



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



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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.

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'Child Soldiers is a remarkable insight into the inner workings of armed groups in Sierra Leone's 1991–2002 war. It is analytically sophisticated and based on solid and innovative field research. Denov's work challenges conventional wisdom and will be an indispensable component in debates about children's roles in recent conflicts. This book should become required reading for those interested in the study of child soldiers in civil wars.' William Reno - Northwestern University. '... Myriam Denov successfully delivers on her objective of giving voice to the (often) v Most child soldiers in Africa are boys, but girls make up a substantial minority and constitute about 40% of the population of child soldiers. However, girls are much more vulnerable to abuse and are used mostly used for sexual purposes by male soldiers. Somalia: War profiteers use child soldiers to continue and prolong fight against the government in order to prevent taxes and curtailing illegal businesses. Congo: Child soldiers who are mostly males, keep the violence alive at borders beyond government control. In many cases, the groups that use child soldiers are anti-government groups or rebels and are not ready to negotiate since many affected countries in Africa do not have a functioning government. Child soldiers in Africa. From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Part of a series on. the civil war ended in April 2002.[4] Child soldiers in Angola were excluded from assistance in demobilizing because the government did not classify them as soldiers.[4] Those who had been child soldiers during the war were excused from compulsory military service but could still serve on a voluntary basis; indeed, some children who had come of age while in the armed. Several high-profile cases of child soldier recruitment into government forces occurred, which contradicted governmental claims of no child soldier recruitment.[4] These child soldiers, though few in number, sometimes attained higher ranks after their service, but were accused of perpetrating human rights abuses and looting.[4].