanda)

For EM 9 Luanda, the worst thing was the walking and that they had to make and wear grass shoes. She said that the most suffering was carrying the boxes of ammunition, having to escape when they were attacked, and missing her mother. EM 1 Luanda, most disliked the marches, and the suffering of living in the house of someone that she did not know who treated her like a slave, and being threatened to tell things that she knew nothing about. EM 2 Luanda, most disliked the killing by UNITA of a friend who was at the frontline and who tried to escape. EM 3 Luanda hated the marching and the constant attacks.

I really hated to be attacked all the time. Why were they attacking all the time? (EM 3, Luanda, pp 9)

There does not exist a person that leaves a house to live in the grass in the bush and likes it. You can only like something when you decide by yourself, not when someone tells you what to do. (EM 9, Luanda, pp 15)

Many of the most stressful thoughts are linked to family that have died, and that they were not able to properly bury and pay respects to their dead family members. There are frequent mentions of the fact that being in the bush meant that they were separated from their family. During the interviews, the young women cried most frequently when talking about being separated from their mothers.

There is great sadness, anger, bitterness, emotional stress and trauma in the formerly abducted girls voices:
When I think, I feel very sad (EM 3, Luanda)

I do nothing to feel better (EM 12, Luanda)
What I do when I hear other people talking and encouraging me is to think that I am not the only one who suffered and lost my child, the others also. I don’t have forgiveness...it was too much suffering, that’s why I return to the city. It is easier in the city than the village to forget what I saw. It was too much. I used to think too much, I loose weight and my children were always ill. (EM 14, Luanda)

These girls have anger in their hearts. They have nowhere to direct their anger. They are angry because they thought that things would be much better after peace came and that they would not be hungry. (KI 1, Huambo).

EM 2 Huambo, talked a lot about the fact that her parents died while she was away and that she has not been able to mourn for her father. It is a source of great sadness to her that her mother had died some days before she arrived at her mother’s house. She had not seen her mother for many years and she missed her by a few days. She believes that the fact that she was abducted is the reason that she has lost contact with family and relatives, why she has a baby and no husband and is thus suffering so much. She also says that there is some witchcraft that kills the children of those who were in the bush.

EM 11 Huambo, was not being present when her mother died and only learning about it many months later. EM 7 Huambo, said that it would have been much better to live with her mother.

In response to talking about the ‘worst things’, some of the young women expressed their relief that the war was over, whatever the difficulties of everyday life in post-conflict Angola.

Good things only started when peace came ... eating well; being clean...nothing good happened in the bush. It was better for those who were with their mothers or with their aunts. It was only suffering for me as I was there alone (EM 2, Huambo)

We give thanks that this is over. Now, that it really finished is the heart stays in peace (EM 20, Huambo)

After all I had been through, here, where I am, nothing can upset me, I cook, wash, clean, I do everything with goodwill, there is nothing that I don’t like (EM 2, Luanda)

There has been a great change in my life, I sleep well. With Kz. 50.00 I can live (EM 18, Luanda).

Comparisons
The abducted girls made numerous comparisons between themselves and peers who were involved and affected by the war, but who had not been abducted. They spend time talking about the fact that they hardly had any clothes, they had no salt, they were walking long distances, but most of all - the fact that they did not go to school. The lack of formal education is frequently mentioned as the biggest difference between them and the others.

EM 4 Huambo, talks about how much she suffered in comparison with the girls who were not abducted and how she still seems to be suffering in comparison to the others.
The ugliest thing is seeing those that ate well continue to eat well. We who were obliged to suffer have nothing. They lied to us so that we would fight; they said the future would be better. In reality this has never happened and on top of this we are dispersed. I see this as very ugly. A dispersed person for me is someone who has no home. When you are living with an unknown person you are not living well. You are like a lost person. (EM 18, Luanda, pp 18)

It is not possible to compare yourself with the ones you found here because of what they have already; when you think to buy a goat she already has; when you think to buy a cow, she already has one, and will have even more (EM 2, Huambo).

There are frequent discussions of the fact that the respondents and their children missed out on studying, and are now having difficulty getting back into school. EM 14 and 18 Huambo, discuss extensively about losing several years of school in relation to those who were not abducted. KI 2 Luanda, says that the girls feel shame when they are with other girls because there were six lost years and it is difficult to recuperate these six lost years. KI 2 believes that the girls have an inferiority complex in that they feel that they may not participate in a certain milieu or in certain activities because they have not studied.

I use to think about, when I see the others that stayed here and I went but... (Silence)...Because the ones who stayed are different, we are really different. I feel in my own heart I am not well, but they are well (EM 12, Luanda)

EM 14 Huambo, makes comparisons between her settled, peaceful life in the bush in the years 1994 to 1998 and life in a small town in Huambo now, and thinks that she was brought up with more morals.

However, there is also a sad acknowledgement that most people are poor and struggling.

There will be a difference between those who lived through the noise and earthquakes of war. People who suffered the consequences of war are quite likely to tell lies or get angry. But there is no difference in the level of poverty of those who have arrived from the bush and those who were always "on this side"; they are both very poor (KI 1, Huambo)

If it were not I, it would be somebody else. I loose time, but 9 years is too much to wish for another person to go through (EM 10, Huambo).

EM 7 Huambo, says that there was no reaction when they heard of the cease-fire; they were just relieved that the suffering was finally over.

Hopes and plans for the Future

In terms of future perspectives, the group of formerly abducted girls in Luanda and in Huambo differed in two important respects: the Luanda peri-urban group ranked having no future plan as number one, and there was no mention of finding their family or returning to their place of origin. The Huambo group ranked no future plan as number four, and returning to their place of origin was ranked number six.
### Luanda

1. No plans  
2. Further/start school study  
3. Start own business  
4. Become literate  
5. Equal ranking: vocational training (pastry cook, tailoring/sewing, painter/decorators), train to be a teacher, send children to school, live with own children, improve children’s lives.

### Huambo

1. Further/start school study  
2. Start own business  
3. Professional training (teacher, nurse)  
4. No plans  
5. Get money to buy and sell  
6. Return to place of origin  
7. Equal ranking: Find parents/separated family, Vocational training (work in hotel); become literate; Improve children’s lives; to ‘have a nice life’.

The freedom, future plans...what freedom, what future? I can only think about the suffering. Freedom from what without my lost son? Even now when I cook meat I can’t eat when I remember my son, my heart hurts, hurts a lot. I can’t forget. (EM 12, Luanda)

…to save enough money to go to somewhere north of Andulo to get back to my home village. I have never studied, but it will be difficult now because it costs money and you have to have paper. In the future I want to study to see if my life changes. But I don’t have a chance, the school costs Kz 300. (EM 7, Huambo)

Longer-term plans focus on "studying", on doing "business" and on improving their children’s lives. Plans for studying (senior school certificate, nursing and teaching, literacy training, vocational training to become a baker, kindergarten aid, hotel worker, painter/decorator) and business, revolve around attaining formal education and are seen as ways of having enough money to live with dignity. To start a small business, one needs to be literate and have access to start up money. The only girls who had managed this had the benefit of family support. EM 2 Huambo for example, is in a very difficult situation because she does not have the money for a small business, money to study or money to eat enough regularly - her desire is to have money to do business so that she will have a regular, dependable source of income.

My uncle that works in Luanda helps, he gives me money. I was taking a pastry course but had to stop because my uncle is not here and I don’t have the 50 dollars to pay. (EM 4, Luanda)

To be doing business and not be doing odd jobs. Or to be in Bailundo where they pay better for odd jobs, this is what I have heard. Or to find my family and where I was born. (EM 4, Huambo)

To be doing business and not odd jobs. And so to have a bit more money so I can get more than one set of clothes and have clothes for the children. (EM 6, Huambo)
What plans can I do? If I borrow some money I need to give back the double. For example, for 1000 you have to give back 2000, and for me who works only with 20 kg of maize flour this is not possible (EM 3, Luanda)

Cultivation the person likes because one must cultivate. But it would be good for example, if there was a possibility of a business (EM 10, Huambo)

Those who do not have children say that they have no plans as yet to have children. Those who have children, wish for their children to be able to study so that the children will have money and be able to look after them when they are old. EM 14 Luanda, wants her children to study. For herself, she thinks that she will not return to Huambo Province because, although it is beautiful, she only saw suffering in the time that she was there. In Huambo “the money just does not appear” (pp 42). The plans of EM 2 Luanda, centre on studying, although it would be difficult to go to school and work at the same time. EM 3 Luanda, wants to study, and to live well with her husband and have children. EM 9 Luanda, wants to study sewing, cooking and decoration.

The optimism that emerges from the focus group discussions with the male adolescents, underlines the perceived hopelessness of the situation of the formerly abducted girls. The boys have hope for the future and clearly see the current difficulties as temporary:

In two years you will not be able to tell the difference between those who stayed in the village and those who went away, just like in the city you cannot tell the difference after two years between newcomers and those there for many years. But in the beginning there are differences: those who were in the bush have a different behaviour because of their suffering, they do not have as many possessions, and someone who has been in the bush is more respectful to other people.

(Boys’ FG Huambo)

The participants in the Huambo girl’s focus group were mainly peasant girls, but a couple were at school. Most participants had no clear ideas about the future. The school going participants mentioned the threat of the killer disease, HIV/AIDS, and the other participants showed surprise at the presence and severity of this disease. When asked about the future, most said they had no idea about the future. One said that she hoped that her work in the fields would go well so that she could sell something and buy clothes for her brother. Another wanted to buy clothes for herself.

The participants in the Luanda girl’s focus group showed pessimism and had little faith that the future would improve, but they were able to state their plans for a future. Most aim to study with the objective of getting a better job. They mention professions such as becoming a cook, pharmacist, teacher and doctor. Most say that they did not study because of being in the bush, and that it is difficult to start again because of the cost. The cost of matriculating in a pre-university professional training course may rise to several hundred dollars.

Studying is the principal thing. Without studies you are nobody. Without studies you can only work in somebody’s house and wash their clothes  (FG Girls’ Luanda, pp 28)
Factors facilitating the Positive Return with Good Potential for Re-integration.
The following two tables were done by adding up demographic data and information related to livelihoods, relationships, living conditions, children, and education. The tables are not based on direction information elicited through research questions, but on trends emerging from the collected data. The following criteria were used to try and discriminate between the factors which seemed to favor a ‘Positive return with good potential for re-integration’ outcome, and those factors that might mitigate against such a positive return.

30% of the Luanda sample (N=6 out of 20) and 10% (N=2 out of 20) of the Huambo sample, reported meeting their own and their children’s basic needs regarding:
- Shelter, nutrition, clothing, household items
- Are currently able to work and earn some income
- Are accessing formal education
- Social capital: are accessing family and/or social networks
- Report being able to follow-through with future plans re work, education and training.

Using the above criteria, 70% of the Luanda sample (N=14/20) and 90% of the Huambo sample (N=18/20), are likely to have negative return outcomes with regards to family and community integration, that is:
- Have no shelter and food security
- Have inadequate basic clothing and household items
- Are currently unable to work, or are earning irregularly
- Not accessing formal education
- Generally excluded from social networks: limited or no sources of support from family, neighbours, the church or other social networks
- Report having no hope of being able to follow-through with future plans re work, education and training.

It was clear from the data that it was almost impossible to generate income, access education and shelter, find and live with their family of origin; unless the young women received monetary support from their family of origin or from their husband. It also seems that the young women had a greater possibility for work prospects, family and community integration if they were younger, without a husband and had few children or no children.

---

63 The FAS III Angolan Vulnerability Survey defines social capital as referring at a general level to institutional features of social life – networks, organisations, involving trust and reciprocity – that enable participants to act together to more effectively pursue shared objectives’. The ability to participate in social institutions, in particular in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, shapes access to and control over resources. Social exclusion includes all aspects of exclusion from social, economic and political life - the terms on which people get access to resources, their rights and ability to influence decisions over the distribution of resources. Social exclusion, like social capital, focuses on the relational aspect of poverty. However, social exclusion focuses on factors which inhibit participation in key social institutions and relationships. (Ingestrom, 2004, pp 10).
**Factors that favor a positive return outcome:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luanda</th>
<th>Huambo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Have own means of income + receive monetary support from family of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lived during the war or originate from a diamond producing province</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Underwent welcoming or re-integration rituals + receive monetary support from family of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Live with family of origin + live in a house together with the family of origin + receive monetary support from family of origin</td>
<td>Have knowledge of the whereabouts of their own family of origin (separated during the war)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Live with husband + receive monetary support from husband that she is living with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Currently studying in formal education system + receive monetary support from family of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Literate and numerate + receive monetary support from family of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Greater chances if younger, without a husband, with no or few children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factors that pushed to a negative return outcome:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Luanda</th>
<th>Huambo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Do not receive monetary support from husband or family of origin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Do not know their own identity (e.g. do not know any or only one or two details of their age, their full name, their parents and or family name, their birthplace, area of origin, etc).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Do not live in own or rented house together with the family of origin (most rent a room, live in inadequate shelter, sleep ‘under the sky’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Illiterate and have poor numeric skills

5. Never attended formal education, or have completed up to 4 years or less of formal education.

6. Live in extreme poverty: maximum of one inadequate meal per day/report that ‘starving’; inadequate or no shelter; inadequate clothing; inadequate or no bedding.

7. Do not have stable means of income (do occasional bit-labour/odd-jobs/’biscates’ for other people, the biscates are not permanent work, and they are not diverse enough within the market that is accessed)

8. Exploited as workers (paid very little money; paid in kind e.g. housework for an unsheltered corner in the yard to sleep with children; work very long hours)

9. Health problems (e.g.: leg pains and unable to walk properly from gunshot wounds; back and muscle pains and unable to walk and stand for long)

10. Do not know the whereabouts of their family of origin (separated during the war).

10. Majority knows the whereabouts of their family of origin + do not live with family of origin or with husband.

11. Majority are not married (most abandoned by husbands, single, widows)

12. Experience discrimination (political re ex-UNITA; social group re ex-bush/’matas’) + lack of anonymity in the provincial peri-urban areas

- Question 7: did not collect information about the differences between the payment and work conditions of the formerly abducted girl soldiers compared to their female worker peers.
6. DISCUSSION

The research was undertaken with an open-ended approach; no specific research hypothesis was formulated to frame the analysis and interpretation of the data. The aim was to seek, hear and document with rigor the voices of the formerly abducted girls. What emerges from the narratives is the work of the abducted girl soldiers during the war, the exploitation of the girl soldiers perceived gender-related compliance and vulnerability during the war, and the continuing exploitation in the post-war period. It is also clear that such gender exploitation is facilitated by the tacit complicity of families, communities, the government of Angola, and the international actors in the ADR and other post-war development programs.

Collectively, the young women’s narratives paint a picture of extreme deprivation and vulnerability, which begins with abduction and continues throughout the war period and return. Societal norms appear to tolerate the labor exploitation of their extreme vulnerability as poor, unskilled young girls and women. These are also the stories of supreme survivors; poignant tales of friendships, of love at the risk of death, of surviving brutal marches and enemy attacks, of risking all for their children and of loving and nurturing their ‘war babies’, and of young women working hard and making a meager living on the harsh streets of Luanda and in the fields of Huambo province.

On the other hand, this hard won resilience is wearing thin for some of the formerly abducted girls. They are living in extreme poverty, most report that they are starving and do not always have the bare necessities to meet their needs and their children’s needs. The fact that most of the girls interviewed in Luanda have no plans for the future paints a disturbing psychological portrait of creeping apathy, deepening social marginalisation, and loss of hope in a better future. The low ranking given to finding their family of origin or returning to their place of origin, indicates an unexpected degree of alienation and social mistrust in a Bantu society which apparently puts a high value on family support networks.

6.1 Gender-based labor exploitation

The armed forces military organization viewed, treated and organized the girls/young women as resources to be gathered and used to the maximum. Within the context of a 26-year guerilla war, the abducted girl soldiers can be seen as low cost, low maintenance, low key, silent and easily hidden from view, already trained, easily controlled, efficient source of multiple types of labor in comparison to vehicles and pack animals.

They required very basic fuel, could travel quietly over any terrain and leave few tracks and dust clouds to be spotted by the enemy, they did not need bridges to cross rivers and ravines or roads to climb any mountains, they worked for years and years, needing minimal maintenance, no

---

64 CCF’s Definition of Child Poverty:
Deprivation: lack of material conditions and services generally held to be essential to the development of children’s full potential
Exclusion: result of unjust processes through which children’s dignity, voice and rights are denied or their existence threatened
Vulnerability: inability of society to cope with existing or probable threats to children in their environment
spare parts and were very easily replaced. Plus, they could cook and prepare camp, dance and sing and provide sex, take care of the wounded and boost the men’s morale.

They were only interested in you for your labour. (KI Huambo 5)

Everybody fought to help the men... Because in that war the women were treated as a transport. Where the car couldn’t go, sometimes there wasn’t a bridge; sometimes... the women always helped the soldiers. (FG Boys, Luanda, pp 10)

This exploitation and complicity continues post-war where formerly abducted young women ex-soldiers are a source of low cost labour at the community level.

Exploitation and complicity is also apparent at the national and international level:

- Socio-political: only demobilised adult male soldiers are seen as a threat to peace. They may have access to and know how to use firearms and may be potential criminals and or sources of political instability. They are therefore the primary targets for a DDRR program. Women are simply not perceived as constituting a potential threat.

- Economic: since the work of girl/women soldiers is not recognized as “soldiering” they are considered dependents of soldiers for the purpose of planning and are effectively excluded from demobilisation program and pension benefits. Hence the brunt of the labour of war is discounted as irrelevant, and planners design cheaper demobilization programs.

The prevailing literature focuses on gender-based violence when examining the experiences of girl and women soldiers. It is clear from this research that gender-based labor exploitation is a significant factor in facilitating guerilla wars. Furthermore, not recognizing the importance of these girls/women’s labour during the war is facilitating continuing gender- based exploitation of their labour in the post war period.

The current USD 180 million demobilization and reintegration program, jointly planned by the Government of Angola and the World Bank excludes the vast majority of women and all young soldiers under twenty years of age from any direct benefits. This contradicts the UN and World Bank policy. The WB’s Africa Region Working Papers explicitly acknowledge that girls under eighteen years of age who have been subject to forced recruitment to work as cooks, porters and ‘wives’, should be considered as child soldiers. Women abducted as children should be considered as soldiers and thus eligible for demobilization assistance. The Africa Region’s Paper on ‘Gender Issues in Demobilisation and Reintegration Programs’, recommends programs to encourage access to vocational training and education for abducted girls and ex-combatant’s wives.

---

There are high numbers of female-headed households and widows in Angolan society. Women in Angola, as in many places in developing countries, take a leading role in ensuring the survival of their families and children. There are more women than men in Angola involved in petty trading in the informal sector to support their families. Most poor families secure their livelihood in the informal sector. This makes access to micro-credit and vocational training critical for the formerly abducted girls to gain access to informal sector trading activities. Furthermore, many girls and women who were abducted by UNITA may require help in relocating to their areas of origin without their husband, and also may require support in facing discrimination or lack of acceptance on return to their areas of origin. Female ex-soldiers and family members are typically more vulnerable than male ex-soldiers in a post-conflict economic and social context, particularly one such as Angola that exhibits high levels of gender discrimination in economic, social, and political life. A comprehensive strategy for offering vocational training leading to livelihood opportunities for men and women as part of the reintegration process could form a key pillar of economic development within Angola.

The current focus on male combatants assumes, in the face of overwhelming evidence and recognized research to the contrary, that all women associated with the armed forces, with the possible exception of woman fighters/combatants, are dependants to men, that the male recipients will use their benefits in the interests of all their household, and that there will be no misuse of benefits. In Angola, the program excludes the following groups from direct benefits; women married to ex-soldiers, unmarried and married women and girls who worked in support functions for the armed forces, women abandoned by their soldier husbands, women who have chosen to leave their soldier husbands, and military widows. This research clearly reinforces the findings of previous researchers that a significant number of women do not continue “as dependents” of war husbands in a post-war period.

The narratives clearly describe the essential logistics support provided by these girls and young women to the armed forces during the war. Three (7.5%) of the 40 girls interviewed fought as armed combatants, the rest worked in logistics and support including the transportation of heavy cargos over long distances in the bush. For the purposes of arduous work that involved a risk of death, they were no longer considered children once they reached thirteen years of age; but they are excluded from demobilization benefits on criteria of age and gender.

There is little talk of women fighters in post-war Angola and there were few reports of women armed combatants amongst the formerly abducted girl soldiers testimonies. However this research does include testimonies from women who did hold guns and were trained (N=5, EM Luanda 1, 9, 12, 18 and EM Huambo 7, of these 3 fought as armed combatants). The figure of 7.5% of women in active combat is low compared to research from conflicts in other countries: 40% of the fighting forces in the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front were women, 12% of the RUF in Sierra Leone, 33% in Colombia and 30% in El Salvador.

Survey figures released in March 2003 by UNICEF indicate the existence of a significant demographic imbalance between the numbers of men and women in the Angolan population. Overall, there are only 91 men for every 100 women in Angola. This imbalance is concentrated within the 20-34 age-group, where women outnumber men by 20-30%. This is largely the result of the deaths of male combatants during the war. UNICEF, Luanda, 2003.
The current semantics do injustice to the role played, and the work done by girl and women soldiers. The fuzzy language of ‘vulnerable groups associated with armed movements’, of ‘women and children involved with armed forces or groups’, ‘women working in support functions to armed groups and forces’ as domestics, porters, cooks, preparing camp, caring for the wounded, clearing paths, spies, sex slaves … needs to give way to the clear and functional, work-related concepts of engineering, logistics, health corps, combat and service support. No military is able to function in the field and at the base without the logistics and support personnel. Maybe if their contribution was recognized for what it is in terms of the language of work, then it would be more difficult not to recognize them as soldiers, and to exclude them from being eligible for the DDRR process because they did not have ‘jobs’ to register or weapons to hand in. Not labeling the work of non-combatant women soldiers as soldiering, continues the gender discrimination of the division of labor whereby critical work that is essential for survival, is simply considered a natural extension of women’s domestic obligations and hence neither worthy of remuneration nor significant enough for women to qualify for training and livelihoods programs.

Men involved with the military in support functions are defined as soldiers, and not as ‘men involved in armed groups or forces’, or as ‘men directly associated with the war’; or as dependants of male or female combatants. It appears as if most, if not all male soldiers, including those involved in health, engineering, political education, reconnaissance and logistics, are entitled to demobilisation benefits. All war-affected men are not entitled to the same benefits. The political and economic implications of such gender discrimination are clear.

UNIFEM, in their comprehensive handbook on lessons learnt and recommendations arising from a review of UN DDRR processes, recognizes that the ‘one-man, one-gun’ approach narrows the definition of who is acknowledged for eligibility for DDRR to an able-bodied male combatant, and that women and children undertake a variety of conflict-related tasks which include providing essential services to fighters and the ongoing maintenance of armed groups. However documentation pertaining to DDRR, goes no further in attempting to define such tasks as soldiering and do not grant soldier status upon the girls and women who actually worked as soldiers in both forced and voluntary capacities, as opposed to the women and children family members of the soldiers who lived as “dependents” of the soldiers in the camps and bases, and whose work was aimed at maintaining their household unit. This research shows, within the Angolan context, a clear distinction between these two groups and distinguishes between women involved in war as soldiers (armed fighters and soldiers working in logistics and support) and women and girl dependants (family members of the military men).

6.2 Differences between war-affected children
All Angolan children are war affected, however not all children were equally affected by the war. The testimonies of the formerly abducted girl soldiers clearly show that some girl children were treated like soldier slaves and had to look after other children their age and older, whilst living in the same war zone and often in the same house. At the risk of comparing the terrible with the horrific, this difference needs to be recognised in order to know what and when child protection efforts need to be targeted and segmented to protect specific groups of children. These

---

differences are necessary to plan appropriate post-conflict support and rehabilitation. In the Angola case, the refusal to recognise the formerly abducted girls as soldiers in their own right has meant that they have been excluded from any direct benefits, and programs have not been designed to-date to cater for their specific needs.

Other children, in towns and cities, in villages and in war zones, suffered but were not soldier-slaves. By viewing all children as the same post war, it privileges those who can access whatever few resources the government has for children, and further prejudices those who were marginalized by the war and continue to be further excluded from any peace dividend. The formerly abducted girls continue to be consciously or unconsciously hidden from view.

Some community-based government programmes for the rehabilitation of children have been planned with support from the international community. The programmes support family and community rehabilitation but do not make a point of targeting child soldiers reportedly because such identification hinders their reintegration. While these programmes may strengthen community cohesion, the failure to target former child soldiers within the broad-based community programmes, suggests that many of these children and their needs and capacities will be overlooked.

Years of research and work in this area, including respected work in Angola less than 10 years ago, shows that unless male and female underage soldiers are recognized as such, and they, their children and their families are targeted under community-based programmes and given access to resources, their sacrifice will be betrayed yet again by the society and its figures of local and national authority, and their contribution to Angolan history forgotten.

6.3 Sex-Labour/sexual exploitation

One of the functions of the girl soldier was to provide sex to the male soldiers. This function took several forms:

- Providing sex to the elder in whose house they were living and working in as a domestic servant.
- Providing sex to the soldiers on the long marches during the military campaigns.
- Sexual acts and organized dancing and ‘agitation’ to ‘rouse’ the soldiers, i.e. keep morale, keep the soldiers awake and alert during critical times when it was anticipated that enemy attacks are imminent.
- Dancing, post-attack rousing and given as a ‘sex reward’ to celebrate a victorious attack.
- Sexual acts and organized dancing for military officers visiting the camps and bases.

---

Whenever there was work to do it was the children of JURA who had to do it. Then when they were a little bit older the men started following them and they had a “war marriage.” (KI Huambo 65, pp 2)

The girls spoke about sex as part of their function with the armed forces, including the forced unions with the “elders”. They differentiated this form of work/sex labour from sexual abuse. Sex labour seemed to be differentiated from the following types of sexual abuse:

- Sexual abuse outside of worker sexual exploitation, like the rapes of girls younger than twelve or thirteen years old which seemed to be the perceived normal age to begin having sex, the rapes that took place during enemy attacks, the raping of girls by soldiers from other armed forces while they were working in the fields, collecting food and water or walking to markets to barter. Rape was said to be frequent where there were large concentrations of troops.
- Sex the girls chose to have with soldiers with whom they had fallen in love.
- Sex the girls chose to have for strategic reasons with male soldiers to obtain protection, to avoid being sent on marches and attacks. Becoming pregnant and/or a wife could enable a girl to stay in the base camp.

The sexual exploitation by older men, in a society that culturally attributes privileges to elders, not only entraps young girls, but also psychologically may demolish any sense that they might have had of the decency and community-mindedness of elder men. This has implications for trust and respect for authority figures and the development of social organisation in their areas of return after enduring such betrayal and exploitation. National and community leadership, including those of civil society, can play an important role in recognizing and investigating this issue. As well as healing personal wounds, addressing impunity and ‘compensation’ in terms of community-based support, can help to restore confidence in authority and regenerate a sense of community.

6.4 Norms regarding children, sex and relationships

Adult military leaders and politicians led Angola’s wars. It appears that, at best, culturally acceptable age norms were transposed upon the military organization of human resources. That is, in terms of UNITA, girls were ‘drafted’ into the JURA on adolescence and it was permissible for them to be involved in regulated sexual activity and enter into marriage unions. In rural Angola, girls entering puberty, as young as thirteen or fourteen years of age, are learning to be wives and mothers and do in some cases enter into marriage unions.

The institutionalization of age, gender and sex norms within the military organization broke down when individual soldiers chose to transgress the norms, and when military groups were deployed for military campaigns, spending up to two months in the bush away from the base camps. During periods of intense and prolonged guerrilla warfare, long periods in the bush in extreme conditions, with diminishing sources of food and supplies, there appears to have been a breakdown of accepted norms and whole scale transgression of customary child protection strategies.

There may be some cases where a commander wanted a girl who had just arrived to be his girl friend. If she refuses, the commander keeps that bitterness. When she later made an error, he would use this to punish her.... Forcing girls to go to parties happened. It
was forbidden but it happened in places far away from the central political administration. (KI 3, Luanda)

Luanda Key Informant 2, who was an officer in the UNITA military structure, reports that girls were used for long-distance transport but gives a higher age when they started. He says that there were rules against abuse, but admits that these rules may have broken down away from the main bases. It does seem that many girls were away from the main bases a lot of the time where central control and authority was weak.

_I lived some situations, for example, there are commanders that obliged the girls to abandon their tents to go to parties. And they were forced to stay there from 19 - 20 o’clock - the beginning of the party - until when they decided to finish. It could be till the next day 5, 6, 7 o’clock. They were forced to stay there. Who wanted to … probably they should deserve a punishment; and some were forced to live with men that were not preferred by them. They arbitrarily used the girls and even lived with the girls without their consent. The parties were ….. forbidden. But in areas far away from the central political administration, that power was there. (KI 2, Luanda, pp10)_

All of the testimonies and interviews give a picture of a highly regulated society, with rules and punishments. However, the testimonies and interviews underline that the primary objective was the effective prosecution of the war. The rules may have changed as the phases of the war changed. Whatever UNITA’s original intentions, the war became one of survival where girls were essential means of transport, and soldiers had to be kept motivated.

The protection of children seems to vary, depending on the decency and strength of the camp commander or the elder in whose house the girl was first assigned; whether they had family in the camp or close by; whether the father of the child acknowledged the pregnancy or the baby and made provisions to protect the abducted girl. Some girls entered into strategic unions with elders in order to protect themselves from campaign and frontline work. Some of the respondents point out that military leaders and officers protected some of the young girls against rape by forcing them into unwanted unions. The respondents say that some of the soldiers were punished, even executed, for abusing a girl. But this seems to have applied mainly to the lower rank soldier; senior officers seemed to have behaved with impunity.

Children living with their family or with a family member were treated much better. Respondent EM 18 Huambo, who was older, was treated worse when her husband was sent away to some other base or area. And girls with family members or friends in the camps report a measure of protection against sexual abuse, but not against other forms of labor exploitation.

Cohen, et al \(^70\) writes that communities in areas directly affected by the war had hardly any capacity to protect their members. Families adopted different, more or less effective strategies to protect their girls. Some arranged for their girls to marry earlier than usual. Young mothers breastfed for longer periods than normal hoping that soldiers would leave them alone. When young girls went to fetch water or collect firewood, they would walk in groups to avoid being caught alone.

---

The Angolan experience and reports from other conflict areas in the past few decades, indicates that despite the existence of significant international human rights standards and humanitarian laws, the international community has limited access to protect children from the ravages of armed conflict. During prolonged armed conflict, governments and rebel groups disregard international legal child protection laws. It is precisely at this point that there are gross human rights abuses and that children and civilians in general, are at their most vulnerable. In addition the sovereignty and non-intervention norms are still so powerful among many states, that intervention, even to protect innocent children, is viewed as an affront to the independence of the state.

It is clear that just as adults and the military abused local age and gender norms, there were attempts by some adults, military personnel and the children themselves, to protect all children against sexual abuse and their own children against worker exploitation. It is necessary for Angolan child protection workers and advocates to learn from these attempts, to document and valorize local, ethnocentric child and gender protection norms, and to encourage the institutionalization and imposition of such protection norms and human rights within the social organizations involved in conflict. The pragmatic challenge would seem to be how to go about strengthening local norms to a point where all conflicting or warring parties, without question, accept them.

To a large extent, the necessary elements to create and sustain programs for former underage soldiers are present in Angola. The statutory child protection tools are in place. International treaties have been ratified, and there exists a progressive family code and national legislation. Angola has incorporated the guiding principles on the internally displaced into national law. Stakeholders in the demobilization program have most of the technical and professional assistance needed to correctly design, implement and monitor programs. What remains, is for all stakeholders to follow through from the rhetoric to the fulfillment of commitments.

In contrast to many countries in Africa, Angola has the means to make the necessary investments in children and their communities. Angola’s oil reserves could produce as much oil as Kuwait within the next decade. The government is heavily reliant on oil revenues, which raise more than three billion US dollars each year. The oil revenue accounts for nearly 75% of national revenue and 30% of gross domestic product. Angola is the world’s top producer of industrial grade diamonds and has abundant numerous other mineral deposits. A peaceful Angola, oriented towards the development of all Angolans, could mean that the extraction of these resources could provide additional revenues to the government and ultimately to its people.

However, there is a documented paradoxical correlation between oil and child poverty. Oil brings in a lot of money and this investment comes to governments in the form of taxes, fees, and other payments. These revenues could be used to fund basic services for children, but all too

---

71 Presentation made by Dr W. Andy Knight, McCalla Research Professor, University of Alberta, Canada, at the ‘Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation’ conference, April 1-3 2004, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

often the state and other institutions that manage these resources are unaccountable to the citizens of their country. Nigeria and Angola for example, have both seen decreased public expenditure on basic services for children over the past 25 years. This is reflected in a lower child expectancy at birth and lower literacy rate - one third of Angolan children die before they are five. Angola’s twenty-seven year civil war contributed to the deepening poverty in Angola, but the war was also fueled by Angola’s abundant natural resources.\(^7\)

### 6.5 A Gender and Child-biased DDRR process

The absence of the mention and provision for underage soldiers in the April 4 2002 Luena Memorandum was a retrogressive step for Angolan society. It discriminates against the rights of children and the young adults who were directly involved in the war at the time when they were underage, many of whom carried out the same duties as adults during the conflict. It undermines the legitimacy of the demobilisation program, and may have significant implications for future stability and public order. Previous experiences, not only in Angola, show the dangers of inadequately implementing demobilization and reintegration programs. There are risks of rural banditry and crime if ex-combatants are not fully social and economically reintegrated. The drift of unskilled, disaffected young people to urban areas with high unemployment and poor infrastructure may also contribute to a rise in social unrest.

The formerly abducted girls were not recognized as child or women soldiers, they had no guns to hand in, many were abandoned by the war husband and lost any link with the war family, despite the fact that most had lived and worked with their ‘families’ for years in the camps. There were not formally included in any category for demobilization or support for re-integration. For those who continued to live with an “elder’s family” or married to a war husband, the male head of household determined their area of return. In practice, many had to find their own way back to resettlement areas. Return routes were often many staged and complicated by the fact that they were often forcefully moved or passed from the responsibility of one government agency to another without planning or warning. They were often powerless and resource weak, constantly vulnerable to decisions made without their knowledge or consent. Furthermore, they seem to have taken decisions on the basis of hearsay rather than on the basis of concrete information. The narratives suggest that few if any of the girls/women have reached their chosen destination.

It is clear from this research that the formerly abducted girl soldiers have slipped through the official demobilization and reintegration process at every point:

- Lack of recognition of their soldier status, because they were too young to be considered as soldiers for demobilization purposes.
- Lack of recognition of their soldier status because they did ‘women’s’ work, which does not qualify for demobilization.
- Lack of recognition of their independent status, as all women associated with the armed forces were automatically considered to have dependant status and thus needed an official or ‘goodwill’ link to a male soldier’s family to become secondary beneficiaries of the demobilization process.

- Lack of support for the return and reintegration process since many were abandoned by war husbands and war families, or choose to separate from the husbands and or war families.

6.6 A Gender and Child-biased Return and Support process

Limited family reunification – continuing self-survival

Two years post war, the formerly abducted girl soldiers desired destination is an area that will offer them and their children greater work and education opportunities. This finding was a source of surprise for the research team who anticipated that the young women’s priority would be to locate and rejoin their family of origin or their place of origin. Eleven (27.5%) of the formerly abducted girls are living with members of their family of origin (7 Luanda, 4 Huambo).

Relations with family are very important but are sometimes difficult and the formerly abducted girl soldiers cannot take it for granted that there will be continuing family support. While "family" is mentioned in ways that show how far family will go to help, it also shows the limits - some have no family or cannot find their family of origin, some find it difficult to reintegrate with the family, and some families are already under severe economic pressure. There are suggestions by respondents that going to meet their families (parents, sisters and brothers) can cause difficulties with their husbands or fathers of their children. The young women also make references to difficulties with their in-laws.

The prolonged war dispersed families over a period of generations. Those that were with UNITA in the bush may have returned during the 1991 Bicesse peace process, during the 1994 Lusaka peace process or before or after the 2002 Luena cease-fire. Some were in camps in Zambia or in other bordering countries. Some ex-UNITA were captured by FAA and some returned on their own.

The girls and women interviewed in Luanda who are not living with members of their families of origin, did not know the whereabouts of their family of origin. Most of the girls and women interviewed in Huambo are aware of the whereabouts of their family of origin, but do not rank highly their plans to make contact with their family of origin. The following were reasons cited for not planning to contact family of origin or return to place of origin:

- Do not have the means to contact or travel to join their families
- Have concerns about reunification: report being frightened and insecure of their reception
- Have concerns that they will not be welcomed because of lack of resources to support them and their children
- Their families will be suspicious of them because they were with UNITA for so long.
- They do not want to live with their family’s of origin because this may complicate their relationship with their husband
- They do not want reunification because they value their anonymity, and are hiding their ex-‘bush’ identity.

74 Unrelated programme work by CCF and Development Workshop in Huambo province in 2004 indicates that on the whole, demobilised male ex-UNITA soldiers living in rural areas in Huambo province, report that these were the places where they were born or had lived before joining UNITA. The demobilised who have been found in these places do not appear to have a strong “UNITA identity”. It is unclear where
I preferred to come to Luanda .... because it is a big wide place. I am here as everybody is. In my face it is not written that this one made war. (KI 3, Luanda, pp 6)

In many other conflicts, those in the Balkans, for example, families separated by frontlines could eventually find each other by telephone via a cousin in other countries such as Germany. In Angola, the communication infrastructure is abysmally weak in a country twice the size of France. Moreover, the people most affected by the war are least likely to have access and know-how to simple things like a telephone. Anti-personal mines, poverty, poor road infrastructure, the comparative high cost of road and air travel, make travel too costly for most people. And all this is especially difficult if you are illiterate, have no money, have babies or young children on your back, have no documents, and have lost knowledge of aspects of your personal identity necessary to trace your family.

The less hopeful and more cynical view of the girls/women interviewed in Luanda when discussing their hopes and plans for the future, may illustrate the extreme alienation experienced by the formerly abducted girls newly settled in a huge post-war city, in very poor conditions, desperately competing in a ruthless economy, with little or no contact with family members and few sources of support and protection. The majority of the girls who went to Luanda, and who are not living with family of origin, had no knowledge of the whereabouts of their family of origin after the war. Some do not even know their areas of origin or their family name. Both the Luanda and the Huambo girls focus on ensuring their own and their children’s survival. Plans for returning to their place of origin and finding family members comes after meeting their own needs. This survival strategy may reflect the fact that they have survived without their families for so long, the lack of trust they feel towards adults and society in general, as well as the expressed desire to remain socially and politically anonymous and not to introduce complicated interpersonal demands and relationships into their lives.

However, the tables of factors contributing to potential for positive return, indicate strongly that social capital in the form of family support, most obviously in the form of financial capital/monetary support, is critical for integration - for enabling further access to social support, education, income-generating and material resources. Thus the formerly abducted girl soldiers who are living with their family of origin or with their husband, and who are receiving the above support, appear to be coping the most successfully with their return to post-war life. Previous research with returning ex-child soldiers, has indicated that reintegration to a family context, was found to be the most important factor in the child soldiers’ transition to civilian life.

This contradiction between the obvious benefit accruing from family contact and support, and the fear of making contact with their family, is in part a reflection of the manifest failure of the authorities in rapidly identifying and assisting these young women in family localization and reunification programmes. Furthermore, deepening poverty limits the potential for on-going

those who have a strong “UNITA identity” have gone. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those who were strongly linked to UNITA’s military activities and may thus expect strong reactions or reprisals, or who continue to identify with UNITA politically, have moved to the larger towns and cities where they are more anonymous.

75 The population of Luanda is estimated at between 3-4 million, a quarter of the country’s total population.
social support. It illustrates the assumption that demobilization and reintegration programmes with ex-child soldiers are dealing with children and adolescents that have the social status of children, and that can be identified, organized and managed in such a way as to facilitate family localization and reintegration. It also highlights the belief that urban and rural communities will absorb and assist young women with family ties to the local community, whether that be through blood or marriage.

**Abandoned by ‘war husbands’ – female-headed households**

Exacerbating the above situation, is the fact that 50% of the young women with husbands during wartime, were abandoned by their husband on return to his area of origin; and 53% of the formerly abducted girl soldiers are living in female-headed households, almost double than that the national average of 27%. Of the 40 women interviewed, 9 are married, and 8 are currently living with their husband. Watteville reports that in Uganda, the divorce rate of ex-combatant returning families is 50-60%, which is much higher than the average rate. The reasons given are related to women ex-soldiers emancipation and inter-ethnic marriage. The husband’s home community often rejects the ‘bush wives’ if the union took place without his family’s approval. In Uganda, many returning ex-combatants abandon their ‘war wife’ and marry a local woman as a step towards community acceptance and reintegration.

This research with Angolan girl soldiers is mirrored by the situation in post-war Sierra Leone where RUF commanders took the opportunity to abandon their ‘bush’ families and start a new life untrammeled by past ‘baggage’. Furthermore, the Sierra Leone research indicates that with children to raise, no family support, and no access to demobilization benefits, the RUF ‘war widows’ often opt for a kind of low-status marriage in the rural districts in which they have found themselves at the end of the war. Village polygamists are happy to acquire a hard-working wife ‘for free’. The standard escape for these young women is reportedly to go to main towns and engage in commercial sex work. The alternative for those afraid of street life in town, appears to be a lifetime of domestic servitude as ‘bush wives’ in rural villages. That said, rural isolation and servitude is not an experience confined to female ex-soldiers.

A key finding of the FAS Vulnerability Survey is that female headed-households are consistently poorer than any of the directly war affected ‘vulnerable groups’. Those that fall into this group and that are also displaced, mostly in Huambo province, are among the most marginalised in the FAS study. The study reports that it is evident that although direct impacts of the war strongly shape poverty and vulnerability patterns, there are other significant social factors which contribute to vulnerability. Gender stands out as the most important criteria affecting extreme forms of vulnerability (Yngstrom, pp 43, 2004).

---

76 MICS 2003 data.
The formerly abducted girl soldiers have struggled through the two years post war on their own. The trauma and disturbance of living through the war, is now exacerbated by the difficulty and insecurity of returning and starting a new life on their own. Most spent such a long time away from their family, and in such extreme and traumatic conditions that they have lost sources of reference, constructed memories and relationships of their past life. The intensity of their war relationships seems for some to have created equivalently intense relationships with their formerly abducted girl soldier peers. It is now difficult for them to start anew, to trust and feel confident with people who did not undergo the same experiences.

**Livelihood strategies – young, single, marginalised, hard-working mothers**

Like other war affected Angolans, the girl and women ex-soldiers are taking into account that peace has failed on previous occasions in Angola. However unlike many of the male demobilized, their vulnerability is greater because they have less authority and fewer resources to make decisions and choices about their post-war lives and livelihoods. The girls are confronted with daunting challenges: choosing people to live with and a place to live, daring to consider whether they can compete for available land or start-up a small business as young, single mothers, ex-UNITA women, poor and uneducated, often with no family to support them. It is a testament to their incredible survivor qualities, that these young women have made it thus far, and that they are able to forge ahead and survive, even if it is from day to day, by doing badly paid, occasional, odd jobs.

Program work done by CCF and by Development Workshop\(^{80}\) in Huambo in 2004, unrelated to this research, shows that the return of the demobilized, as well as the displaced peoples, seems to be taking place slowly and in stages. The first step appears to be a return to the small towns (main town in a municipal or communal area). There are apparent concentrations of returnees, recently demobilized and displaced people in these small rural towns. People say that they may eventually return to their “area of origin” but they will stay where they are for a year or two, while they create conditions to return.

Furthermore, it seems that those who were forced to abandon their lands have invested in other ways of surviving related to the urban markets. The men have learnt new skills, such as fishing or different forms of agriculture (irrigated farming) or petty trading or an urban trade such as car repair. Many seem to prefer the relative security of their present survival strategy, even if they are living in poverty, to the uncertainty of a return to a rural area that will require re-learning old skills and accumulating new assets. Those who are most vulnerable, like the formerly abducted girl soldiers and others who survive on occasional odd-jobs at very low pay, do not have the assets to return to a rural area and are unlikely to manage to start accumulating any assets on the basis of the current limited and unreliable opportunities to income.

Those who are returning in stages to rural areas are doing it in a way that helps them to maintain another income in the mean time and to accumulate the assets needed for a full return to a rural area. The men report that they want to return with a plough, some cattle, agricultural instruments and some household goods. They need to maintain a source of income from petty trade or an urban job to provide for a successful return to agriculture. These sources of income are more likely to be found in a small town rather than in a rural area, and are more likely to be found in

\(^{80}\) Correspondence with Paul Robson, 22 November 2004.
places along the main roads. Choosing to live near a town also facilitates the continuing search for family members.

There are unlikely to be any services in rural areas, away from the main roads or small towns. Furthermore it will take some time to clear the bush again, to build a house, to clear pathways and to know which areas are still mined. Demobilised and displaced people also appear to take into consideration the fact that they have lost most of their assets a number of times, when peace failed over the last 30 years. They therefore are investing slowly until they are really convinced that peace is permanent, and in particular are waiting to see the outcome of the forthcoming elections.

However, many demobilised soldiers have gone to other areas, places where they have not lived before. This makes some sense - many of these people have been away from the “areas of origin” for up to 28 years. They do not know whether they still have a family in their “area of origin”. They suspect or know for certain, that their village was destroyed at some time and that all the inhabitants left. They may fear that they may not be welcome there. They may know, or suspect, that rebuilding an economic life there will involve clearing land that has been uncultivated for up to 25 years. They may know or suspect, that there is strong competition for land in some areas of Huambo Province while it is slightly easier to find land in other Provinces.

They have few assets. Rebuilding their economic life requires some help to get started, such as a small loan to start a small business (buying agricultural products from peasants in their fields and reselling it to passing traders at the roadside, for example), or advice on how to start a small trade, or some help to gain access to a piece of land. A relative is the normal source of such help: a relative will provide the small loan or advice to start a small business, or will make the introductions to the Soba to get access to land. It makes more sense for the demobilised soldier to go to a place where they know they have some relative or close friend who can help in this way than to return to their “area of origin” where there may be no family members. People from the Central Plateau have been forced to move from there since the colonial period, and it is just as likely for them to find family members in other areas as in the “area of origin” on the Central Plateau itself.

While the formerly abducted girl soldiers are proving to be tireless micro traders, the sustainability of their enterprises are constrained by a lack of capital and marketing skills, not to mention the fact that the informal sector itself is highly insecure. The formerly abducted girl soldiers are particularly vulnerable because most have no relatives in the areas of return to help them with some capital to start in small trading or agriculture. They are more likely to find such jobs in small towns, where there are more people with some money to pay someone to shell maize or wash clothes, and where there is more likely to be a concentration of people so there will be a steady flow of odd-jobs. Working and earning capacity is reduced by the presence of young children, illness and the rain. If they do not receive any outside support, they do not eat on the days when they earn no income, and are thrown out of rented accommodation when they cannot meet the monthly rent.

None of the formerly abducted girl soldiers are employed in the formal sector. They have no or poor educational qualifications. Chances of employment in the social services (health and
education) where women traditionally have a greater likelihood of getting a job are sabotaged by extremely low budget allocations given to the rehabilitation of social services. Another block is the fact that they have been ignored by the demobilization process, which means that those who had an appropriate level of education, were not formally identified, and thus not integrated into the public sector admission of health and education staff.

In terms of understanding the ex-combatants access to or exclusion from social capital, social networks in rural areas of Africa need to be primarily understood from the point of view of membership in social institutions, in particular membership in autochthonous kinship and domestic groups, i.e. those descended from the original founders of the communities. Marriage is the foundation of these groups, and is through marriage that men and women gain access to productive resources, in particular land. In is mainly upon marriage that young men are allocated land from the domestic group, and it is mainly through marrying that women gain access to land. However, in some cases, women also inherit land in their own right. Through marriage, men also gain access to the labour women and children provide to farm that land. Control over land is therefore overwhelmingly vested in men, while women as wives normally have rights to use the land, and through this can fulfill one of their main domestic responsibilities – food provisioning for the family.

Only one of the formerly abducted girl soldiers reports working on her own land - her husband’s land in Huambo. In the central highlands where Huambo province is located and where most of the formerly abducted girl soldiers originate from, women have few land rights. Traditionally, a widowed woman loses access to the land she had through her husband, the land tends to go to the husband’s eldest brother or the husband’s eldest son, and she gets sent back to her parent’s village. However, CCF work in other projects and reports from the focus groups and the key informant interviews, suggests that the traditional authorities can and are giving a plot of land to women returning from the war without husbands to the rural areas. None of the 40 formerly abducted girl soldiers reported receiving any such aid from their families of origin or communities of return. This lack of legal right to land and agricultural resources, coupled with not having the option of cultivating family land, has meant that the formerly abducted girl soldiers have become part of the agricultural labour force. While this opportunity has enabled the formerly abducted girl soldiers to employ their skills and to earn an income, their current living conditions indicate that they occupy a marginal position within the rural social hierarchy.

Not being a member of an autochthonous group restricts access to resources, as well as participation in the social life of the community. That does not mean that outsiders cannot become part of an autochthonous community: when there is no shortage of land or conflict over other resources like water, male outsiders or families might be welcomed, while women would only be welcomed as wives. Not being married, means not being able to participate in these institutions, and this means being excluded from access to critical productive resources.

The FAS III findings suggest that processes of integration and social cohesion are highly uneven across the three surveyed communities in Luanda, Huambo and Uige. Where pressure on resources is not so great, social cohesion is generally stronger than in other areas, and there is a greater possibility of integrating newly settled people who are connected through marriage. In

---

81 Yngstrom for FAS III, pp 48, 2004
almost all cases, in the rural and the urban areas, unmarried women (single, widowed during the war or because of marital breakdown) are excluded from active engagement in social and economic life. Thus women who head up their own households tend to become isolated within the community, both socially and economically. In particular this is true of women who have married into the local community and have subsequently lose their husbands or are abandoned by them, of widowed women IDP's who have some family links to the village, and those who returned to the village after they had lost their husbands. In each case, as with the formerly abducted girl soldiers, the women’s access to resources was found to be compromised.

In terms of accessing other forms of support, the church is commonly cited as an important source of spiritual and material support. The FAS survey cites the church as a central part of life in urban and rural Angola, with almost all households belonging to a church. However, as reported by the formerly abducted girl soldiers, direct support to individuals does not appear to be widespread, with the exception of help with funerals. Beyond the church it is rare to find associations that have emerged without external support from NGOs.

The FAS study, though not representative, clearly indicates that the trend in urban and rural areas is that vulnerability is heavily skewed towards women. In poor communities, women are much more likely not to have access to land, not to own a house and have no assets except their labour. Since there is much more supply in relation to demand for labour, they are much less likely to get work. This picture is even more marked for women associated with the ex-military of UNITA in Angola. This vulnerability and marginalisation is clear from the profile developed of the girls interviewed:

- 45% (N=18) formerly abducted girl soldiers were 18 years and younger at the time of the interview (7 Luanda and 11 Huambo).
- On average they were sixteen years old when they had first child. This is two to four years younger than average\(^2\).
- 12.5% (5) are currently in school (4 Luanda, 1 Huambo).
- 60% (24) had no formal or informal schooling whatsoever. This is well above the national average where 27 % of female heads of households do not know how to read and write\(^3\).
- 53% (21) are living in female-headed households; almost double the national average of 27\%\(^4\).
- 80% (N=32) of the sample was living in conditions of extreme poverty.
- When paid in cash, the formerly abducted girl soldiers earn an average of US 50 cents per day, which is below the income poverty line in Angola, which is calculated as one dollar per day.\(^5\).
- 20 % (N=6/20) of the Luanda sample, and 10% (N=2/20) of the Huambo sample reported meeting their own and their children’s basic needs for shelter, nutrition, clothing; are currently able to work and/or accessing formal education, report being able to follow-through with future plans re work, education and training.

\(^2\) MICS 2003 data: two thirds of Angolan women give birth by 18 years old, by 20 years old, 68% are mothers.
\(^3\) MICS 2003 data.
\(^4\) MICS 2003 data.
The formerly abducted girl soldiers do not report any discrimination directed against them because they are ex-soldiers. This may be because they are not recognised as having been soldiers at all. They report three major forms of discrimination:

- Political discrimination related to the fact that most are perceived as ex-UNITA
- Labour, and
- Gender-related discrimination by the communities of return.

From the above discussion and the respondent’s narratives, it appears as if the vulnerability of their position is taken as normal and it is overwhelmingly accepted in society that they can be used to the maximum. It appears as if communities can exploit these young women because they have no legal or traditionally defined social responsibility towards them, especially if they don’t belong to or are not recognized by a family which belongs to a particular community. The villages and urban neighbourhoods are not interested in throwing them out, and appear happy to have exploitable people on the margins working for next to nothing. It seems as if the main protection against being a woman and being ex-UNITA, is if they are integrated into a family or championed by a family member or family friend. The implications for the DDRR process is to recognize these people early on in the process to ensure that they do not fall through the DDRR cracks and remain an underclass on return to community, with the generational implications of reproducing an underclass.

This research shows that two years post war, most of the formerly abducted girl soldiers are not girl children, have not been identified as ex-child soldiers, are not dependants of male ex-soldiers, have self-demobilised, and are not going back to place and family of origin. Hence their families, the armies that used them, and society in general, have largely abandoned them to a meagre survival, with few income-generating skills and no social safety net.

6.7 Psychosocial Identity, Family Support and Social Status key to Rehabilitation

The formerly abducted girl soldiers suffered, and continue to suffer, from multiple hardships:

- Abduction,
- Loss of identity,
- Initial and on-going separation from their parents and families,
- Orphaning, witnessing parents and family members killed,
- Rape and repeated rape by multiple men,
- Forced marriages,
- Extreme physical punishments,
- Forced labour including sacking the dead, walking across minefields and enemy territory, sex labour, carrying heavy materials for extensive periods of time under hazardous conditions,
- Being attacked and being involved in military attacks,
- Untreated illnesses and wounds,
- Pregnancy and child birth under hazardous conditions,
- Chronic malnutrition and at times starvation,
- Forced to abandon their children or watching their children dying or being killed,
- Rejection, discrimination and poverty on return: ignored by the demobilization process, abandoned by their war husband, exploited by authority figures and employers, neglected by the community of return and for some, by their family of origin.

Reported psychosocial responses to their hardships are similar to those reported by studies done with child ex-soldiers in Africa\textsuperscript{86}. Namely:

- **Psychological**: Elements of depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress: head and other aches when they feel sad, feeling tired a lot of the time, thinking all the time about bad things that happened, bad dreams about their abduction and war experiences, feeling moody and irritable, feeling sad and hopeless a lot of the time, feeling anxious that things might go wrong again, feelings of despair about the future.

- **Identity problems**: expressed in terms of having ‘broken memories’ or not remembering the past, feeling confused a lot of the time about time, place, people and how to plan for the future.

- **Self-esteem**: Worthlessness and guilt about not being able to care for their children and improve themselves.

- **Self abuse**: A formerly abducted girl soldier in Huambo was clearly abusing alcohol.

- **Social**: shame, fear and anger at being discriminated and exploited, low self esteem about being ‘ex-bush’, about being uneducated, about not having enough clothes and food, about not being able to cope.

- **Resentment**: Anger and bitterness targeted at authority figures and the ‘haves’, especially those that had before, during and now still have after the war.

Re-establishing normalcy and social integration for the formerly abducted girl soldiers, is not simply about returning home, but about having to recover or establish a new identity, define new guiding social values and establish relationships based on a combination of factors including kinship, socio-economic interests, and shared experiences and circumstances. Such a process is extremely difficult for the young women who have lost parts of their personal history and identity, and who are coping with the psychosocial fallout of war. Reintegration and rebuilding their lives is especially difficult if they have no support from the family of origin or the “war family”.

The narratives show how return and integration can have disintegrative aspects\textsuperscript{87}. The long years of separation and exposure to new social environments and attitudes, new perceptions of the role of sexual relationships, of the role of family and its members, a newly gained socio-economic status in terms of independence and/or exclusion, and forced migration in search of work - all contribute to continued dismantling of existing social networks and the establishment of new ones.

It is clear from the research that assigned and/or assumed social identity (erg. Daughter, sister, wife, widow, single mother, ex-bush girl, abducted girl soldier, working girl), influences access


to resources and prescribes a social status. Defined social identity or lack of an identity will
determine the young women’s current, mid and long-term survival position in the social
hierarchy of post-war Angola. The young women with the best chances for rehabilitation are
those who have family support and consequently easier and swifter access to resources, including
community recognition and support.

DDRR programs often focus on economic and social reintegration and deal inadequately with
the psychosocial needs of ex-combatants. Psychological rehabilitation needs are important in the
medium and long term. Ex-military exhibit high levels of trauma and violence with self-abuse
including drug and alcohol abuse, destructive relationships and work patterns, increased risk of
being sucked into prostitution, child trafficking and suicide. They also tend to higher rates of
violence towards others such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and physical violence. Reports
from countries as different as Namibia, Chad and Nicaragua recount a similar rise in post-
conflict tensions relating to domestic violence, child abuse and a general rise in interpersonal
violence and crime. Such tensions and conflicts are statistically higher in the families of the ex-
military. Life skills programs within DDRR processes should include preparation for the
prevention of and coping with, post-war related domestic conflicts and criminal activity.

The FAS III Survey indicates that the main pattern of conflict and violence emerging from post-
war urban Luanda and rural Huambo, is of widespread domestic gender-based violence, often
resulting in separation and divorce. The FAS respondents cite poverty as being a cause for most
conflict. In the case of gender-based violence it appears to be related to men trying, and often
failing, to find a role for themselves in this new post-conflict situation. It was widely admitted by
poor men that it is women who are the main income earners in their households. Alcoholism and
drug addiction are also blamed for these abuses. Women choosing to leave violent husbands
leave themselves more exposed to other risks, either if they choose to stay alone or if they get
involved with other men. Many of the fathers do not support the children once they have left
them. In Huambo, land was cited as one of the main sources of conflict within the community,
even within families.

The formerly abducted girl soldiers cite poverty in the form of competition for scarce resources,
discrimination against ex-UNITA, and family disputes especially those related to alcohol abuse
and alleged infidelity, as the main causes of community disputes.

6.8 Targeting Adolescents
The formerly abducted girl soldiers age group post war, consists of adolescents and young
women in their early twenties. The war has affected this group at a critical time in their young
lives. In the aftermath of war, many young people have great difficulty imagining a future that
holds a meaningful place for them. Developmentally adolescents are at the psychological phase
where they are forming their identity and making key decisions with regard to their future and
their relationship to society. Depending upon their opportunities and experiences, they have
enormous potential to either contribute positively to the development of their communities, or to
become destructive forces in society.

Angola’s colonial history and the long years of war have meant that anybody under thirty years old has no memory living in a peaceful society. No Angolans have experienced living in their own modern, united, and democratic nation state with fair and functioning organs of governance. Apart from positive experiences that some groups may have had at a local level, or elites at the national level, there is no consensual institutional and cultural memory of what it means to be a citizen of a democratic country. The demands of a modern nation state and a functioning democracy requiring representation and consequently elections at local, provincial and national levels, requires that the youth participate knowingly in decision-making structures. Disaffected and disillusioned young people in a country where the average life expectancy is forty-four years of age will undermine the development of a healthy inclusive nation state.

The majority of childhood intervention programmes in Angola are mainly for children below 12 years of age. On the whole adolescents are neglected and there is a dearth of programmes for the 13-18 and to a lesser extent the 19-25 age groups, especially for rural youth. Programmers and donor agencies need to target this age group, in particular for long-term, psychosocial and educational programmes aimed at helping to prepare them to adjust to a peaceful society, and for the roles and responsibilities of adult life and the civic responsibilities of a citizen in the 21st Century.

6.9 Gender-biased Reunification Rituals and Emotional Support

None of the interviewed girls or women reported participating in reintegration ceremonies or rituals. The research shows that girls and women were not included in the purification rituals because it was assumed that they were not soldiers and had not killed. The abducted girl soldiers proximity to death, their combatant, logistical and support roles, including their frontline work, does not appear to be viewed as soldiering, or deemed contaminating in such a way that it might undermine the community on return. The implications for this in terms of psychosocial reintegration at an individual, family and community level is not known.

Previous research with underage male soldiers and with adult soldiers in Angola and in other countries indicates that many communities practice cleansing and purification rituals so that the harm, including killing, men may have done during the war does not revisit and contaminate their community. If such ceremonies are not done during the immediate period of return, they are usually done when the ex-soldiers shows aggression or are involved in some act of social disturbance.

The reintegration rituals concerned with cleansing appear to apply to returning male soldiers only. This has parallels to the demobilisation of male soldiers only, in an attempt to defuse the perceived potential of ex-male soldiers to be factors of social and political destabilisation. Women ex-soldiers are not demobilised or ritually cleansed because in part they are not deemed threatening to community or national stability. It is also possible that there is not a long tradition of women soldiers in Angola, and traditional rituals and community social regulatory mechanisms have not recognised and adapted to the changing dynamics of war.

The available literature suggests a gender-neutral understanding of welcoming ceremonies, purification rituals and related traditions. This research suggests otherwise and further gender and child-aware research needs to be done in this area.
6.10 Valorising (womanly) emotional support
All of the formerly abducted girl soldiers described emotional and practical support from women relatives and friends as crucial to their healing and problem solving. This took the form of talking about their pre-war lives, their war experiences, and sharing concerns and coping strategies on return. It is important that such modes of support and healing are valued and reinforced. One-on-one supports and simple friendships should not be ignored in the search for community support networks and traditional rituals. We should not undermine or silence the ways in which women acknowledge and support each other. In an attempt to move beyond the dominance of the ‘Western Medical Model’ of psychiatry and psychotherapy, psychosocial workers are at risk of neglecting the positive healing potential of supportive friendships and discussion. There is a risk of creating false distinctions between different modes of healing and support that exist along a continuum of support modalities.

*What has helped is talking with my mother, my sisters and my aunt* (EM 1, Luanda)

*Now I visit my girlfriends, we talk and I feel well.* (EM 7, Huambo)

Sorenson reports that women in post war societies have been active in organizing voluntary organizations that offer medical, psychological, educational, legal and economic services. Another issue addressed by women’s organizations has been the growth of violence within post-war societies. Through classroom education and workshops, women have sought to raise awareness about violence against women and children, and to change the attitudes that consider such violence acceptable.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report will attempt not to repeat widely accepted recommendations from previous research, but present a number recommendations arising directly from this research. The recommendations are based on the Angolan situation, and aim to improve our understanding of girl soldiers and improve the quality of program interventions.

This research distinguishes between women involved in war as soldiers (armed fighters and soldiers working in logistics and support) and dependants (family members of the military men). The recommendations are focused upon the formerly abducted girl soldiers, and not the broader group of girls and women who were in the armed forces as members of military families.

7.1. Recognition of soldiering work
This research with the formerly abducted girl soldiers suggests that:
- The soldiering work of girls and women should be recognized as such; the girls and women should be accorded the title and status of ‘soldier’ or ‘ex-soldier’;

---

- The international conventions and domestic laws regulating standing armies and armed groups be altered to clearly recognize the soldiering role played by women involved in military logistics and support.

7.2 False Assumptions
The following are commonly made false assumptions in the design of post war demobilization and reintegration programs. Namely, that:
- All girl ex-soldiers are still children at the end of the war, at the time of demobilization, and by the time they settle into an area of return,
- All girl/women ex-soldiers are dependants of male ex-soldiers (wives, family members, continue living in the house of the male head of household where they were assigned during the war),
- All girl/women ex-soldiers widows and abandoned wives can prove their war unions/marriages to male ex-soldiers,
- All girl/women ex-soldiers will automatically become secondary beneficiaries of demobilization and other benefits directed at male ex-soldiers,
- All or most of the girl/women ex-soldiers want to, whether they have the means to or not, return to live with or make contact with their family of origin,
- All or most of the girl/women ex-soldiers want to, whether they have the means to or not, return to live in their areas of origin (house, village, town),
- All communities will accept and assist young women with family ties to the local community, whether that be through blood or marriage,
- It is impossible to identify and work with girl/women ex-soldiers once they have self-returned and begun the integration process.

It is assumed that barriers to identifying and reaching out to girl and women ex-soldiers are absolute and exist for all situations. The reasons most frequently cited for excluding girl and women ex-soldiers from DDRR programs are the dangers of targeting a particular vulnerable group in an overall vulnerable community and the costs of an enlarged inclusive program. There is no doubt that it is be difficult to get military and military families to spontaneously identify the formerly abducted girls working for them, and to get the military and political hierarchy to recognize the young women’s work as soldiering and pay them for their contribution. However, in a rights based framework, there is no legitimate justification for not reaching out to these young women who are the ultimate victims in the power game of war.

Post-war programming needs to strike a balance between community-based assistance directed at all war-affected children and women, and simultaneously identifying a vulnerable group and integrating them into the community-based programmes. In practice, this research has shown that access to the girls and women is not difficult even in a peri-urban area. The girls and women, once they felt safe, wanted to talk. Furthermore, following the research, CCF set up a pilot vocational training and support program for the formerly abducted girls and their children in a peri-urban area of Luanda (see 7.3.4 below) and the candidates far outnumber the available places on the program. The majority of the clients heard of the program by word of mouth and presented spontaneously. It is possible to correctly identify these girls and trace them, to consult with them in private, and with their permission to facilitate their entry and continued attendance of social services, vocational and support programs. Lessons learnt from this project regarding
iterative sampling can contribute towards devising mechanisms to register girls and women who are in FQA’s and holding camps, or for those who have already left military gathering areas.

7.3 **Primary Rehabilitation and Reintegration issues related to research and programming**

7.3.1 **Listen to the girls:** The young girls and women interviewed told us that, two years post war, the main rehabilitation issues facing them were:
- **The need to survive:** how to get the means to meet their and their children’s basic needs. This involved accessing work to get money or bartering their labor for shelter and food.
- **The need to progress:** how to get enough resources to educate and train themselves in order to become more resourceful and more secure.
- **The need to heal:** physically, psychologically and spiritually.
- **The need to trust:** to make family and social links such that they can begin to reciprocate in mutually positive relationships.
- **The need to be recognized:** by their communities, by the authorities, and by the law as competent and valued social actors.
- **The need to hope:** to feel that they and their children are secure enough in the present, to be able to risk hoping to achieve some plans and even dreams of the future.

7.3.2 **Research Priorities driven by Local staff.**
The research team was Angolan, apart from one South African, and all have extensive experience in working with children and communities in conflict and post-conflict situations. CCF Angola is identified as an international organization with a local national team. It has a solid eleven-year track record in child protection and war-related psychosocial work in Angola. The CCF country team has deep and long-term contacts across all levels of Angolan society. The local team “owned” the research and was highly motivated to produce the voices of the formerly abducted girls. The psychosocial experience of the researchers enabled them to establish rapport, create trust, detect nuance and negotiate cultural understanding.

7.3.3 **Issues of Methodology and Process**

a) It was an invaluable asset to have **women interviewers and field workers** who have a sound empathy with and knowledge of the background of these young women, and the pitfalls and benefits of recovery and rehabilitation efforts. Two of the interviewers were formerly abducted girls, and all the team had direct experiences of war.

b) As stated in the project proposal, the research tried to keep to the principles of the **rights-based approach** in carrying out the research. Namely that:
- The participatory methodology emphasized narrative and personal voice, which was essential in uncovering the invisible suffering of the girls and young women
- By interviewing both formerly abducted girls, women who were abducted years ago, and key female informants, the research took an ecological approach that identified the problem at the different individual, family and community levels. The information was collected and triangulated at multiple levels, facilitating a holistic interpretation of the data.
- The research attempted to identify the existing knowledge and skills of the formerly abducted girl soldiers and of war-affected girls in general, drawing lessons from their
resilience and coping strategies, and seeking to identify barriers that they face when reintegrating into society.
- CCF conducted feedback workshops that invited and included most of the project partners and research participants, including their feedback in the final project report.
- Advocacy for the girl’s rights was included in the research design and acted upon during the project’s lifespan.

c) **Budget for translation**: The resources (people, time and money) required for translations into multiple languages were underestimated.

d) **Intensive project preparation and training** using trainers with previous experience in working with child soldiers in Angola.

e) Strong *psychosocial* component throughout the research: the staff experienced are psychosocial workers, interviewing and debriefing strategies informed by knowledge and practice thereof.

f) **Staff debriefing** support throughout project: regular group sessions, and one two-day retreat during the data collection phase in the field.

g) **Staff field observation and notes**. It was only near the end of the project that it was recognized that whilst the staff valued and sought debriefing, they did not value their subjective insights enough to note and document them so that their interpretation of the ongoing process could become a part of the research data. This aspect of the analytical process needs to be more clearly incorporated into training and project work.

h) Valuable interpretations were made when the whole team participated in two ‘analytical workshops’ to examine the synthesized data. It is important to include all project staff in the analysis of the synthesized data. Often field workers and interviewers are not included in the interpretative and analytical conceptualization of the collected data, sometimes not even in feedback workshops and presentations of the final reports.

i) Emphasis on communicating and respecting clearly stated and understood *ethical standards*, including informed consent, strictly controlled data management, and an absolute commitment to confidentiality.

j) **Iterative sampling**: using trusted community organizations and local contacts to identify adolescent and adult key informers. Using this group to identify and access the formerly abducted girl soldiers. Confidentiality issues regarding the introductions and networking were agreed upon beforehand with this group. The young women do not want to publicize their ex-soldier/ex-‘bush’ status, confidentiality and working with trusted key informants and established community groups is key to this process.
k) Consulting with the formerly abducted girls regarding the most confidential and convenient meeting times and places. The young women did not want the interviews to take place in or near their places of residence. Transport was provided or subsidized to and from the interview sites.

l) The respondent’s participation was totally voluntary. They received no financial or other renumeration for their involvement.

m) Drinks and refreshments were provided for the young women and their children during the interviewing. This was a useful stress reduction strategy: the young women needed to replenish their energy because the interviews are draining in that they brought up painful memories. The young women and at times their children, often only eat one meal a day and came to the interviews hungry and thirsty.

n) The three to five hour interview, done over a period of two days by the interviewer and co-facilitator, gave adequate time for reflection and support, enabling the young woman to revisit and expand upon issues, and deal with her emotions with two supportive women interviewers.

o) An influencing and advocacy strategy was started from the very beginning: prefacing the research with community-based awareness raising / sensitizing consultations and meetings, and concluding the research with detailed feedback and dissemination workshops. The aim was to promote community awareness and to talk openly about the experiences of this group of Angolan women and children within the local communities where the research was conducted, as well as with representatives of government, the military and civil society.

p) Respecting, consulting and working with traditional and government authorities. Despite the risks, CCF informed, and where relevant attempted to include government departments at all points during the research, namely MINARS and MINFAMU.

q) Whilst not included in the CIDA project brief, the project was designed and provision was made by CCF Angola to follow-up the research project with an intervention project. This plan was not communicated to the project participants during the research.

7.3.4 Important elements to include in community-based ex-girl soldier interventions

a) The following lessons are drawn from the short experience gained since September 2004 in the implementation of a program intervention to respond to the needs identified in the research. The project, Support for the Reintegration of Girls Formerly Abducted in Conflict\(^{90}\), started in September 2004, has built on lessons learnt from the formerly abducted girl soldiers research and the experience CCF has

\(^{90}\) Funded by Norwegian Church Aid and Terres de Hommes.
gained from previous in-depth work with child soldiers and war affected children. In December 2004, there were two hundred and forty nine formerly abducted girl soldiers attending the courses in the context of this project. Up to 60% of course participants are other young girls living in the neighborhood. The courses aim to mix longer term residents with the more recently arrived formerly abducted girl soldiers in order to promote social reintegration.

b) **Conduct situational analysis, research and respond to the expressed opinions of former child-soldiers:** The project intervention was designed in response to the expressed needs of the formerly abducted girl soldiers interviewed in the formerly abducted girl soldiers research. For example, CCF sought vocational training programmes in relation to their requests – the formerly abducted girl soldiers stated that they did not want to do very hard physical work because their bodies have ‘been weakened and are sick’ by the hard labour, the wounds and the illnesses of the war.

c) **Partnership:** The project works through identified local partners in Luanda and Huambo (Kandengues Unidos, ASBC/Associação Samuel Bruce Cole, IECA), who will provide literacy and skills training to young women who were involved in the armed conflict. The project aims to build the capacity of existing organizations to deliver to more clients.

d) **The vocational skills’ training** is geared to the following job opportunities:
- Cooking, pastry making and baking
- Security guards
- Childcare workers
- Painting and decorating
- Cutting, pattern-making and sewing
- Setting up a laundry
- Agricultural skills.

The courses include the following components:
- Literacy and numeracy training
- Human rights education
- Health education with an emphasis on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS
- Job seeking and marketing skills.

e) **Capacity building and institutional support** for local partners. CCF has linked the local partners with international organizations such as Terre des Homme to finance the participation fees for the training courses. Terre des Homme also builds in training for better bookkeeping and money management. CCF is training local partner project staff in the following components which will be included in the course:
- Psychosocial support techniques
- Life-skills training
- Child development skills.

---

91 For example: CCF Angola’s ‘Life Skills Education Programme for War-affected Adolescents’, and the ‘Building Resilience in Angolan Children and Communities’ programme.
f) The project aims to support partners to provide **preschool facilities** for the children of the participants.

g) **Flexible course structure:** The courses are **modular**, 3 to 5 days per week, ranging over periods of 3 to 8 months.

h) The courses are situated in **easily accessible** places, in areas near where the girls live in the peri-urban neighbourhoods of Luanda and selected project sites in rural Huambo.

i) **Access social services for ex-child soldiers and their children:** The project aims to ensure that the beneficiaries will have access to existing health care, social assistance and educational services for themselves and their children.

j) **Civil registration:** clients are supported and encouraged to acquire personal identity documents.

### 7.3.5 Mainstreaming in program design:

a) **Mix of programming strategies:** Programming needs to be located within a continuum from emergency, to relief, to development, and at times bringing them together. For example, this implies that in certain cases the issues of program design are not premised solely on sustainability, but rather on what needs to be done to move children from present individual emergencies or hardships, towards longer-term programming about their futures.

b) Child protection agencies should work through local and traditional authorities to facilitate the ex-girl child soldier’s **access to land and housing**. Access to land is not sufficient. The women ex-soldiers need to be included in integrated rural development programs as autonomous clients.

c) **Access to health services:** The girls and young women need to be supported to access reproductive health services in as one a stop as possible. Experience shows that poor people are intimidated by professionals and are not likely to negotiate their way through a complicated system. The children of these women also require access to basic preventive health care.

d) Facilitate the acquisition of **identity documents** at all points in the process of return. This requires the recognition of the girls as autonomous individuals in their own right throughout the process. The sooner this is done, the more likely the girls are to benefit from direct and indirect support.

e) **Targeting adolescents:** Life skills programmes, adult education and vocational training, human rights awareness, civic rights and responsibilities, voting education. Adolescents and young adults are a neglected group. Existing programs emphasise
the under-fives and primary school children. The war robbed most adolescents of their childhood.

f) Facilitating normalcy through:
- **Friendships, cultural and spiritual recovery** and support through the encouragement of supportive discussions, friendships, and peer group support, youth clubs, traditional rituals, and church groups
- Building in a **long-term, future oriented perspective** into the process and content of the interventions. The survival imperative of living for the moment during war time and the uncertainties of return and resettlement, has meant that most Angolans have not dared to hope too much or too long for the future, or expended too much of their energy and resources on future planning. Fostering hope and encouraging communication, practical decision-making and planning skills to resolve conflicts and plan for the future, are invaluable life skills.

### 7.4 DDRR Recommendations

**a) Terminology and definitions**

The research team found the concept ‘**underage soldier**’ to be a more nuanced term reflecting the reality of different cultural, age and gender norms regarding the definition of childhood. The term ‘child soldier’ has a clear definition on explanation, and has critical child protection implications. However the immediate impact/understanding of its usage amongst the general population is a more limited and gendered, that of a pre-adolescent boy soldier with a gun in his hands. The meaning of underage soldier is clear in legal terms - a person under the age of eighteen years old who has been incorporated into an armed group or force and has served as a soldier. Community awareness needs to be done to communicate the above.

It is suggested that the UNICEF 1997 definition of a child soldier is adjusted create a **definition of a girl or a woman soldier**, that this definition is used to identify girl and women soldiers during demobilization, and becomes the **operational definition of the criteria for eligibility for DDRR**. This definition is inclusive of all women soldiers, attempting to bring to an end the distinction between women combatants who fought, and women soldiers who served. The italics show the suggested changes:

“A **girl or woman soldier** is any person, under eighteen years of age in the case of a child on recruitment or demobilisation, who is part of any regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. **Girls and women** recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage are included in this definition. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child or an adult who is carrying or has carried arms.”

---

To consciously use the more inclusive phrase: ‘soldiers who served in the armed forces’, as opposed to the only combatant related ‘soldiers who fought for the armed forces’.

b) **Family Quartering Area Protection Rapid Assessment**
To plan for and conduct FQA/cantonment sites rapid assessments of individuals and family or household units in the early stages when people first arrive in the camps. Focusing especially on children and adolescents, in an effort to facilitate the DDRR process, and provide information and recommendations to policy makers, humanitarian agencies and donors regarding issues affecting children, youth and service/program development during the first phase of return and rehabilitation. Specific objectives of the assessment can include:

- Clarifying the protection dimension in relation to the numbers of soldiers, including a gender and age breakdown
- Providing categories for identifying the composition of the armed forces/groups, including logistics and support functionaries
- Providing mechanisms to solicit information on the prevalence of people in the armed forces/groups who entered voluntarily, due to lack of protection or by force.
- Providing categories for identifying all dependants of the male and female soldiers
- Identifying, assess and categorise the priorities, capacities, vulnerabilities and needs of all individuals assessed
- Identifying particularly vulnerable groups
- Begin documenting cultural, traditional and emerging practices and beliefs, and other factors contributing to the vulnerability, and the protection of children and adolescents
- Documenting the main areas of return in the country
- Mapping key risks and protection issues, with recommendations for practical, rapid implementation of protection mechanisms for individuals and groups, e.g. formerly abducted girl soldiers wishing to leave their ‘war family’.
- Making recommendations to the Government, donors, UN organizations and humanitarian agencies for priority interventions that would contribute to a safer and healthier environment for people children and adolescents returning to their communities of origin.

c) The DDRR field officers have to identify the child and female soldiers using strictly negotiated criteria that have been agreed upon during the peace negotiations, and not relying only on the military commanders in the government/standing army and the armed groups providing the information. Following on from the above definition, **categories for identifying all soldiers** who served need to include:

‘Did you work for the armed group/force on a daily basis to do the following - carry supplies; prepare and maintain camp including washing and cleaning; care for the sick and wounded; gather and prepare food; ...’.

d) **Female field workers** to explore if girl and women soldiers provided sex to the male soldiers, and if girls and women were forced into marriage unions.
e) Likewise, male field workers to question boys and men regarding the **sexual abuse of male soldiers**.

f) For protection workers to develop **technical peacekeeping and military expertise** and capacity in terms of the issues facing child soldiers, and at national level, be included in the DDRR and peacekeeping training programmes given to military personnel, peacekeepers and other DDRR-related staff.

g) Register all girls and women **individually**, away from men, partners and any family.

h) Ensure transport for women and their children who wish to **travel independently** of their war husbands or war families.

i) Recognition has to be taken of the fact that ex-girl soldiers are also wives, ex-wives and widows of male soldiers. In the event that the girl and women ex-soldiers are not recognized as such, but as part of a general group of ‘women directly associated with the armed forces’, demobilization benefits such as **kits and salaries should be paid directly to the widows and former wives of demobilizing combatants**. In addition, the extension of the benefits to widows and former wives should bear in mind that many women in this position have no documentary proof of their relationship, and implementation of any policy of this kind should avoid placing an impossible burden of proof onto widows or former wives themselves.

j) Plan (budget, personnel, training, timeline) for the identification and registration of girls and women who have **self-demobilised and self-returned**.

k) Early planning and preparation for **family tracing, unification and integration**. This should be seen and planned for, as a staggered, long-term programme that includes all age groups, but with a vulnerability focus on child and women ex-soldiers. The training and early deployment of staff is essential.

l) During the peace negotiations, set into motion **partnership planning for post-DDRR ongoing facilitation and mediation of family localization and reunification, and longer-term rehabilitation and development programming**. This should include international and local NGO’s and government agencies, and involve gender and age disaggregated rapid assessments within the FQA’s as mentioned above, as well as in the identified areas of return and with receiving communities.

m) **Use of community resources**, such as the identification and mobilization of a flexible, community-based support network to assist the government and international agency family tracing and reunification programme. In Angola, CCF’s work during the Lusaka Peace process with the community-based, catequist church activist network, proved successful in facilitating family and community mediation, providing psychosocial support including traditional healing practices, and facilitating appropriate social and economic roles for the returning **male** child soldiers. The community-based network was
reported to have also begun to prove effective in meeting the needs of child soldiers who had escaped or were formally released from an armed group. If the peace process had held, it was believed that this network could have been an effective and sustainable basis of support for meeting the needs of girls and disabled youth that were excluded from the formal demobilization programme\(^{93}\).

n) That DDRR funders, planners and implementers, like the World Bank and the Government of Angola, need to have plans in place for monitoring progress against child and gender-specific objectives as part of the implementation of the ADR Program, and for compliance with international child and gender policies in post-conflict settings.

o) The humanitarian agencies and NGO’s need to be included in, fundraise and plan for the monitoring and implementation of a child and gender sensitive DDRR, ensuring that the special needs of all girl and women ex-soldiers be addressed.

p) Government and authority figures should publicly encourage acceptance and reintegration of UNITA ex-combatants, their families and those girls and single mothers who are returning to their areas of origin.

7.5 Advocacy and Political Commitment

**Advocacy is critical**, critical at every stage, critical in every situation. There is often a willingness to identify lessons learned but little apparent commitment to applying the lessons learned in practice. The critical need for enduring and persistent advocacy is demonstrated by the fact that in the 1994 Lusaka Protocol, the demobilization of (male) child soldiers was a priority in the first resolution adopted by the commission set up to implement the peace agreement. Eight years later, underage soldiers were excluded from the peace agreement and the ADR process. The political willingness to distribute the DDRR packages among male soldiers, women soldiers and underage soldiers is rarely apparent. Women and underage soldiers are rarely at the discussion table when peace agreements are being negotiated. The decision-making process regarding the triage of post-war threats from ex-soldiers continues to dictate that resources are first prioritized for the high ranking personnel, then the male combatants who are seen as posing a social and political threat to peace, and then whatever is left over, for general programs aimed at the disabled, youth and women who were the primary victims of the war.

7.5.1 At the national level, child protection agencies can:

b) Acknowledge formerly abducted girl soldiers as a vulnerable category needing special assistance through Angola’s post-conflict development programs.

c) Increase their awareness of the Angolan constitution and statutory legislation, and the norms and traditions of customary law and social organization (patrilineal or matrilineal). Systems of inheritance have particular relevance for the application of legal

standards and their impact on children, their families and communities: family and
criminal law; property, land tenure and inheritance, labour legislation and social
security.

d) Maintain ongoing monitoring and public reporting of any violations of the GoA’s
practical commitment to the main legal standards aimed at protecting and promoting
human and children’s rights. Angola’s constitution prohibits the recruitment of soldiers
under the age of eighteen. Angola is party to the African Charter on the Rights and
Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International
Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and to the International Labour Organisations
Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the
Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.\textsuperscript{94}

e) Focus on child labour in Angola. With the exception of the children of the elite, child
work is considered normal in Angola. The lack of services means that children have to
participate in the household economy, often doing heavy and time consuming work,
such as collecting water and firewood. Further research is needed to try and clarify in
21\textsuperscript{st} Century Angola, what work is considered as traditionally linked to the socialization
of children, and child work that results in too heavy a burden on children in the family. It
is particularly important to consider work that involves the exploitation of children by a
third party. There is a low level of industrialization and a low demand for non-skilled
labor in Angola. It seems safe to assume for the moment that children are not used as
industrial labor.

f) Prevent the future recruitment and worker exploitation of child soldiers. Together
with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, note must be taken of the International
Labour Organisation’s Convention 182. The ILO Convention 182 defines a child as all
persons under the age of 18, and includes ‘forced or compulsory recruitment of children
for use in armed conflict’ among the ‘worst forms of child labour’.\textsuperscript{95}

g) Lobby the government, the military and the opposition to ratify and enforce policies
giving protection to children during armed conflict, including: developing in conflict
zones codes of conduct that are rooted in local norms and values, zones of peace
(improve security and establish Child-Friendly spaces in IDP and refugee camps),
periods of tranquility and national immunization days.

h) Lobby the military to accept an inclusive definition of women and girl soldiers, and
work towards including this group in veteran’s groups, military pensions and other
benefits for ex-soldiers.

i) Work with the government departments to improve and extend civil registration of all
citizens.

\textsuperscript{94} Human Rights Watch. \textit{ Forgotten Fighters: Child soldiers in Angola}. New York. Vol.15,No.10(A)-April
2003, pp 23.
j) Encourage relevant government ministers, opposition parties, government advisors, senior members of the armed forces and civil administration, traditional leaders, and other popular figures in Angolan society to talk to ex-child soldiers and their families.

k) Work to influence authority figures to publicly support the case for the prevention of children’s military recruitment, and to talk out against the sexual and worker exploitation of children, child soldiers and women during and post-war. And to publicly encourage acceptance and reintegration of UNITA ex-combatants, their families and those girl soldiers and single mothers who are returning to their areas of origin.

l) Use the popular media (television, national and community radio and newspapers) to bring this study’s recommendations to national attention, and to ensure that the voices of ex-child soldiers and their families are heard.

m) Support Angolan Child Protection and Human Rights groups.

7.5.2 At the international level, child protection agencies can:

a) Lobby international agencies involved in negotiating peace treaties and DDRR programmes to maintain legal standards and ensure the recognition and due treatment of child and women soldiers.

b) Develop technical peacekeeping and military expertise and capacity in terms of the issues facing child soldiers, and at national level, include child protection workers in routine training programmes given to military personnel, peacekeepers and DDRR-related staff.

c) Countries on the board of the International Development Association should insist that the reintegration plan for Angola include educational, training, and micro-credit for all women and girl ex-soldiers.

d) Lobby first world governments to ensure that protection stays on the government’s agenda, as well as that of the UN Security Council, and that the Council is involved in monitoring agreements to stop the use of children in hostilities.

e) Establish codes of conduct on monitoring, reporting and calling to account international agencies and organizations violating their own policies and international conventions regarding the recognition, conditions of service and inclusion of child and women soldiers in humanitarian operations, peace accords and DDRR programmes.

7.6 Research recommendations arising from the study

The following questions need to be further researched in Angola and the results fed into the training of child protection workers, peacekeepers, the military, the police, legal workers, national and community leadership:

a) Child protection questions:
- What norms and cultural values sustained the “Culture of violence” in Angolan society for so long, that gave rise to the absence of protection for children, and that led to the harming and killing of so many children for so long?

- What local norms and cultural traits in Angola result in the continuation of the gender-based sexual and labour exploitation post-war?

- In the 21st Century Angola, what standards of child protection work, and which do not?

- What child protection norms and values (at the international, regional and local levels) can be used to promote the enhancement of protection of children during armed conflicts?

- Is there a clash between international and local legal measures aimed at the protection of children in Angolan conflict zones, and why exactly?

b) Reintegration issues:

- For the purposes of planning, disaggregate the reintegration process into the economic, political, social, psychological and spiritual dimensions of reintegration in relation to women and girl soldiers and their children. Research the types of support sought and received and from whom, and the support offered and withheld and from whom.

- Review and monitor the factors mitigating or facilitating positive return with good potential for reintegration, including community acceptance and stigmatisation, hopes and plans for the future.

- Pay particular attention to the children of girl and women ex-soldiers.

- Document and monitor the health and psychological status of girl and women ex-soldiers.

- Seek to understand the young women’s perceptions of their social role: considering the changes in family roles and responsibilities, especially within women-headed households

c) Reintegration traditions and rituals:

- The available literature imposes a gender-neutral understanding of welcoming ceremonies, purification rituals and related traditions. Further research needs to be done in communities and with returning girl and women ex-soldiers.