



# Child soldiers and 'Volunteerism' in civil wars in Africa: the case of Somalia, 1991-2011



View/Open

Full Text (3.523Mb)

**Date**

2012

**Author**

Mwongera, Peter K

**Type**

Thesis

**Language**

en\_US

**Metadata**

[Show full item record](#)

**Abstract**

This study examines the recruitment of child soldiers in Somalia, the roles played by them and the impact of the conflict on children in Somalia. The study concentrated on child soldiers, their relatives including parents and other informants that had interacted with them one way or another. Officials from various groups involved in the interventions in whatever capacity were interviewed including those working with UNHCR, UNICEF and other NGOs. The study employed both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles and relevant internet sources. Gaps found in secondary data were filled by conducting thorough oral interviews where fifty persons including former child soldiers were interviewed. Somalia has lacked a national government since the fall of Mohammed Siad Barre's dictatorship in 1991. Rival armed groups were embroiled in armed struggle that plunged the country into civil war. The US and UN humanitarian and military interventions from 1993 to 1995 failed to restore peace. Since then, various groupings of Somali factions, mostly clan based sought to control the national territory or portions thereof and have been fighting for slightly over twenty years now. Furthermore, external forces and actors mostly led by interests other than for Somalia have made matters worse by supporting various groups and persons in Somalia. This has complicated and protracted the conflict. It is in the prevailing environment that many children have found their way into the war through the many warring groups involved in the conflict. Often, cruel methods of forced recruitment of child soldiers are popular images used in the academic literature and by the media. Children have been portrayed as vulnerable victims and their agency in conflict denied. While this is true in some contexts, overall, this picture is largely misleading. Children sometimes weigh the options of joining or abstaining from joining armed conflict and have on many occasions joined armed groups voluntarily. Therefore, this research sought to find out the conditions that could be encouraging children to voluntarily join armed groups in Somalia. The study examines roles played by child soldiers and the impact of the war on children. Taking up arms was found to be a conscious choice and an attractive option for the young considering the prevailing conditions. The common fallacy is to compare child soldiers with children in peaceful times or in prosperous societies. Membership to armed groups saved most children from the wrath of the militia groups within their locality, provided them with some means of livelihood, gave them an opportunity to enjoy their childhood or youth and acceptance within their clan, sub-clans or families as need would be. Girls, an otherwise discriminated group found some respect and recognition after joining some of these groups to be with their loved ones. However, the short term benefits for joining armed groups are outweighed by the disadvantages on the macro-level when it comes to reintegration, economic growth, peace, and the general well-being of children. It is the recommendation of this study that preventing children's participation in war is critical to the future of Somalia.

**URI**

<http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/8899>

**Publisher**

University of Nairobi, Kenya

**Collections**

-College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) [23811]

Copyright © 2019

University of Nairobi Library

[UoN Quality Policy](#) | [Send Feedback](#)

In the case of Somalia, for the period 1991 to 2010, the results suggest that neutral interventions, either military (humanitarian) or diplomatic, can lead to lower conflict intensity, but if partisan and military they lead to higher conflict intensity. If partisan and diplomatic and provided to both sides of the conflict they have no effect on conflict intensity. The conclusion is that peace competes with other objectives of external interventions. January 1991 to March 1992 – De-escalation of the conflict by international “humanitarian” intervention in the aftermath of the power vacuum left by the toppling of the Barre regime. April 1992 to October 1996 – Conflict escalation in General Mohamed Farah Aidid’s bid for control and the international community’s failure to manage the conflict. Listen to child soldiers, wounded, lost and working children tell their stories. Warning: Some of the stories told involve violence. In the civil war in Sierra Leone children fight for both the rebels - the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the pro-government local militia, the Kamajors. The Kamajors do much of the front-line fighting for the government and the West African peace-keeping force, ECOMOG. Often after the RUF attacks a village they abduct the surviving children. The children, many of whom have seen their parents slaughtered, are then removed to special camps. Those children who escape often join the Kamajors who give them shelter and food. For the last 50 years there has been conflict in Burma between the go “During active hostilities children in the LRA were forced to participate in combat and to carry out raids, kill and mutilate other child soldiers and civilians, and loot and burn houses.”<sup>23</sup> Although most parents and family try to hide and protect their children, many of them get taken anyway – as in the case of an adolescent who had been abducted at the. Similar to the LRA, the RUF in Sierra Leone used abduction as one of its main recruitment methods, but it should not be forgotten that “all sides had recruited children, who were the main victims of forced recruitment”<sup>25</sup> – meaning that the pro-government Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the Sierra Leone Army also forced. During the Civil War, World War II, teenagers - soldiers and partisans - fought on both sides. In the postwar period, the practice of accepting children for military service gradually ceased. In accordance with the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 in August 1949 adopted in 1977, persons under fifteen years of age were prohibited from participating in armed conflicts. In 1995, the United Nations was urged not to recruit minors under the age of eighteen. The greatest number of children

and adolescents today are forced to fight with arms in their hands in numerous armed conflicts, rocking the African continent. Tropical Africa remains the least stable region of the planet, and it is here that the phenomenon of "child soldiers" has become most prevalent. The Somali Civil War is an ongoing civil war taking place in Somalia. It grew out of resistance to the military junta led by Siad Barre during the 1980s. By 1988–1990, the Somali Armed Forces began engaging various armed rebel groups, including the Somali Salvation Democratic Front in the northeast, the Somali National Movement in the northwest, and the United Somali Congress in the south. The clan-based armed opposition groups overthrew the Barre government in 1991.