



chapter 6

**CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH FIGHTING FORCES (CAFF)
AND SMALL ARMS IN THE MANO RIVER UNION (MRU)**

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Introduction

Many West African conflicts evoke images of child fighters roaming the streets armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles. While children have reportedly participated in violence in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and to some extent in Guinea-Bissau and Senegal,¹ armed groups and state forces operating in the member states of the Mano River Union (MRU)—namely, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—especially favour the use of children. Given the regional dimension of the problem, efforts have been made to demobilize and reintegrate children associated with fighting forces (CAFF) after conflict, and lessons learned are beginning to emerge. Little is known, however, about the factors that encourage armed groups to recruit children. While it has often been stated that the availability of small arms plays a significant role,² little empirical research supports this link. Furthermore, the information available as to the types of weapons used by children is anecdotal only.

The aim of this chapter is to deepen our understanding of the links between small arms and CAFF in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. It comprises four main sections. The first section provides an overview of CAFF in MRU conflicts and describes the profiles of the children interviewed during the course of this study. The second looks specifically at recruitment from the CAFF perspective, and reflects on the role of small arms within that process. The third examines the different tasks that CAFF carried out in an attempt to determine their role and 'utility' for armed groups. The personal experiences of children during combat operations are discussed in the fourth section.

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The analysis presented here is based primarily on field interviews with 270 former CAFF conducted in the three MRU states between September and November 2004. All of the children interviewed were under the age of 18³ when first recruited and spent at least several months with an armed group. Three teams of local researchers—consultants in Guinea, researchers from the Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE 24) in Liberia, and Caritas Makeni staff in Sierra Leone—conducted the interviews. These were deliberately kept informal to avoid intimidating the children. At the end of each interview, however, interviewers had to fill in a standard reporting form, which served as the basis for the quantitative data presented here.⁴

Main findings are as follows:

- Firearms play a crucial role in the recruitment of children by armed groups. Some children are forced to join at gunpoint, while for others wielding a firearm signifies that they have achieved maturity. Firearms also enable children to enrich themselves at the expense of others—again at gunpoint—and are also an important means of self-protection from other armed or state groups.
- Almost all CAFF were provided with weapons, although to a much more limited extent than adults. CAFF mainly had access to assault rifles, in particular AK-47 models,⁵ whereas adults manipulated a wider range of weapons including rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs), light machine guns, and, in the case of those operating in Guinea, handguns.
- CAFF tasks were generally diverse and did not necessarily involve the use of firearms. Few reported using firearms while spying; many used them to steal food from storage facilities and villagers, as well as for guarding and soldiering. In more poorly organized and equipped groups, CAFF also portered weapons and ammunition, and maintained the firearms of superiors.
- The means by which armed groups controlled and supervised armed CAFF also differed. Within better-organized groups, strict ammunition control ensured that CAFF enjoyed only limited opportunities to discharge weapons. In groups with loose controls, CAFF deployed arms and ammunition for personal gain. Lax supervision based on favouritism enabled some CAFF to deploy their weapons when and how they saw fit.

- During periods of fighting, the rules under which CAFF may access small arms change dramatically. When armed units are under attack, commanders will provide more group members, including young recruits, with weapons for the purposes of defence and offence.
- The availability of small arms and ammunition determines to what extent commanders will consider arming CAFF. When arms and ammunition are scarce, leaders will provide weapons only to their 'best' fighters. Conversely, when weapons and ammunition are more easily available even CAFF will receive arms.
- Demographics also help explain the extent of child recruitment: children simply represent a large proportion of the population in regions where recurring conflict has resulted in dramatically increased mortality rates. In addition, armed units that lack military infrastructural support—e.g. access to trucks, housing and support staff—use children for menial tasks such as fetching water, gathering fuel, portering, cooking, and cleaning.

CAFF and conflict in the MRU

Historical overview

The use of CAFF in the region is as interconnected as the nature of the conflicts themselves. In 1989, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire, sparking a seven-year civil war. Besides the NPFL, the United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO, which later split into the 'ULIMO-J' and 'ULIMO-K' factions), local self-defence forces, and remnants of the Liberian National Army also took part in the first phase of the Liberian civil war.

In 1991, the Liberian conflict spread into Sierra Leone when Foday Sankoh, the leader of the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led a mixed group of fighters from Taylor's NPFL, Burkinabe mercenaries, and Sierra Leoneans across the border. The Taylor-sponsored RUF was quick to acquire territory. Troops from Nigeria, Guinea, and ULIMO supported the besieged Sierra Leonean government, successfully defending it against the RUF but failing to prevent a coup d'état in Sierra Leone in 1992 by the military.⁶ A number of local Sierra Leonean communities formed militias under the rubric of the Civil Defence Force (CDF) to defend against the RUF—these

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included the Kamajors, Tamaboros, Donsos, Kapras, and Gbethis.

In 1996, Nigeria and other West African states brokered a ceasefire between warring Liberian factions. This led to the 1997 elections that Taylor won. In Sierra Leone, elections were also held in 1997 following another coup: this time by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which then invited the RUF to join it in forming a new government. A peace agreement followed in 1999.

Peace in Liberia did not last. In 2000, Taylor's government faced attacks by the Guinea-supported Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)⁷ and, after 2003, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and various paramilitary and militia groups supported Taylor. These included the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), the Special Security Services (SSS), and a number of RUF fighters.

In 2000, the conflict spread after Taylor-sponsored rebels launched cross-border incursions into Guinea. The Guinean military was able to defeat the attackers only after recruiting thousands of Young Volunteers and receiving military support from LURD and the CDF in Sierra Leone. Fighting came to an end in Liberia with the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement of August 2003 and Taylor's exile to Nigeria. Since the 2002 election, Sierra Leone has also been relatively stable.

Throughout this decade of fighting, the numbers of children deployed by armed forces remained largely unknown. But many NGOs (HRW, 2004; Watch List, 2004; CSC, 2004a; 2004b), have documented the extent to which armed groups and government forces in Liberia and Sierra Leone recruited and deployed children. In Liberia, a total of 11,221 children (8,704 males, 2,517 females) were admitted into the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (DDRR) programme (UNMIL, 2004; NCDDR, 2004);⁸ while in Sierra Leone, 6,850 children were demobilized, despite the fact that many more took part in the fighting (UNSC, 2004, para. 21). In Guinea, the number of children recruited remains undetermined, with estimates ranging from 7,000 to 30,000.⁹ Between 2000 and 2001, Guinean authorities recruited and organized Young Volunteers into self-defence committees following rebel incursions into the southern part of the country.

Profile of respondents

A total of 270 CAFF were interviewed for this study: 100 in Liberia, 91 in Guinea, and 79 in Sierra Leone. In Liberia, nearly half (46) of the respondents had recently belonged to a rebel force, primarily LURD (35) and MODEL (7).¹⁰ Nearly as many (39) were members of a pro-Taylor militia group, such as the Jungle Lions (11), the ATU (9), and the Small Boys Unit (SBU) (6).¹¹ Eleven Liberian respondents did not specify the name of the ‘government militia’ they were associated with. Only 12 Liberian respondents had belonged to the AFL. Only one respondent had been with two different groups (MODEL and ATU—interestingly).

A considerable number (22) of the 79 Sierra Leoneans interviewed claimed to have belonged to more than one group: indeed, seven were affiliated with three different factions. Although this study did not allow for the tracing of CAFF between armed groups, it nevertheless indicates that a number of young Sierra Leoneans had previously been active in Liberia or organizations closely linked to the country. The overwhelming majority of respondents had belonged to the RUF (65 of 79). Six had also been with the SBU or Small Girls Unit (SGU), 4 with the Jungle Lions, and 1 with the ATU. Twelve Sierra Leonean CAFF had been members of the AFRC/SLA—although 7 had also been with the RUF, the SBU, or the SGU. Eight respondents had been members of the CDFs and the Gbethis. With one exception, all of those associated with these self-defence committees had also been a member of either a rebel group (RUF) or the AFRC/SLA. All 91 Guinean Volunteers had served, or were serving as Young Volunteers.

Table 6.1 Affiliations of CAFF respondents

	Guinea	Liberia	Sierra Leone
Rebel forces	0	46	78
Militias	91 *	39	15
Government forces	0	12	0
Total	91	100 **	79 ***

*All respondents from Guinea had been part of the Young Volunteer self-defence committees, which are classified here as militia because they were government-backed.

** Five respondents did not specify the unit they had been affiliated with. Only one person had been with two different groups (MODEL and ATU, interestingly).

*** Fourteen respondents had been with both a rebel and a militia movement.

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At the time of the interviews, all but three of the 79 Sierra Leonean CAFF had returned to their families after having undergone disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). The three others had returned to their families without having gone through DDR. In Liberia, 32 had already returned to their families after completion of DDR, while 21 were still undergoing the process, 11 were in interim care, 20 were waiting to be selected for the programme, and 6 were employed in a public works programme. Seven had returned to their families without going through any DDR process. In Guinea, just under half (41 per cent) were still Young Volunteers at the time of the interview. The other respondents had left the self-defence committees and were either undertaking professional training or at school (38 per cent). Twenty-two per cent were working either in agriculture or business.

At the time of the interview, respondents in Liberia and Sierra Leone were younger than those in Guinea. In Liberia the average age was 17 years, 18 in Sierra Leone, and 20 in Guinea. The recruitment age was the lowest in Sierra Leone. On average, respondents had been recruited at the age of 12, compared with ages 14 in Liberia and 16 in Guinea. The overwhelming majority of respondents were boys (over 80 per cent). Girls were more numerous among the Sierra Leoneans (24 per cent) and Liberians (21 per cent) than among the Guineans (9 per cent).

Table 6.2 Age at recruitment

	Youngest	Average age	Mean age
Guinea	15	16.3	16
Liberia	9	14.6	15
Sierra Leone	5	12.3	12

Interviewers selected respondents based on their willingness to talk. In many instances the interviewer and child had come to know each other through the demobilization process. This sample is therefore neither random nor representative of all CAFF in the respective countries surveyed. Nevertheless, the experiences related here are certainly more reliable and detailed than any random sampling. For most of these children, life with fighting forces has been highly traumatic and conversations regarding past

events had to be carried out in an atmosphere of trust. It is very likely, however, that a number of issues were far too sensitive to be discussed in one single conversation—even with a known adult. Particularly traumatizing events, such as experiences of sexual abuse, are therefore likely to be under-reported here.

Perspectives on the recruitment process

The research examines the extent to which children felt forced or coerced into the military and the degree to which they were able to make their own decisions. Children interviewed revealed the diverse role firearms played in the recruitment process: some were press-ganged at gunpoint, others were attracted by the possibility of using a firearm, and still others were prompted to join by fears for their personal security. Recruitment experiences, whether forced or voluntary, differ considerably between countries and according to circumstances. Overall, however, forced recruitment was more common (40 per cent) than strictly voluntary (20 per cent). A notable proportion (40 per cent) of children felt that they had no say even though no force was used.

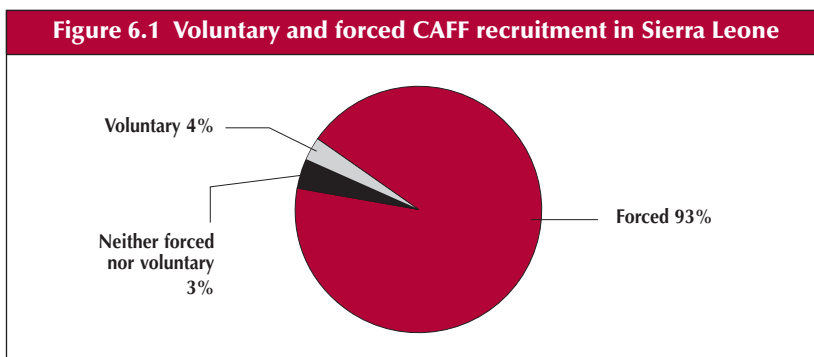
Forced recruitment

Overall, more than a third of respondents (40 per cent) declared that they had been forced to join an armed unit. This did not apply in Guinea, however, where not a single Young Volunteer reported forced recruitment.

More than 90 per cent of Sierra Leonean CAFF claimed to have been forcibly recruited, in particular by the RUF. The RUF abducted children from their homes and schools and snatched them from the streets. The following accounts are typical: 'I had been sent by my parents to fetch water when the town was attacked. I was captured and abducted by RUF fighters.'¹² 'I was captured when the rebels attacked my village. I was sleeping when a rebel with a firearm entered the room. I was alone and was taken away.'¹³ Only one of the 65 respondents affiliated with the RUF did not describe the recruitment process as forced.¹⁴ There is, however, a possibility that those interviewed exaggerated owing to the fact that investigators for the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) were collecting evidence against the RUF. The excessive use of force by the RUF, however, is well-documented elsewhere, and voluntary

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recruitment is generally believed to have been limited to the early years of the movement (McIntyre et al., 2002 quoting Richards, 1996).



In Liberia, the proportion of CAFF who claimed to have been forced into an armed unit (36 per cent) was also considerable. Experiences were similar, even though forced recruitment was more common in pro-Taylor militia groups (49 per cent) than in the rebel groups LURD or MODEL (30 per cent). Because the survey covered a wide sampling of Liberian groups, these trends are based on interviews with only a few children and must therefore be interpreted with caution.

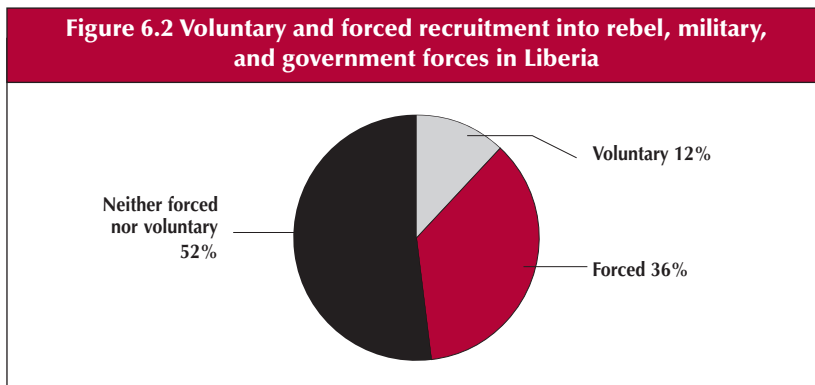
Children associated with the Jungle Lions revealed that officers in army uniforms carried out forced recruitments on the street. They reportedly abducted children on their way to school¹⁵ or grabbed them from vehicles.¹⁶ Four respondents mentioned the town of Gbarnga, close to the Guinean border, as the place where the Jungle Lions recruited them.¹⁷ They also named General Benjamin Yeaten, Director of the SSS and Deputy Chief of Staff of the AFL, as the person in charge.¹⁸ A then 15-year-old explained, 'I was escaping fighting between government forces and LURD in Gbarnga for Nimba County when I was captured on the road. They accused me of being a rebel. I was interrogated and tortured by the government militias. They held me for two weeks as a prisoner. Due to my obedience I was incorporated into the group.'¹⁹

LURD engaged in forced recruitment after gaining military control over any given area or before launching a major attack.²⁰ Children were seized

Table 6.3 Forced recruitment in Liberia by group

	Reported forced recruitment	Per cent	Total respondents with group
Rebel			
LURD	9	26	35
MODEL	2	29	7
ULIMO	1	100	1
Donso	1	100	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>44</i>
Militia			
ATU	3	33	9
Jungle Lions	7	64	11
'Militia'	7	64	11
SBU	2	33	6
SSS	0	0	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>39</i>
Government forces			
'Government forces'	3	27	11
<i>Total</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>11</i>

from the road, vehicles,²¹ or camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs).²² A number said they were press-ganged during the battles of Gbarnga, Monrovia, and Lofa Bridge.

Figure 6.2 Voluntary and forced recruitment into rebel, military, and government forces in Liberia

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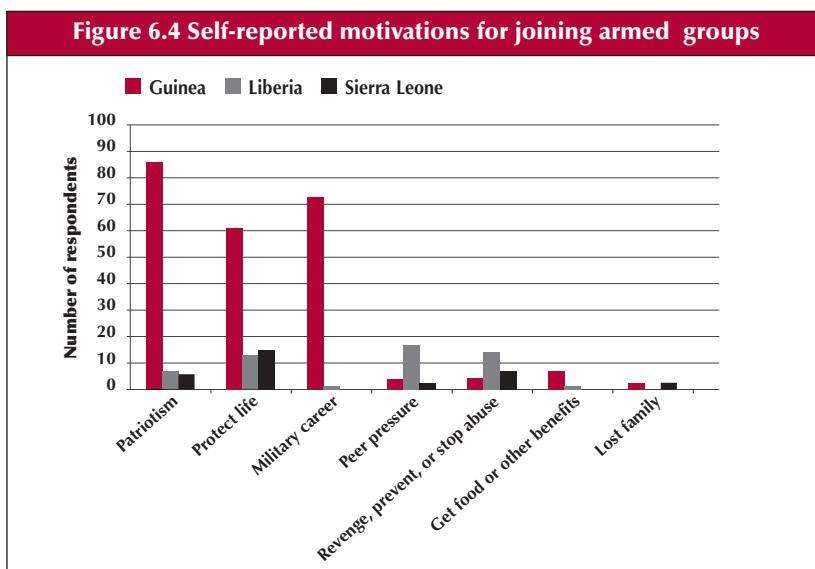
In total, fewer than 20 per cent of all children stated that they had voluntarily joined armed groups. Voluntary recruitment was the highest in Guinea, where nearly 40 per cent of respondents reported that they had joined civil defence committees as Young Volunteers. In Liberia, in contrast, only 12 per cent said they had volunteered, and in Sierra Leone only three. (See Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3.)



Patriotism and, in particular, the desire to defend their communities and country from invading rebels motivated Guinean CAFF. Many also harboured aspirations for a career in the Guinean army. The need for protection was also important. Less important were revenge and peer pressure (Figure 6.4).

Interpreting motivations appropriately can be difficult given that these change over time. Guinean CAFF, most of whom were 16 years old when they became Young Volunteers, became aware of the privileged status that their superiors enjoyed in Guinean society. This may have influenced decisions to stay that varied from initial aims. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between CAFF motivations at the recruitment stage and at the time of the interview.

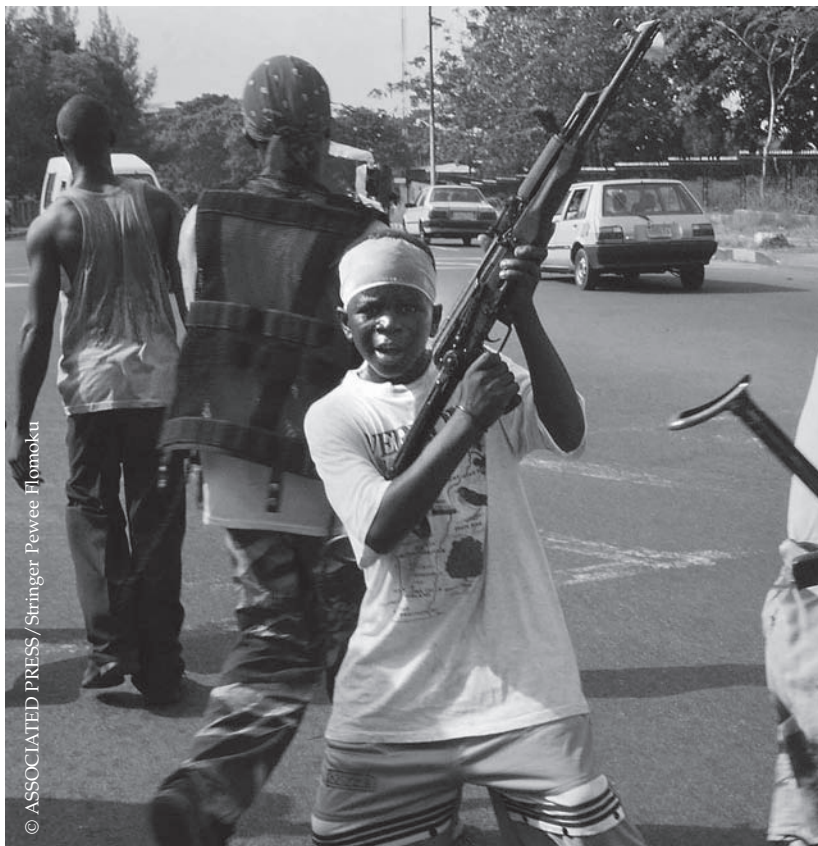
In Liberia, children described peer pressure as the most common reason why they joined an armed group²³ and alluded to material benefits rather than the patriotic ideals and sense of duty expressed by Guinean counterparts. One 16-year-old explained, 'once you become a fighter you get your own



money and other material things or anything you want.’²⁴ Access to firearms and the power associated with being member of an armed group were clearly important: ‘when you are in possession of arms you can loot and get anything you want. You can say or do anything to anybody without fear.’²⁵ ‘My friends told me to come looting with them and I was given a firearm to protect myself.’²⁶ From the available data, it appears that peer pressure was as important in all Liberian groups.²⁷

However, it is difficult to distinguish between children who joined armed groups voluntarily and those who went along because ‘that was the only thing to do’. In all three countries combined, about 40 per cent of the children appeared fatalistic—making it difficult to categorize recruitment as ‘voluntary’ even though force was not reported.²⁸ Family members often pressured children and youth to join armed units. A Liberian CAFF reported: ‘I was taken to a training base by my uncle, who was an officer in the ATU.’²⁹ Another reported: ‘My uncle encouraged me to join the [government] forces to resist LURD from entering Liberia.’³⁰ In Sierra Leone an 11-year-old told interviewers a much-admired elder brother who had been promoted as his unit’s second-in-command had influenced his own decision to join.³¹

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A child fires in the air in the centre of the Liberian capital Monrovia, 19 December 2003.

Others enlisted because of increasing insecurity. For many, such decisions were not truly voluntary, but were dictated by the circumstances of the conflict. A Guinean CAFF put it as follows: 'There was little choice about it. All civil activities had stopped. We mobilized to defend our country.'³² The general calls for mobilization issued by the local Guinean administration in schools and other places led to social pressure. A then 17-year-old spoke for many when he said: 'Like all my friends, I volunteered.'^{33,34}

In Liberia, 14 CAFF explained how they joined rebel or militia groups to take revenge for killings or because they saw it as the only way to protect themselves and their families. These motivations were expressed by CAFF participating on all sides of the conflict: some joined LURD to avenge killings by government militias, while still others joined militias in response to rebel violence.³⁵ These were also the motivations that guided children in Sierra Leone to join the CDF or Gbethis militias. One interviewee explained that he had enlisted at the age of 12 after rebels killed both his parents, and that village elders had mobilized children to create a civil defence force.^{36,37} The fact that so few were in a position to make their own decisions raises questions regarding the possibility of truly voluntary recruitment.

Small arms in the recruitment process

The use of small arms was more prominent in cases of forced recruitment. The overwhelming majority (103 out of 110) who experienced forced recruitment reported being conscripted at gunpoint.

Among those CAFF who 'volunteered' few directly mentioned firearms. Motivations behind joining armed units, however, were often linked to high levels of insecurity as well as the material or career benefits that accrued from access to weapons. For most children, and for those in Guinea in particular, conflict-related insecurity played a prominent role in decisions to join armed groups. Some CAFF, particularly in Liberia, maintained they volunteered owing to the benefits associated with carrying a firearm. Small arms were described as symbols of maturity that conferred authority on their bearers. This was especially the case where impunity and lawlessness enabled children to loot, steal, and rape. Many of the children interviewed also expressed fear of firearms.

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The perfect little Kalashnikov soldier? Rational choices for child recruitment into armed groups

Armed groups would not recruit children into their ranks unless they wanted to. This section explores the reasons why children themselves believed they were recruited, and also discusses how armed groups used and deployed them. The degrees to which adults supervised and controlled CAFF access to, and use of, firearms reveal how armed groups were organized. Comparisons between the three countries moreover, reveal not only common patterns but also considerable diversity. This should only serve to alert researchers to avoid making sweeping generalizations when analysing the role of children in armed conflict.

Demographics, conflict mortality, and CAFF

MRU countries share fundamental demographic characteristics that may contribute to the recruitment of children into conflict. Since youth make up a considerable proportion of the total population of West Africa, it is unsurprising that children are called upon to perform adult tasks at an earlier age than in societies where adults are predominant. According to UN-HABITAT (1999), more than 40 per cent of West Africa's population is aged less than 15 years (Sierra Leone 44.2 per cent, Liberia 46 per cent, Guinea 46.9 per cent)—more than twice that of Europe.³⁸ Respondents confirmed that this partly explained why they had been recruited. One Liberian child maintained that, because children were in the majority, they had no choice but to fight.³⁹ A child in Sierra Leone said, 'there are always so many children in each country, that is why the government has a special interest in them.'⁴⁰ In Guinea a child explained: 'Children were needed because there were so many of us.'⁴¹

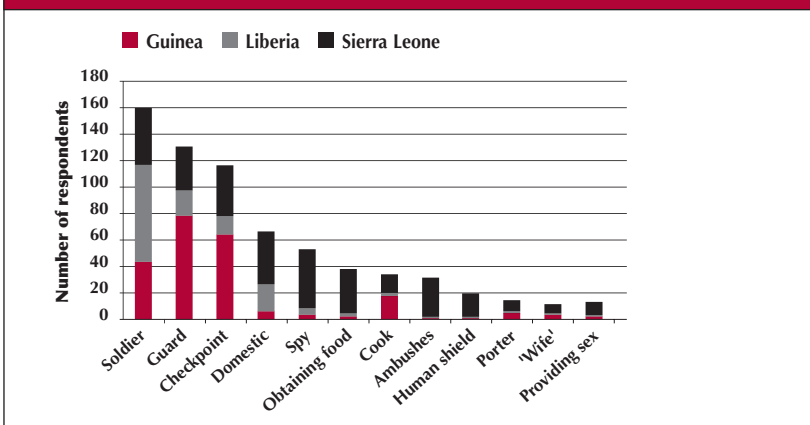
While precise figures are non-existent, there is little doubt that MRU conflicts claimed many lives and made it necessary for all fighting forces to constantly replenish their ranks. An International Rescue Committee (IRC) study found that the mortality rate in Sierra Leone was as high as 3.7 per 1,000 inhabitants per month during the conflict: nearly three times (2.8) higher than the expected normal mortality rate (Fornah et al., 2001).⁴² CAFF accounts from Liberia provide a glimpse of the hardships that caused so many premature deaths: 'Life with the armed group was unbearable because

one had to be strong just to survive. We had to walk such long distances. Most of my friends died because they could not withstand the weather and the hunger.⁴³ According to one interviewee, the death toll from violence was the main reason why children were recruited: 'Children are needed to replace adults who die in combat.'⁴⁴ Rebels in Liberia also sought to increase their numbers following territorial gains: 'After Lofa County came under control we needed more people to do further advances.'⁴⁵

Military support tasks

Most CAFF undertook support duties, although these varied according to country (see Figure 6.5). For the most part, however, the majority of children reported having been 'soldiers'—although, as will be described below, this term did not mean the same thing to all respondents. In Sierra Leone, spying, domestic work, and foraging for food were the most common tasks undertaken by CAFF. In Guinea, the majority of Young Volunteers were employed as checkpoint guards, and not a single child mentioned having to search for food.

Figure 6.5 All children's tasks within the armed groups



Differences in physical and support infrastructure available to armed groups, as well as variations in military strategy and internal command structures, may help explain why CAFF duties varied. In Sierra Leone, nearly all CAFF interviewed (93 per cent) said that units were mobile and constantly

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shifted from one location to the next. The majority (61 per cent) reported bunking down in remote areas without much infrastructure, and just under half (44 per cent) stayed in makeshift camps in the forest. Only a tiny minority (6 per cent) ever stayed in barracks in a town. Analysts argued that the RUF was not interested in establishing economic and social institutions or political infrastructure to support them (Rippon and Willow, 2004)—an assumption that would be confirmed by the nature of the tasks asked of the children.

This meant that a number of armed groups—and the RUF in particular—required human labour to build and maintain camps. Former child combatants from Sierra Leone reported being sent to fetch water for washing and cooking. Forty-four per cent said that they were required to steal food for themselves and the troops, which meant attacking villages and other supply facilities.⁴⁶ The dependency on manual labour partially explains why it made sense for the RUF to recruit so many CAFF.

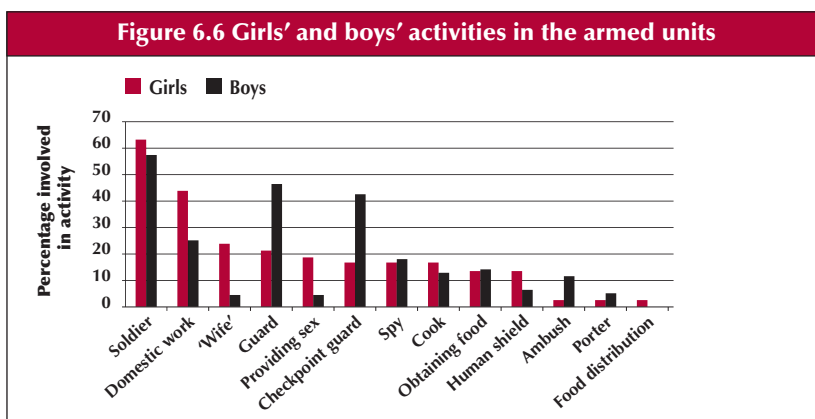
In Guinea, by contrast, the national army supported the Young Volunteers, who therefore enjoyed superior physical infrastructure. The majority were housed in barracks (71 per cent of interviewees) and most military activity took place in local communities. A small number (16 per cent) camped in the forest, and only a third (34 per cent) ever spent time in remote areas without much infrastructure. It also appears that the general physical infrastructure was professionally run, which meant that Young Volunteers could be deployed for military tasks such as guarding checkpoints, as opposed to fetching water and gathering wood.

Differences in infrastructure also influenced the support tasks requested of young recruits. In Sierra Leone, carrying firearms (72 per cent) and ammunition (69 per cent) from one camp to another were the most common gun-related tasks. In Guinea, trucks—not human labour—transported ammunition to where it was needed.⁴⁷

Gender made remarkably little difference when it came to the assignment of tasks. While armed groups recruited fewer girls,⁴⁸ boys and girls were treated similarly and differences were marked more by country than by gender. The only exception is that more girls undertook domestic work (40 per cent compared with 24 per cent) and fewer girls were employed as guards (22 per cent compared with 47 per cent). However, a higher percentage of girls than

boys claim to have been soldiers⁴⁹ and more girls were spies than were asked to cook. Overall, tasks required of girls were similar to those asked of boys in each country. However, what the limited nature of this study—undertaken primarily with male interviewers during one session only—does not reveal is the full extent of sexual abuse and exploitation usually associated with female CAFF. Although Figure 6.6 does indicate that a significant proportion of former female CAFF were sexually abused, numbers are likely to be far higher.

UNICEF, Human Rights Watch, and other NGOs and international organizations have sponsored similar studies that point to the ubiquity of gender-based violence, rape, and sexual slavery of female CAFF. Girl soldiers, in contrast to their male counterparts, are more likely to be forced into relationships with commanders and fellow soldiers, i.e. to become camp wives, and suffer the unintended pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), and other reproductive health problems that are the inevitable consequence of multiple rapes and coerced sex.



Support tasks and access to firearms

The overwhelming majority (91 per cent) of youngsters interviewed claimed that they had access to firearms while they lived with armed units. Most commonly, CAFF had access to AK-47 assault rifles but also reported the presence of other types of assault rifles.⁵⁰ In Sierra Leone, the RUF provided CAFF with AK 47 assault rifles (29), but also G3s (19) and a few M16 rifles (7).⁵¹ In Liberia,

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over half of the youth interviewed reported access to both AK-47 type weapons (54) and also Uzi sub-machine guns (23). The latter were scattered among different rebel groups and militias, suggesting considerable internal circulation of firearms between Liberian groups.⁵² Five Uzis were also recorded in Sierra Leone—all within the RUF.

Table 6.4 CAFF access to firearms

	CAFF with access to firearms	Percentage of total CAFF interviewed
Guinea	82	90
Liberia	94	94
Sierra Leone	72	91
<i>Total</i>	<i>248</i>	<i>92</i>

Few CAFF (7 per cent)—and usually only in Sierra Leone—had access to handguns (pistols and revolvers).⁵³ These appear to have been particularly popular among girls (31 per cent of all girls had access to a handgun compared with 11 per cent of boys), which may be a reflection of both differences in physical strength and the need for personal protection. ‘I was given light firearms as it was easier for me to carry them’,⁵⁴ explained a 13-year-old girl who had been abducted by the RUF at the age of seven. A particularly high proportion of girls also described feelings of insecurity over fears of attacks and sexual assaults from group members: handguns may have provided personal protection from unwanted advances.⁵⁵ In Guinea, the use of handguns—both pistols and revolvers—also distinguished adults from children. Among most armed forces, handguns are status symbols reserved for the use of senior members: foot soldiers carry assault rifles. This also appears to have been the case among Sierra Leonean armed groups, where only 16 CAFF reported having access to handguns.

The majority of children interviewed (90 per cent) reported that adults and children had access to different types of weapons.⁵⁶ It seems that heavier weaponry remained predominantly, if not exclusively, in the hands of adults. According to interviewees, access to light machine guns and RPGs was reserved for adults.⁵⁷ No child reported using man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), although ten children from Liberia and Sierra Leone said that their groups did possess these.⁵⁸ The use of RPGs by children was likewise

rare (5 out of 270) and was reported only in Liberia (4) and Sierra Leone (1). Only one child from Liberia reported using mortars.⁵⁹

Interviewees clearly indicate that most armed groups had sufficient supplies of small arms, and assault rifles in particular. One reported: 'Arms and ammunition were always available. We were never out of them.'⁶⁰ Weapons sources varied. In Liberia, CAFF told interviewers that arms were delivered at night by helicopters and trucks. They also reported receiving brand-new weapons, some of which were still in sealed boxes.⁶¹ In Sierra Leone, children associated with the RUF described how some weapons were traded through intermediaries who smuggled arms through the forest. Many weapons and ammunition available to the RUF, however, were seized from enemies or other groups' storage facilities, or by ambushing vehicles. Young Volunteers in Guinea had very little knowledge of where weapons and ammunition came from. They were simply there.

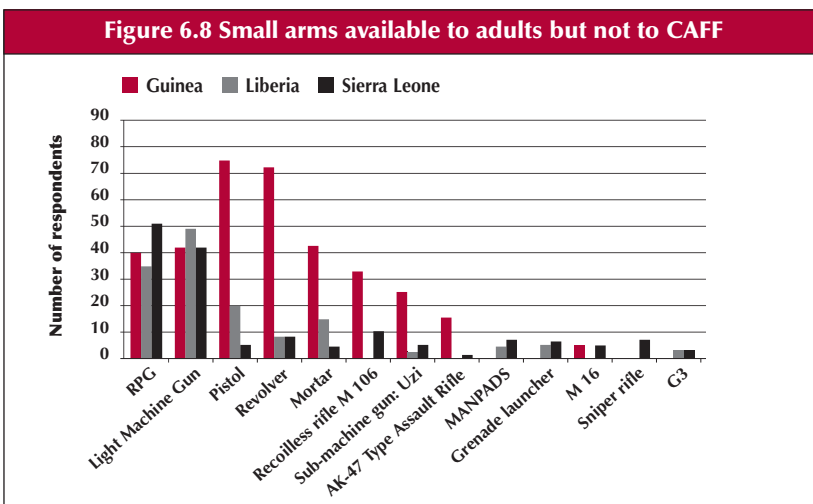
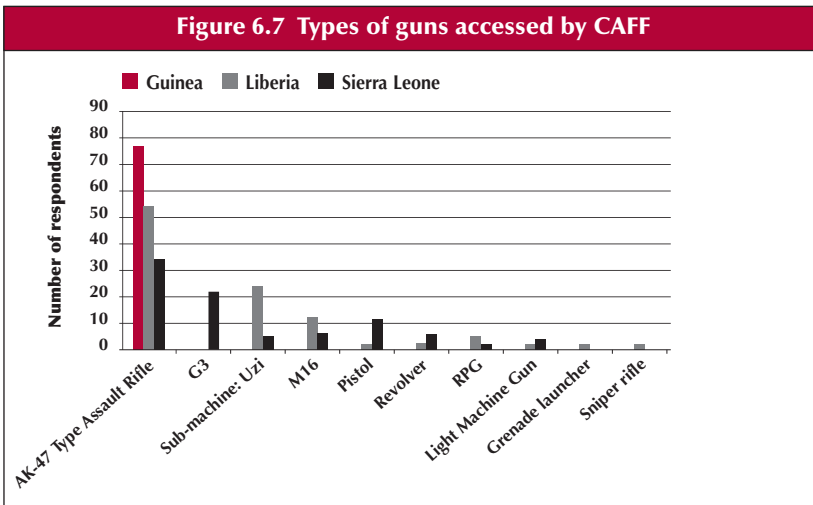
Twenty-two respondents said that they did not have access to small arms. A slightly higher proportion of girls than boys were denied access to firearms.⁶² The most significant factor in Sierra Leone and Liberia, however, appeared to be age. Boys who were denied weapons were recruited at a much younger age than the average (9 years compared with the average of 13 years). This suggests that priority was given to more mature, physically stronger, members. No such pattern was visible in Guinea, however.

The availability of arms and ammunition is vital to any armed unit, and shortages affect the way groups procure and manage their weapons. The scarcer the ammunition, the more careful the leadership tends to be when granting access to arms. CAFF are generally perceived as more likely to waste ammunition and to make less effective use of their weapons than experienced adult fighters. Several accounts suggest that, in armed units with limited ammunition supply, ammunition is given only to the best fighters and only for very specific missions.

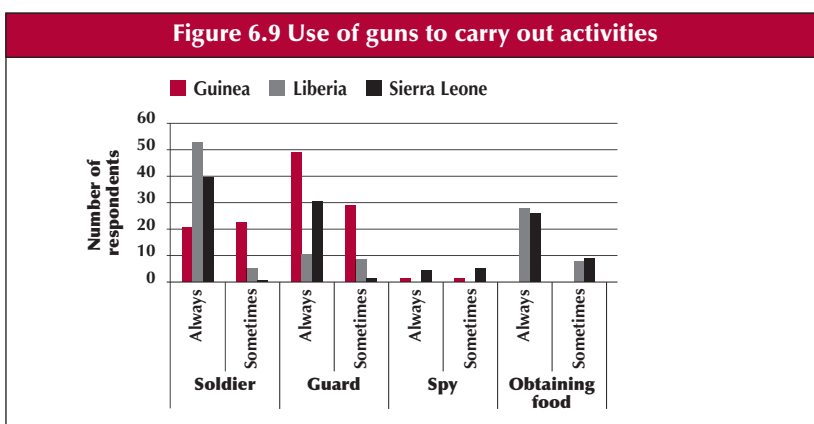
The widespread availability of weapons and ammunition in the MRU helps explain why armed groups there could afford to enlist large numbers of children without jeopardizing their effectiveness. Available evidence, moreover, indicates a strong reliance on foreign sources—despite the UN Security Council arms embargo and the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Import, Export and

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Manufacture of Light arms.⁶³ Rebels in Mali, by contrast, who lacked financial resources and foreign backing, relied mainly on weapons seized during combat or looted from state armouries, as well as on small-scale trafficking (Small Arms Survey, forthcoming).⁶⁴ The shortage in weapons and ammunition supply may partly explain why rebels there did not recruit children, while in the MRU all parties to the conflicts did.⁶⁵



CAFF did not use firearms for all activities—nor did access to a gun mean that they kept their personal firearm with them at all times. Firearms were frequently used for soldiering, guarding and obtaining food but rarely for spying (Figure 6.9). Some CAFF were provided weapons for specific purposes and a predetermined period of time (e.g. shifts), while others had more permanent access.



Note: The information provided by children interviewed was classified according to whether they 'always,' 'sometimes,' or 'never' used a firearm to carry out the activities that they reported to be involved in. For visual clarity, however, only positive answers—i.e. 'always' and 'sometimes'—are reported in this figure.

Children's experiences in combat

Combat strategies and children

Among the majority of children (58 per cent) who claimed to have been a 'soldier', only 75 per cent used firearms. In Guinea, the proportion of CAFF who did not use small arms for soldiering was more than half (53 per cent).⁶⁶ This suggests that the military functions of children differed depending on the particular support needs of the armed group. Interviews showed that tasks varied according to whether CAFF were involved in defending or taking territory. CAFF sometimes provided psychological support to adults during combat operations. In Sierra Leone they took part in reconnaissance missions. In Liberia and Sierra Leone 'soldiering' included obtaining supplies—usually by force—and activities that would be classified as war crimes.

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In Guinea, the primary military objective was to defend border communities. Consequently, the largest proportion of children acted as guards and manned checkpoints. Less than half of the children interviewed actually took part in combat, probably owing to the fact that self-defence was more important than reclaiming territory. Young Volunteers were integrated into civil defence units that patrolled the streets at night near the Sierra Leonean and Liberian borders where rebels often entered. 'We were organized in surveillance groups. When we heard that there had been an attack, we went out and blocked the road.'⁶⁷ Children also took part in ambushes of rebel groups that had entered Guinea and other offensives. As one Young Volunteer explained, 'the rebels entered during the night but they did not know the area. They found themselves in the middle of two battalions that ambushed them. It is not easy to tell what happened. Some were killed, others were captured and others found their way into the forest and disappeared.'⁶⁸ 'During the second attack, we encircled the rebels and many were captured and transported to the camp.'⁶⁹

According to a few accounts from Guinea, Young Volunteers also participated in recapturing border territory that had been occupied by rebels. There are some accounts of territorial advances into Liberia. Nevertheless, narratives are in most cases less detailed and tend to focus on deaths and injuries rather than on the particular duties of children during the offensive. The following account is quite typical of the way they reported their experiences: 'I fought to Freeport, Vai Town, and Gardensville for two weeks. I received a minor injury close to my eye.'⁷⁰

Judging from the different weapons available to adults and children, one can extrapolate regarding the real role of children, at least in Liberia. According to observers, both rebels and government forces in Liberia relied extensively on light weapons—as combat would usually begin with RPG shelling followed by small arms fire (Brabazon, 2003, p. 9). Therefore, adults with access to the greater firepower of RPGs and light machine guns were in control of more strategic positions and were responsible for initiating combat. They were responsible for the main round of firing, while younger recruits equipped with assault rifles advanced towards the enemy lines.⁷¹ Such a strategy is supported by a Liberian child's account: 'It takes courage to go to the front, especially when the enemy is well equipped. Our friends continued to be killed but you have to keep moving. There was a common saying among

young fighters, which was “man moving, man dropping”: whatever happens to your friends, keep moving.^{72,73}

The important role played by adult leaders is evident when children talk about their memories of specific battles. A Guinean child said: ‘We came from Yomburo to support our friends from the urban commune. Thanks to the strategies of our commander and other officers we liberated Yéndé Millou.’⁷⁴ A Liberian youngster reported: ‘In Tappita, MODEL attacked us from Grnad Gedeh. The President came to supervise us and because of his presence we were very happy and we fought until I killed one of their generals called Bad Blood. I was wounded in the process.’^{75,76}

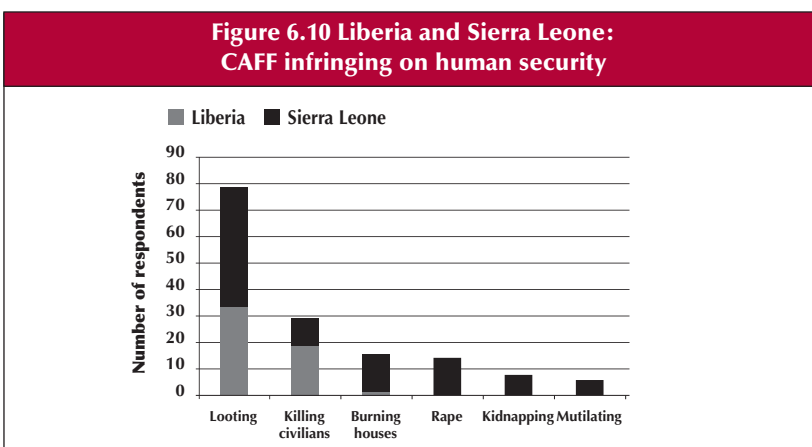
There are also several accounts from Sierra Leone of children being sent to the front line—but these suggest that children performed a psychological rather than a military function: ‘Some believed it confused the enemy to see a child in the frontline because some adults hesitated firing on a child. This gives the child time to kill the enemy adult.’⁷⁷ More typical is the following: ‘Children have luck and the one who has a child with him can succeed in anything. This is why adults decided to recruit children for the frontline.’⁷⁸ Many (more than 25 per cent of all MRU respondents) children had undergone traditional rites that supposedly protected them from bullets. Nearly half of all Sierra Leonean respondents had undergone such rituals. Others simply argued that children gave adults confidence.⁷⁹ A quarter of all CAFF interviewed in Sierra Leone said that children had been used as human shields. This was reported only once in Liberia, and not at all in Guinea.

Surprisingly, the links between CAFF activities and armed group objectives are not always evident. Observers argue that the RUF’s main purpose in Sierra Leone was to maintain control over the diamond mines (UNSC, 2000, para. 23). However, not a single respondent reported any event that could be directly related to this objective.⁸⁰ Most of the children (51 per cent) interviewed in Sierra Leone were engaged as spies. They were employed to locate ‘enemy’ positions and to familiarize themselves with the layout and particularities of towns and villages prior to attacks. Respondents believed it was difficult for government troops to identify children as spies. Girls, commonly called ‘sweet sixteen’, entered into relationships with government soldiers and were tasked with evaluating the strength of military camps.

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For some CAFF in Liberia, and the majority of those interviewed in Sierra Leone, the term ‘soldier’ was related less to military confrontation than to targeted operations such as ambushing vehicles, killing civilians and captured enemies, as well as to looting.⁸¹ A considerable proportion of interviewees from Sierra Leone and Liberia admitted having been involved in looting (56 per cent in Sierra Leone), killing civilians (17 per cent in Liberia), burning houses (19 per cent in Sierra Leone), raping (18 per cent in Sierra Leone), and kidnapping (10 per cent in Sierra Leone). Not a single Young Volunteer admitted to having taken part in any atrocities or looting.⁸²

**Figure 6.10 Liberia and Sierra Leone:
CAFF infringing on human security**



Substance abuse appears to have fuelled atrocities in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Most CAFF (89 per cent) admitted taking drugs while living with the RUF. Sixty-five per cent confirmed that their own commanders had supplied them. In Liberia, nearly a quarter (22 per cent) of all CAFF interviewed echoed the statements of counterparts in Sierra Leone. Interviewees themselves explained why: ‘Children are easily controlled and very brave when given drugs. Has no second thoughts and can always perform.’⁸³ ‘They readily commit crimes.’⁸⁴ Marijuana appears most common, but cocaine and gunpowder mixed with other drugs and ‘tablets’ were also mentioned in Liberia. In Sierra Leone children also consumed a drug called ‘brown brown’ (a mixture of cocaine and gunpowder or crack cocaine) or ‘blue boat’. Heroin and

opium were very rarely mentioned. In Guinea, children reported using alcohol (mainly palm wine), but no other drugs. Commanders did not supply the wine.⁸⁵

Controlling firearms and children in fighting forces

Comparisons between weapon control procedures in the three countries revealed considerable differences in group internal structure. In Guinea, self-defence committees were comparatively well structured, and functioned on the basis of a hierarchy and set rules. In Sierra Leone, individuals within the RUF, rather than a clear organizational hierarchy, controlled CAFF. In Liberia, accounts reveal limited control and high levels of anarchy.

These varying structures affected access to small arms. Guinean CAFF were generally handed firearms for guard duty but had to return them afterwards. The majority (85 per cent) of children interviewed reported that Guinean officers strictly guarded and controlled weapons and ammunition stockpiles, and rarely made them available to children (Figure 6.11).⁸⁶ Only those who went on combat missions were given ammunition.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Young Volunteers reported that they fired only when ordered to and were supervised by adults at all times. Only one child reported shooting during an internal dispute; and there were no accounts of shooting games—which children from Liberia and Sierra Leone did report. Eighty-five per cent of Young Volunteers said that they maintained their own firearms.

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, firearms were distributed for self-defence, but also for personal use and even looting. No clear pattern emerges, however, of consistent stockpile procedures—which suggests that organizational structure varied at the sub-unit level and thus depended on individuals and context rather than culture and group-specific procedures. This is illustrated by seemingly contradictory accounts within Liberia's ATU: 'ATU's stockpiles were manned by the S4 Section of the Unit. No unauthorized person was allowed anywhere near it.'⁸⁸ 'Stockpile management existed but arms were not controlled. Indeed, some individuals received more than one firearm.'⁸⁹ Interviews indicate that the RUF consisted of loosely aligned sub-groups that differed considerably in their internal structures. Many CAFF mentioned their sub-groups by name—thus highlighting the extent to which each unit

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boasted its own identity and characteristics rather than identify itself as part of a unified RUF structure.⁹⁰

Some groups were well guarded and prepared: 'Our group was well organized. They only attacked at night. The camp was situated close to the river and surrounded by armed men so that no one could leave. Our camp was never attacked.'⁹¹ 'Our group had a well-structured command. The Small Boys Unit always guarded the camp and no one left the camp without the knowledge of the commander.'⁹² Other CAFF describe unstructured and unorganized groups: 'The group that captured me was not really an organized group because they lacked a command structure, especially when everyone had taken drugs.'⁹³

CAFF also reported enormous variations in unit size: according to some respondents some groups were made up of as many as 1,000 members,⁹⁴ while still others described their group as 'very small'.⁹⁵ Command structures appeared to be based on the personality of commanders, and varied depending on the extent of internal strife and clashes between individual leaders. One child reported: 'The group was too large and there were four commanders and each commander had his own group.'⁹⁶ Several CAFF described conflicts between 'too many commanders' as one of the defining characteristics of their group.⁹⁷ A third of Sierra Leonean CAFF reported disputes and having shot at members of their own group, incidents that were reported by only 1 per cent of all respondents in Liberia and Guinea combined.

The various units of the RUF appeared to have used many CAFF as personal support for individual adults. The majority of children in Sierra Leone (70 per cent) were tasked with carrying firearms for their superiors, which was not the case in Guinea. This also meant that adults controlled children's access to small arms; only a third of respondents from Sierra Leone were allowed to maintain their own firearms.⁹⁸

The structure of CDF units in Sierra Leone also appears to have been heterogeneous. In one village, the local armed civil defence force comprised a rather small group of perhaps 30 soldiers, and belonged to the broader chiefdom level civil defence group of 1,000 people.⁹⁹ Other accounts showed that some units included up to 250 soldiers per camp. These appeared to be well run and guarded at night; food and medicine were provided and 'one could hardly hear a gun shot'.¹⁰⁰

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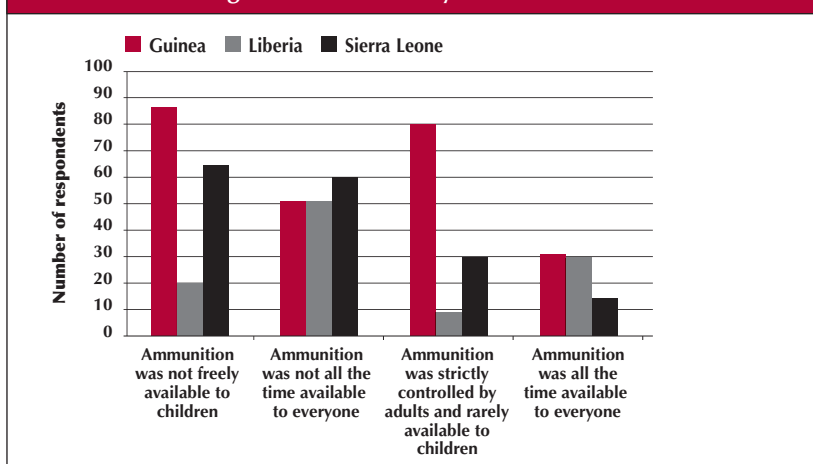
© ZOOM DOSSO / AFP / Getty Images

Robert Jack, 13, child soldier for deposed Liberian president Charles Taylor poses before surrendering his AK-47 assault rifle during the first day of the disarmament programme, 7 December 2003.

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The survey suggests that organizational structure and behavioural patterns also varied within Liberian rebel groups. During the takeover of Monrovia between July and August 2003, observers claimed that LURD appeared better organized than MODEL, and that fewer LURD soldiers were drunk or on drugs and committed less looting and fewer atrocities against civilians (Itano, 2003). The 35 LURD-affiliated CAFF interviewed in this study did not entirely confirm this assessment but did reveal considerable differences in the ways sub-groups operated. Some said that 'LURD was better than other forces because it had discipline'.¹⁰¹ Others said that 'the group lacked control over its own fighters'.¹⁰² There were also varying accounts regarding troop behaviour. According to some, LURD 'was ruthless to civilians and sometimes to its own soldiers',¹⁰³ while others said that this group did not loot and kill, except in crossfire.¹⁰⁴ Reports of looting are frequent among LURD respondents (over 37 per cent),¹⁰⁵ and over half (54 per cent) admitted taking drugs. Weapon stockpile control was marginally stricter and more organized than among other Liberian groups, but adult supervision of armed CAFF was more lax (31 per cent compared with 56 per cent).¹⁰⁶

Figure 6.11 Availability of ammunition

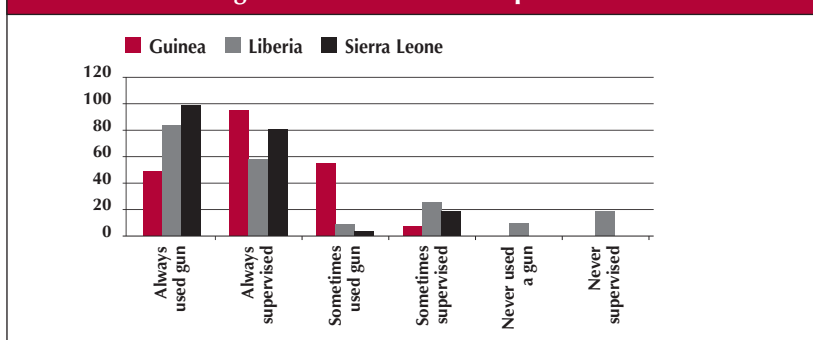


There is also evidence to suggest that rules that governed armed groups changed depending on the circumstances. 'Only senior commanders could

distribute arms and ammunition. However, changes occurred when the camp was under attack. At this point, everyone was permitted adequate ammunition to defend the camp from the capturers.¹⁰⁷ CAFF in Liberia and Sierra Leone thus found themselves in a rather unpredictable environment. This seems to explain why nearly all children in these countries reported having been punished at some point (95 in Liberia and 74 in Sierra Leone).¹⁰⁸ In Guinea, by contrast, rules were much clearer and only 28 per cent of respondents said they had ever been taken to task.

Adult supervision of armed CAFF in Liberia was looser than in Sierra Leone and Guinea. A particularly high proportion of Liberian children reported using guns for soldiering activities (82 per cent) but adults supervised just over half. A quarter of Liberian CAFF confirmed that they were sometimes supervised and a fifth said that they were never supervised when 'soldiering with a gun'. In Guinea, by contrast, over 90 per cent maintained they were supervised when they were 'a soldier' and less than half provided with a firearm.

Figure 6.12 Gun use and supervision



Conclusion

This chapter has shown the circumstances under which CAFF will volunteer to join armed groups and established that their motivations vary. In Guinea, Young Volunteers were incorporated into a hierarchical military environment and felt that they contributed to an important national effort. In Liberia, in contrast, children were attracted by the possibility of using firearms to loot

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and exercise power. From the perspective of armed groups, recruiting children enabled adults to build upon their own power bases and to press-gang young workers for the express purpose of undertaking tasks they did not want to do themselves. Among less-endowed groups, enlisting children to take over unpleasant chores associated with running a camp made a certain amount of sense. Furthermore, as long as violence and hardship continued to cause high mortality rates, so too did commanders feel the necessity to fill out their ranks with youngsters. The demographics of young West African societies, moreover, ensured a plentiful supply of CAFF.

Prevention strategies will need to focus on potential volunteers but should also seek to reduce the pool of potential recruiters. However, successful strategies will require an understanding of the circumstances and mechanisms that lead to child recruitment. Campaigns that seek to increase awareness of the risks and dangers associated with joining armed groups will need to take into account the extent to which children are interested in taking advantage of material benefits or long-term job opportunities within a hierarchical structure. It also needs to be borne in mind that, at least in this sample, 'volunteers' constituted a minority of all CAFF interviewed.

Engaging armed groups will be more difficult. The motivations behind recruiting children during periods of conflict will be particularly difficult to undercut. A programme that targets potential recruiters before the process begins, therefore, has a greater chance of success. Many potential recruiters are former CAFF who are already familiar with the functioning of the group.¹⁰⁹ In this context, DDR programmes aimed at former CAFF are crucial owing to the fact that child participants already possess the experience and expertise necessary to eventually run their own groups.

Demobilizing CAFF requires an appropriate understanding of the internal structure of armed groups. If children are offered opportunities for advancement, or conversely, enrichment, this too will affect motivations either to join or to stay with an armed group once recruited. In Guinea, demobilizing Young Volunteers should be undertaken in cooperation with, and with the institutional support of, the national armed forces.

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, it will be necessary to effectively break up relationships between former commanders and their young charges. Because

command structures were so highly personalized, it is likely that power relations between adults and CAFF continued well beyond the official end of hostilities. It will also be crucial to change CAFF attitudes. Access to firearms endowed many with a sense of power and independence that they will be reluctant to abandon—especially in view of the trauma they suffered during the war.

Finally, reducing and controlling small arms flows should be an essential component of both prevention and demobilization—more than 90 per cent of CAFF interviewed had access to firearms at some point in time. This chapter argues that armed groups would be less inclined to recruit CAFF should weapons—and in particular assault rifles—be less readily accessible. The proliferation and easy availability of small arms needs to be halted—if only for the sake of future generations who risk both their innocence and their very lives.

List of abbreviations

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
ATU	Anti-Terrorism Unit
CAFF	Children associated with fighting forces
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CEDE 24	Centre for Democratic Empowerment
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DDRR	Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reconstruction
IDP	Internally displaced person
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MANPADS	Man-portable air defence system
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MRU	Mano River Union
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade launcher
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SBU	Small Boys Unit
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone

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SGU	Small Girls Unit
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SSS	Special Security Services
STI	Sexually transmitted disease
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy

Endnotes

- 1 See Part II of this report.
- 2 'One consequence of the availability of small arms and light weapons and their subsequent use in conflicts around the world is the unconscionable use of CAFF' (UNICEF, 2001).
- 3 CAFF in this chapter are understood to include 'any person under 18 years of age who is part of the any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups other than as purely family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriages. Is does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms' (UNICEF, 1997).
- 4 See Appendix 6.1. The three research teams pre-tested the interview reporting forms with five children each in July 2004. The reporting form was then improved and finalized at a methodology workshop in Bamako on 30–31 August 2004, in which six field researchers (two from each country) as well as three Small Arms Survey research staff participated. The reporting form allows for multiple answers and thus seeks to capture the complexity of the experience rather than forcing life stories into mutually exclusive categories. The form also allows the interviewers to note down the children's personal stories in short narrative boxes to illustrate the quantitative patterns identified.
- 5 'Ak-47 models' refers to all types of assault rifles similar in shape to the Russian-made Kalashnikov, including the Czech Model 26 as well as the weapon's Egyptian and Chinese versions.
- 6 'Despite the backing of 1,200 Nigerian troops and 300 Guineans, efforts by government forces to contain the insurgents fail for lack of equipment, pay and political support. Anti-Taylor Liberians in Sierra Leone and Guinea offer their military support to the Sierra Leone government and form the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia, ULIMO. Guinea reportedly begins secretly training ULIMO fighters. ULIMO advances into the diamond mining and timber areas of eastern Sierra Leone and western Liberia' (*Accord*, 2000).
- 7 See 'Liberia' in Part II.
- 8 See also Table 4.3.
- 9 See Chapter 5 of this book. The percentage of Young Volunteers recruited under the age of

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- 18 remains unclear.
- 10 Other groups included ULIMO and the Sierra Leonean Donso. Two respondents did not specify the particular rebel group to which they were affiliated but said that it had been a rebel group.
- 11 Two had been with the SSS.
- 12 Interview 205.
- 13 Interview 215.
- 14 The then 14-year-old boy attached himself to the rebel group at the time when the entire population of his village was leaving in the aftermath of an attack, unaware that he was joining rebels rather than a group of refugees. Interview 202.
- 15 Interview 131.
- 16 Interview 145.
- 17 Interviews 164, 178, 179, and 195.
- 18 Interview 178.
- 19 Interview 195.
- 20 Interviews 148, 122, 126, 147, 159, and 160.
- 21 Interview 110.
- 22 Interview 107.
- 23 Of all interviewed CAFF, 17 per cent said that they had been influenced by peer pressure, and 26 per cent of those did not mention force in the recruitment process.
- 24 ATU. Interview number 105.
- 25 Interview 118.
- 26 Interview 125.
- 27 Of the 17 CAFF who described peer pressure as important factors, five had joined LURD, three unspecified militias, one MODEL, one the SBU, one the ATU, one the SSS, and one the Jungle Lions.
- 28 It is assumed that when the decision was neither explicitly voluntary (Question 9, answer b) nor forced (Question 9, answer n or o) it was difficult to describe the recruitment process as voluntary even though no force was used.
- 29 Interview 102.
- 30 Interview 134.
- 31 The respondent said that he had been with both the Gebethis militia and the RUF. It is not clear from the interview which group his brother belonged to that motivated the 11-year-old to join too. However, it is likely that the experience refers to the Gbethis militia rather than the RUF.
- 32 Interview 38.

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- 33 Interview 49.
- 34 For more information on the background to mobilization in Guinea, see Chapter 5 of this book, which documents Guinean President Lansana Conté's September 2000 call for mobilization against insurgent attacks.
- 35 Of those 14 who mentioned revenge or protection as a motivating factor, six joined LURD, one MODEL, two the ATU, one the SSS, two the Jungle Lions, and two government militias.
- 36 Interview 244.
- 37 Interview 257.
- 38 In the European Union in 2002, under 15-year-olds accounted for 16.7 per cent of the population, according to Eurostat (2004, p. 8).
- 39 Interview 137.
- 40 Interview 224.
- 41 Interview 73.
- 42 There are enormous uncertainties in estimating the numbers of conflict deaths, and these figures can suggest only a possible magnitude rather than hard facts. According to databases which monitor press reports on fatalities, some 3,500 people in Liberia and over 13,000 in Sierra Leone died from the effects of direct violence during the conflicts. If the heightened mortality rate in the population of 2.8–3 deaths per 1,000 per month is anything to go by, Liberia might have experienced a population loss of 50,000 and Sierra Leone of 75,000 in each year of the conflict.
- 43 Interview 112.
- 44 Interview 222.
- 45 Interview 104.
- 46 HRW (2004, p. 25) found in Liberia that those children associated with LURD and MODEL relied solely on stealing to survive because they were not paid. However, the report does not indicate whether they received any food from armed groups.
- 47 'When we left for combat we had a truck for ammunition and one for firearms which followed' (Interview 6). 'We had a military on the terrain who noted the needs and informed the camp' (Interview 4).
- 48 Just over 80 per cent of interviewed children were male. As the sample is not representative, it may not reflect the actual proportion of girls within armed units. However, there can be little doubt that there are fewer girls than boys.
- 49 It is possible that girls exaggerated their combat experience in the interviews in the hope that this would entitle them to more benefits from DDR processes. However, the fact that the pattern is similar across all three countries despite quite different DDR processes makes such bias less likely.

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- 50 Of the 270 CAFF, 165 (61 per cent) reported having access to an AK-47 type assault rifle. In Guinea, with the exception of five children, all CAFF had access only to AK-47 models. Identification of firearms was carried out by using the silhouette attached to the annex. From the picture it is not possible to determine whether CAFF were given access to a Kalashnikov or any other AK-47 type assault rifle produced elsewhere, such as Czech Model 26, whether the Egyptian or the Chinese version.
- 51 Of the 65 CAFF, 13 reported having access to more than one type. Most (nine) had access to just two different types, some (three) to three, and one to four different types.
- 52 Five children in LURD, five children in MODEL, two in the RUF, two in ATU, one in SSS, one in ULIMO, and six in unspecified government militia or 'government troop' stated that they had an UZI. One child with an UZI did not specify the group.
- 53 No young person in Guinea reported access to handguns and only three in Liberia did so.
- 54 Interview 215.
- 55 Interview 255.
- 56 All respondents in Sierra Leone and Guinea said there was a difference. However, four respondents in Guinea and five in Sierra Leone did not respond. In Liberia, by contrast, 16 persons said that there was no difference between the weapons to which adults and CAFF had access.
- 57 About half (126) of the interviewed CAFF stated that adults had access to RPGs, as compared with only five children (four in Liberia and one in Sierra Leone) who reported having used RPGs. The picture for light machine guns is similar, except that two of the three children who used light machine guns came from Sierra Leone. CAFF rarely mentioned assault rifles as the weapon type in the hands of adults; this likely reflects respondents' desire to stress weapon types to which they did not have access rather than an actual absence of assault rifles in the hands of adults.
- 58 Six children in Sierra Leone reported that adults in their group had access to MANPADS. Five were associated with the RUF. In Liberia, four children reported that adults had access to MANPADS. One was associated with LURD, three others with government militias. No interviewed child from Guinea reported MANPADS.
- 59 Of the four children who reported the use of RPGs, two were associated with LURD, one with the ATU, and one with the Jungle Lions. Given the total sample of 270 interviewed children, it seems reasonable to assume that the operation of RPGs and mortars by children was the exception rather than the norm. Children were reportedly seen by eyewitnesses to have operated RPGs during the 2003 LURD attack on Gbarnga (Watch List, 2004, p. 28). HRW (2004, p. 26) claimed that children 'typically received limited training in operating automatic weapons,

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- mortars and rocket propelled grenades'. Children interviewed in this study confirmed that they received very little training.
- 60 Interview 101.
- 61 Interview 110.
- 62 Only five of the 22 children who were not given a firearm were girls. Of the boys, 8 per cent were not handed a firearms compared with 12 per cent of girls.
- 63 Three reports of the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia (UNSC, 2001; 2002a; 2000b) confirmed systematic flouting of the UN arms embargo on Liberia and the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium. Global Witness (2003) provided further evidence of frequent arms shipments to Liberia occurring at least two or three times a month.
- 64 Also see Chapter 2 on Mali and Part II of this study for details on weapons transfers.
- 65 This study did not seek to further explore this hypothesis, although more research on this link would be worthwhile.
- 66 This compares with 17 per cent in Liberia and 5 per cent in Sierra Leone of all CAFF who said that they were soldiers but did not always use a gun to be a soldier.
- 67 Interview 34.
- 68 Interview 70.
- 69 Interview 66.
- 70 Interview 128.
- 71 The use of children in the front line has been reported by HRW (2004, p. 19), which claimed that children 'were often the first to be sent out to fight occupying dangerous, forward positions'. The information gathered in this study supports the general conclusion that children equipped with assault rifles played an important combat role by advancing towards the enemy.
- 72 Interview 144.
- 73 The assumption is further supported by interviews carried out by HRW (2004, p. 21): 'You would be sent to the front first. You go and get killed and then the next one takes your place, it never ended.'
- 74 Interview 89.
- 75 Interview 109.
- 76 Other reports suggest that the highest-ranking officers stayed well clear of the fiercest fighting. Journalists reported from Monrovia that streets were deserted and that soldiers 'would occasionally run out to the entrance of a bridge and shot widely for a few seconds before running back to hide behind a wall . . . Sometimes the commanding officer would force his men onto the bridge by threatening them with his pistol' (Itano, 2003, p. 6).

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- 77 Interview 114.
- 78 Interview 129.
- 79 Interview 111.
- 80 The questionnaire did not specifically ask children about this. However, it is still striking that not a single child mentioned diamonds or mines in any of the narratives.
- 81 It is unclear whether this ranking reflects the reality or simply the fact that these particular acts were highly traumatizing and therefore more likely to be remembered and reported by CAFF.
- 82 There are reports that both the army and rebels in Guinea committed atrocities but this is not reflected in the reports of the Young Volunteers.
- 83 Interview 244.
- 84 Interview 256.
- 85 Over half of all Guinean children interviewed said that people had to obtain their own drugs. Only two mentioned commanders as the source of drugs.
- 86 Interview 6.
- 87 Interview 41.
- 88 Interview 105.
- 89 Interview 109.
- 90 Nineteen groups were mentioned by name. There were: Blow-up-Boys (Interview 203), Born Naked (204 and 266), Night Combat (205), Wonders Boys (206), Scorpion (201), Rogged (202) Demba Squad (207), Black December (208), Hungry Lion (209), Kill Man no Blood (210 and 217), Bullet (211), Snake (218 and 221), Cobra Squad (219), Tiger Boys (224), Blazens (226), Tanks & Armour (234), Death Squad (235), Lion (265), Jungle Lions (269).
- 91 Interview 227.
- 92 Interview 223.
- 93 Interview 220.
- 94 Interview 231.
- 95 Interview 232.
- 96 Interview 238.
- 97 Interviews 251, 252, and 254.
- 98 The interviews carried out by HRW (2004) in Liberia also suggest that such personal structures existed within several groups active in LURD in Liberia. However, the number of children interviewed from each group was too small to allow conclusions to be drawn on typical group structures.
- 99 Interview 244.
- 100 Interviews 250 and 239.

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101 Interview 125.

102 Interview 104.

103 Interview 148.

104 Interview 142.

105 This is higher than the average for all children interviewed from Liberia.

106 The conclusion that internal structures in LURD were not uniform is supported by the conclusions drawn in the HRW report on Liberia (HRW, 2002), which noted divisions between the Guinean-based political side of the movement and the field-based commanders.

107 Interview 222.

108 For Liberia, this conclusion is supported by the work carried out by HRW, which found that it remained unclear which acts would be tolerated. The report quotes one interviewed child who said that it depended partially on who made the decision as to what punishment would be used and others reported that in some units there were beatings for no apparent reason (2004, p. 21).

109 According to reports, it has been documented elsewhere that many children who fought in the 1989–97 war in Liberia returned to armed groups when fighting resumed in 2003 (Watch List, 2004, p. 30).

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