

## **Addressing Child Soldiering in Post-Conflict Situations in African States: Lessons Drawn from Sierra Leone**

Oluwaremilekun Toyin Oluwaniyi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Redeemer's University, History/International Relations, Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria

otoldo\_olu@yahoo.com

This study investigates the reintegration of child soldiers into African society, failure of which constitutes huge post-conflict challenge and security risk to state and society in Africa. This study argues that if child soldiers are not properly demobilized, rehabilitated and reintegrated in post-conflict environment, they constitute a security risk to themselves, their families and society which created the 'soldier' in them. Despite the international law negating the use of children as soldiers, there is growing international concern that large numbers of children are being recruited to military forces in situations of conflict around the world and most importantly, in Africa. In West Africa alone, civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea produced hundreds of child soldiers most of whom were forcibly recruited. The forms of recruitment of child soldiers, their indoctrination, training and activities dovetailed into negative physical, social and psychological experiences in post-conflict situations for the child soldiers, their families and the society in general. In war-torn societies, the DDR programme most times does not meet its expectations, therefore, creating in the ex-child soldier, a potential agent of criminal and political violence in his society. Based on fieldwork carried out in Sierra Leone, this study draws lessons from the successes recorded here for reintegrating ex-child soldiers in war-torn African countries. Although different circumstances predicate conflicts in Africa, the relative successes recorded in Sierra Leone cannot be ignored to serve as a marker in other war-torn states. Hence, this study focuses on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration methods initiated and implemented for child soldiers in Sierra Leone. It also investigates the good outcomes and how such positive sides can be replicated in other war-torn societies in Africa where child soldiering was and is still a very common phenomenon. However, it showcases the problems encountered during the process as a way of building better reintegration for child soldiers in other African states. This study concludes that one should not expect a one-size-fits-all syndrome but a good score card can begin to serve as a benchmark for building a concrete post-conflict reintegration of child soldiers