CHILD SOLDIERS
CREATIVE DISRUPTION AND
REINTEGRATION

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**ACRONYM LIST**

- A2R: Alliance for Revival and Rebuilding
- APRD: People’s Army for the Restoration of Democracy
- AU: African Union
- CAR: Central African Republic
- CPJP: Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace
- CPSK: Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country
- DDR:
- DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo
- FDPC: The Central African Democratic Front
- FIDH: The International Federation for Human Rights
- FEA: Federation of French Equatorial Africa
- GAPLC: Patriotic Action Group for the Liberation of the Central African Republic
- LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
- M2R: Movement for Revival and Rebuilding/Alternative Political Movement in CAR
- MESAN: Movement for the Social Evolution of Black Africa
- MLCJ: Movement of Central African Liberation for Justice
- NGO: nongovernmental organizations
- UFDR: Union of Democratic Forces for Unity
- UFR: Republican Forces Union
- UN: United Nations
THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON

There are an estimated 250,000 child soldiers worldwide. While not all of these children are engaged in direct conflict, they are used for a variety of services which support groups engaged in violence. Reintegration programs require a high-level of sensitivity to the realities these children face. Additionally, gender sensitivity is necessary as approximately 40% of child soldiers are female. This is not an issue specific to a country or region; rather it is a global crisis which demands attention. The United Nation’s Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict recognizes 23 countries as locations where children are impacted by conflict in South America, Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia.

METHODOLOGY OF THE GUIDED EXPERIENCE

The aim of this narrative is to provide the foundation for a guided experience, which centers on the case study of Central African Republic and four Central African children. A guided experience allows an audience to engage in experiential learning through a technology-based platform, such as a flight simulator for pilots-in-training. Much like a tour of a museum, the guided experience will lead the audience on a journey, in this case the path of one of the four children that concludes with reflection questions and additional information.

The guided experience is broken into four sections. The first is a general background on the current conflict and actors in CAR so as to ensure that each guided experience participant has some basic knowledge. There are option videos which allow the participant to visually engage with the crisis. The second section allows the participant to choose one of the four Central African children; each with a unique identity. The third section is the child’s journey through conflict and follows a basic game theory model in which the participant is confronted with a binary question until the last question, which will present two open-ended possible life paths. The next step in the child’s journey will depend upon the participant’s answer to the questions. The use of binary questions emphasizes that the children either do not have many options or do not believe they have many options. For example, interviews with former child soldiers revealed many were threatened with life or death ultimatums when given orders. The final section is a series of reflection questions and resources regarding children and conflict-zones. The participant will also have the option of returning to the first section so as to walk through the other potential journeys.

HOW DO WE DEFINE A CHILD SOLDIER?

For the purposes of the narrative and guided experience, we refer to the definition provided by the UN’s Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict:

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“A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies, or for sexual purposes.\(^3\)

An additional distinction must be made within international humanitarian law and international human rights law regarding the definition of child soldiers. Under international humanitarian law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, it is illegal to recruit anyone under the age of 15.\(^4\) This is understood as “customary” and applicable to both state and non-state actors in international and non-international conflicts. This customary law has been held in cases regarding former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and in the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL).

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child’s Option Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, states are required to increase the age of compulsory recruitment and direct involvement in conflict to 18 years old.\(^5\) If a state allows for voluntary recruitment of children between the age of 15 and 18 years old, the state must introduce specific safeguards and must give priority to the oldest for recruitment. Under the Optional Protocol, non-state actors are prohibited from recruiting or using children under 18 years old. There are a number of regional and international protocols that align with this Optional Protocol regarding state and non-state actors or go further to outright prohibit the participation of anyone under the age of 18 years old.

The definition and supplementary clarifications on child soldiers are significant in that it does not distinguish between a child being coerced and a child voluntarily engaging in conflict. This removes blame from the child, whether or not they believed they had a choice. Further, the definition of child soldier activities beyond direct conflict allows for extension of legal action and protections. These factors broaden our understanding of who is classified as a child soldier and what the life of a child soldier may be.

**WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DOING?**

The UN’s response to children affected by conflict has evolved from the report issued in 1996 by former Minister of Education for Mozambique Ms. Garca Machel, “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,” and a follow up debate by the UN Security Council in 1998. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1261 on August 25, 1999, which allowed for the issue of children affected by war to be placed on its agenda.\(^6\) In 2000, the Security Council adopted a second resolution as well as the Optional Protocol (mentioned previously), which became effective on February 12, 2002 and is now the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers. Additional Resolutions and the Paris Commitments expanded the mandate of the United Nation’s Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSR).\(^7\) Further, the adopted Security Council Resolution 1379 calls for the names of parties recruiting or using children in violation of international humanitarian law, which resulted in the OSR’s Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to “name and shame” parties involved in the above violations. The OSR focuses its work on the “Six Grave Violations” of children in conflict: 1) Killing and maiming of children; 2) Recruitment or use of

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\(^3\) Ibid.  
\(^4\) Ibid.  
\(^5\) Ibid.  
\(^6\) Ibid.  
\(^7\) Ibid.
children as soldiers; 3) Sexual violence against children; 4) Attacks against schools or hospitals; 5) Denial of humanitarian access for children; and 6) Abduction of children.8 In 2014, the Security Council and the OSR began the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign to end the recruitment and use of children in conflict by the end of 2016.9

Regarding state efforts, there are a number of UN member states that nominally support the Security Council initiatives but have not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. The United States (US) is a primary example as it has yet to correct a loophole in its 2008 Child Soldier Prevention Act (CSPA).10 The Act’s intention was to halt US military aid to states that have failed to stop the recruitment and use of child soldiers, however the loophole and waivers provided by the Obama Administration have allowed countries such as Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Yemen to continue receiving support despite their implication in the use of children in conflict.11

Positive developments have occurred through entities beyond the UN and state actors. There are a number of nongovernmental organizations focused on the issue of children in conflict and working towards eradicating this issue through advocacy, policy work, campaigns, and various development efforts. Child Soldiers International and the Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative are two well-known examples.1213

In recent years, former child soldiers and those affected by conflict as children have shared their stories in a more public manner. For example, Emmanuel Jal penned War Child: A Child Soldier’s Story about his experience in Sudan and South Sudan; Hamse Warfa wrote America Here I Come: A Somali Refugee’s Quest for Hope about his upbringing in Somalia; and Ishmael Beah authored A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier about his childhood during the Sierra Leone Civil War. More recently, the film “A Good Lie” portrayed the true story of four orphaned Sudanese children and their journey through the Second Sudanese Civil War to the United States. These narratives are important in bringing attention to such a serious issue, however with so many stories from very specific regions of Africa, it limits the international community’s understanding of the global impact of children and conflict.

THE CHILD SOLDIER IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

Having endured five coups and multiple rebellions since independence from France in 1960, violence in Central African Republic (CAR) is complex.14 CAR is currently experiencing quasi-sectarian conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, primarily Christians and animists.

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
There have been a number of efforts to build a sustainable peace, such as the Liberville agreement in January 2013 and the Brazzaville agreement in July 2014, but nothing has lasted as the country faces competing political and economic interests, as well as corruption, bankruptcy, widespread poverty, and border insecurity.\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{16} Despite CAR being a resource-wealthy state with goods such as diamonds, timber, gold, uranium, oil, and ivory, an estimated two-thirds of the population, lives below the poverty line.\textsuperscript{17} Constant cycles of violence in CAR and the Sahel region have also contributed to poor living conditions. No current generation of Central Africans has experienced peace. Given the inherently violent environment and the number of variety of actors and their competing interests, it is difficult to attribute the conflicts in CAR to any particular reason or actor. As a result, the leadership takes advantage the instability in order to mobilize the masses in order to fulfill their own desires.

\textit{The Actors}

\textbf{Séléka Rebels and Supporters}

The Séléka rebels are an alliance of factions who overthrew President General Francois Bozize and the CAR government on March 24, 2013 under the leadership of Michel Djotodia, former leader of the UFDR. In addition to political motives, Djotodia mobilized the masses by centering his rhetoric retribution for Northern Central Africans, the victims of human rights abuses committed by Bozize and his supporters and the North’s lack access to the resource wealth of CAR.\textsuperscript{18} Due to the complicated and varied identities of Séléka rebels, it is surprising that the group united under the Séléka rebel identity. However, Djotodia used religious identity to his advantage. Approximately 15% of Central Africans are Muslim, of which the vast majority reside in the north, therefore Séléka rebel group self-identifies as Muslim.\textsuperscript{19}\textsuperscript{20} This religious dichotomy appealed to the Muslim community and increased the Séléka numbers due to the geographic nature and Southern Central Africans being primarily non-Muslim and Bozize-supporters. The Séléka were able to recruit from Chad and Sudan due to strong Gula tribe connections, which creates an additional dynamic.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Anti-Balaka Group and Supporters}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
The Anti-Balaka, or anti-machete, initially formed as “local militias paid to defend crops and cattle against robbers and highwaymen due to the absence of state security.” As the violence by Séléka rebels escalated, the Anti-Balaka began shifting their original goals and purpose. Throughout the March 2013 coup, the Séléka rebels committed many war crimes, such as rape, executions, theft, and burning of homes and villages. This created a large internally displaced peoples (IDP) community and forced a number of people to flee. The Anti-Balaka retaliated and mobilized masses by citing religious divides as many the Anti-Balaka are non-Muslims, primarily Christian and animist. While there are religious and cultural differences internal to the Anti-Balaka and supporters, the leadership mobilized its masses by perpetuating the identity of Séléka rebels as Muslims due to the Séléka’s own rhetoric and Arabic-language use rather than use of French or local languages in Southern CAR.

**Army of Central African Republic**

Given that the army was loyal to the former president, Bozize, it is assumed that the soldiers are motivated to continue violence against the Séléka rebels despite the interim government. For example, shortly after the conclusion of a military ceremony on February 5, 2014 in which Interim President Samba-Panza spoke highly of the national army, soldiers lynched a man. The soldiers and witnesses believed the man was Muslim and a former associate of the Séléka rebels. One witness stated that it was acceptable for this to happen by citing “an eye for an eye.” This lynching was not an isolated event and is characteristic of the evolving preferences of the army, the Anti-Balaka, and supporters due to the increased rhetoric of the dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims in CAR.

**Interim Government of Central African Republic**

Djotodia was forced to step down in January 2014 amid criticism of his handling of the sectarian violence. Catherine Samba-Panza, former mayor of CAR's capital city Bangui, was appointed by CAR's parliament as interim president of CAR. As of August 2014, Samba-Panza shares state leadership with Prime Minister Mahamat Karmoun, a Muslim politician. Given the convoluted history of CAR’s leadership, there are both political motivations and grievance motivators for the interim government in choosing Samba-Panza and Karmoun as their leadership. In an effort to distance itself from all previous authoritarian regimes and rebel groups,

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22 Felix, Bate, and Paul-Marin Ngoupana. "Central African Republic conflict is political, not religious."
23 Lister, Tim. "Religious violence in CAR plagues 'most abandoned people on earth'."
24 Felix, Bate, and Paul-Marin Ngoupana. "Central African Republic conflict is political, not religious."
25 Ibid.
27 Felix, Bate, and Paul-Marin Ngoupana. "Central African Republic conflict is political, not religious."
30 Ibid.
31 BBC. "Central African Republic profile."
Samba-Panza provides neutrality whereas Karmoun appeals to the Muslim community who have historically been oppressed. This has the potential to limit the violence and provide a path towards peace.

**REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS**

As far as international states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the French have the most at stake with regards to CAR as the former colonial power and have maintained military presence since CAR’s independence. The UN and the African Union (AU) have been involved in a variety of capacities from security to peacekeeping efforts. Various NGOs have remained active in CAR, such as Doctors without Borders.

The roles of various regional state actors Chad, Uganda, South Sudan, Libya, DRC, and Rwanda have varied throughout history both positively and negatively. For example, the ex-Vice President of DRC went to trial in 2010 at the ICC to face allegations of allowing DRC troops to rape and kill in CAR between 2002 and 2003.

There are also external rebel and terrorist groups that have operated along the borders of CAR and within CAR such as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) as stated previously and most recently the militant Islamist group Boko Haram. Such terrorist groups and other non-state actors do not operate in ways that are easily analyzed by conflict analysis models, which makes them unpredictable. However, we do know that many of these armed groups are using child soldiers. The Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict reported LRA abductions of Central African children following reports and separation from militant groups.

**CURRENT CRISIS FOR CHILDREN**

Save the Children estimates that there are 6,000 to 10,000 Central African children associated with many of the armed groups as of December 2014 compared to the estimated 2,500 in December 2012. This number will only grow if the interim government and international and local communities do not address the root causes of children used as soldiers. Children are involved in conflict for a number of intertwined economic, social, and political reasons. In many conflict-affected areas, there are a number of orphaned and vulnerable children due to years of violence, disease, and death. With no one caring for these children, they may be forced into participating through coercion, kidnapping, false promises, or drugs. Even if the child has a guardian(s), those individuals may decide to give up the children out of fear or with the belief

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32 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 BBC. “Central African Republic profile.”
38 Lister, Tim. "Religious violence in CAR plagues 'most abandoned people on earth'."
that the child will exact revenge on behalf of the family, ethnic group, or tribe for wrongs
committed against them in during the conflict.

Additionally, those recruiting child soldiers are seeking large numbers of recruits with as
little investment as possible. Not only are many of these children vulnerable and easy to find,
they can be easily manipulated through threats of violence. As discussed previously, the role of
the child soldier extends beyond combat. Children, both boys and girls, cook, carry gear, and
provide services for the leadership of the militant group. Further, girls are taken as wives for the
leadership and subjected to sexual abuse. One must also assume that boys are also subjected to
such abuse, however there is little data or research to support such a claim which stems from the
social taboos of acknowledging sexual abuse as well as the social gender norms and
expectations.

Further, in conflict-affected zones, such as CAR, basic services are nonexistent, such as
schools and health care facilities, and there is high unemployment. Given the bleak environment,
some children may “chose” to join military groups in the sense that they do not believe they have
a viable alternative for survival. This also begs the questions as to what we expect former child
soldiers to return to following escape or a cease-fire.

THE CHILDREN AND THEIR EXPERIENCES

In the following section, the content for Stages 2, 3, and 4 are provided.

**AAKIFAH**

Aakifah is a 12 year old Muslim girl from Bangui. She lives with her father, his new
wife, and two younger siblings. Aakifah’s father is an alcoholic and abusive which cause
Aakifah’s mother to leave the home. Her mother was unable to take Aakifah and her siblings to
societal norms which provide the patriarch custody of children. As Aakifah’s father and new
wife, also an alcoholic, are unable to maintain employment or care for the home, Aakifah
frequently misses school as feels obligated to care for her younger siblings. When she does
attend school, she makes sure to travel with a large group of students and children.

**AAKIFAH’S JOURNEY**

1. Aakifah’s father’s new wife seems fit to care for Aakifah’s siblings today. Aakifah
missed walking to school with the group. Do you stay home?
   a. Yes: Aakifah encounters a group of Séléka rebels and is abducted. She is
      subjected to sexual abuse, forced labor, and threats. On more than one occasion,
      Aakifah is forced to kill a fellow child soldier for disobeying orders or attempting
      to escape so as to set an example. Aakifah turns to alcohol and drugs, when
      available, to cope with the atrocities that she witnesses and those which she is
      forced to commit. Go on to the next step.
   b. No: Aakifah’s father returns to the house from a night of drinking and begins to
      physically and verbally assault Aakifah. Aakifah will continue suffering this
      abuse or may eventually be killed in conflict or captured by one of the many
      armed groups in the area. End of guided experience.
2. If yes to question 1: Aakifah is now 15 years old and has been held by the Séléka for about a two and a half years. She sees an opportunity to escape from the rebels. Do you attempt escape?
   a. Yes: Aakifah manages to break free from the rebels with two other girls in the midst of combat. One girl is killed by a stray bullet. Aakifah and the other girl manage to find a nearby village with access to international aid. They are quickly transported to a nearby medical facility and rehabilitation center for returning child soldiers. Go on to the next step.
   b. No: Aakifah continues to suffer at the hands of the Séléka but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Aakifah a victim, she becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Aakifah dies in combat or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

3. If yes to question 2: Aakifah receives immediate medical care from Save the Children UK and is transferred to a reintegration home on the outskirts of Bangui. Aakifah finds out that she is pregnant after a month at the home. Local staff give Aakifah the option of enrolling in a vocational school in order to support herself and her child. Do you accept this option?
   a. Yes: Aakifah may face uncertainty supporting herself and a newborn child, but she has a community around the reintegration home and does not feel marginalized for her time in the bush with the Séléka. End of guided experience.
   b. No: Aakifah may return to her father’s home following a tribal cleansing ceremony. If her father accepts the newborn, the baby will go with her. If not, the baby may be sent to an orphanage. If Aakifah returns home, she may eventually break free of her father and start a family on her own. An alternative is that she is captured again or flees to the bush for a sense of security. This particular path is rife with the unknown. End of guided experience.

**Mahmoud**

Mahmoud is a 13 year old Muslim boy from Bangui. He currently lives with his extended family in a small village as both of his parents were killed in conflict. He has no siblings or immediate family to care for him. He is frequently left on his own as his extended family does not have the resources for school. Additionally, Mahmoud typically sleeps in a mosque in a larger town with other young boys as his family fears that he will be taken in night raids on their village; this is a common tactic by both the Séléka and anti-Balaka to recruit or kill. He was already abducted once before and managed to escape. He recuperated at a group home for 2 months before returning to his extended family. His family does not openly discuss his time in the bush after performing a cleansing ceremony due to the community’s aversion to ‘bush people.’

**Mahmoud’s Journey**

1. Mahmoud is returning to his village after sleeping at the mosque. He can hear shouts and gunshots and immediately remembers his time in the bush. Do you run?
a. Yes: Mahmoud runs back into the bush in an attempt to hide from the violence. Go on to the next step.

b. No: Mahmoud enters the village and is immediately rounded up by the anti-Balaka. They have burned everything in the village and are now forcing the villagers to either join them or be killed. Ultimately, the commanding officer decides to kill everyone. End of guided experience.

2. If yes to question 1: Mahmoud returns to the village after a day passes. He finds that there are no survivors and everything has been ransacked or destroyed. While walking to the mosque, Mahmoud encounters a group of Séléka fighters. They have not seen him yet. Do you run again?

a. Yes: Mahmoud is lucky and manages to hide from the Séléka rebels. He does not know if they would recruit him or kill him as there is no way to identify himself as Muslim rather than Christian. Go on to the next step.

b. No: Mahmoud has nothing to return to and no one is left in his family. He joins the Séléka as it is the only thing he knows and provides him with more food than he would have while living on the streets alone. Mahmoud endures years of suffering at the hands of the Séléka but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Mahmoud a victim, he becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Mahmoud dies in combat or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

3. If yes to question 2: Mahmoud manages to reach the mosque after the Séléka rebels move on from their campsite. He stays in the town and lives on the streets. His only consistent meal during the day is from the mosque. This continues for 6 months. The Séléka rebels return to the area and send children into the village to recruit. Do you attempt to avoid recruitment?

a. Yes: Mahmoud yet again manages to avoid being recruited. He is barely surviving on his own but knows that the life of a child soldier is violent and brutal. He’d rather struggle on the streets than return to the bush.

b. No: Mahmoud has nothing to return to and no one is left in his family. He joins the Séléka as it is the only thing he knows and provides him with more food than he would have while living on the streets alone. Mahmoud endures years of suffering at the hands of the Séléka but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Mahmoud a victim, he becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Mahmoud dies in combat or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

**Philippe**

Philippe is a 15 year old Christian boy from Bangui. He recently returned from the bush as a child soldier and lives with his immediate family. A week ago Philippe’s father and his brother-in-law were attacked by the Séléka rebels while traveling to a neighboring village for business. Philippe’s father was killed and his brother-in-law had his nose, lips, and hands cut off, leaving him permanently disfigured and disabled. Philippe’s sister and grandfather believe Philippe should avenge the family. Others in the Christian community openly criticize him for
not immediately taking up arms with the anti-Balaka. Philippe’s mother pleads with him to stay home and help take care of the family despite the pressure.

**Philippe’s Journey**

1. Philippe is now the most able male in the household. Philippe hears of an opportunity to enter a vocational school on scholarship but there is no guarantee. Do you apply?
   a. Yes: Philippe decides to apply for the scholarship and is accepted. He must travel back and forth to a neighboring village for the two-month program, which presents risks as it is the same road on which the attack on his family occurred. Go on to the next step.
   b. No: Philippe decides to stay at home and try to help his family. He finds the pressure from his sister, grandfather, and his community to be too much and becomes resentful. The anti-Balaka come through Bangui and Philippe decides to join to avenge his father and brother-in-law. He believes that this will restore his honor and his family’s honor. Philippe endures years of suffering in the bush but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Philippe a victim, he becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Philippe dies in combat or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

2. If yes to question 2: Philippe has just started his vocational training for brick-laying. He continues to struggle with the pressure that he and his mother receive from his family and community for not to actively seeking revenge on the Séléka or the Muslim community. Do you continue the vocational training?
   a. Yes: Philippe graduates from the program and manages to find a job in a village near his village. They are familiar with him and his family but do not ostracize him as they have a number of reintegrated child soldiers in the community and seek peace and stability. Go on to the next step.
   b. No: Philippe decides to stay at home and try to help his family. He finds the pressure from his sister, grandfather, and his community to be too much and becomes resentful. The anti-Balaka come through Bangui and Philippe decides to join to avenge his father and brother-in-law. He believes that this will restore his honor and his family’s honor. Philippe endures years of suffering in the bush but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Philippe a victim, he becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Philippe dies in combat or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

3. If yes to question 2: Philippe meets a Muslim girl, Aakifah, in the new community. He knows that neither of their families will approve of their marriage and will not support them. Do you get married to Aakifah?
   a. Yes: Philippe and Aakifah get married and manage to build a new life together. There are obstacles and they do struggle, but they hope for a better future together.
b. No: Philippe becomes resentful towards his family and his communities. He turns to alcohol to repress his emotions. End of guided experience.

**GRACE**

Grace is an 11 year old Christian girl from Bangui. She currently lives in an Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp with her mother, grandmother, and four younger siblings. Her father has been missing for two years and it is believed that he either is fighting with the anti-Balaka or dead. Grace’s mother attempts to find work and sells small handmade goods and is frequently not home. Grace must take on the burden of chores outside of the home as the oldest child, such as collect firewood for cooking and water. This leaves very little time for education, which is only available to paying students.

**GRACE’S JOURNEY**

1. Grace’s mother asks her to fetch water late in the day near dusk. Grace must go to the edge of the camp, which can be dangerous at nightfall. Do you go to get water?
   a. Yes: Grace goes to fetch water as she knows her family needs the water. The Séléka rebels are staking the IDP camp and spot her. They capture her and take her back to their camp. She is forced to convert to Islam and a Séléka rebel forces her into marriage. She endures two years of physical and sexual abuse, hard labor, violent combat, and forced to commit heinous acts. Go on to the next step.
   b. No: Grace is severely punished by her mother and she is forced to go get water. The Séléka rebels are staking the IDP camp and spot her. They capture her and take her back to their camp. She is forced to convert to Islam and a Séléka rebel forces her into marriage. She endures two years of physical and sexual abuse, hard labor, violent combat, and forced to commit heinous acts. End of guided experience.

2. If yes or no to question 1: Grace is now 13 years old and has been held for two years. She is as much a perpetrator as she is a victim but still hopes for escape. She manages to break free from her ‘husband’ and the militia. She has the option of returning to the IDP camp to her family or going to a reintegration center. Do you go to the reintegration center?
   a. Yes: Grace begins to talk about her experiences after three months of medical care and daily group therapy activities with social workers. She is making progress and set to begin vocational training in a month. She also converts back to Christianity and finds community in attending church. Go on to the next step.
   c. No: Grace returns to the IDP camp and finds that two of her siblings were abducted and her grandmother and her other two siblings have died from disease. Her mother is now an alcoholic but begs Grace to stay and help. Grace attempts to help her mother and takes on the brunt of the chores which means she cannot attend school. She also refuses to discuss what happened to her in the bush and becomes resentful. After six months, she decides to join the anti-Balaka for revenge against the Séléka rebels and what they did to her. She is again forced into marriage. Grace endures years of suffering at the hands of the anti-Balaka but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Grace...
a victim, she becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Grace dies in combat, in childbirth, or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

3. If yes to question 2: The reintegration center stops receiving funding and must close. Grace must either find a new reintegration center or return to the IDP camp. Do you attempt to find a new reintegration center?
   a. Yes: Grace manages to find a new reintegration center with the assistance of one of the local social workers. She has some serious setbacks with regards to her mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder but remains hopeful that she will soon be able to start her vocational training. She has also managed to find a new church community in the village.
   b. No: Grace returns to the IDP camp and finds that two of her siblings were abducted and her grandmother and her other two siblings have died from disease. Her mother is now an alcoholic but begs Grace to stay and help. Grace attempts to help her mother and takes on the brunt of the chores which means she cannot attend school. She also refuses to discuss what happened to her in the bush and becomes resentful. After six months, she decides to join the anti-Balaka for revenge against the Séléka rebels and what they did to her. She is again forced into marriage. Grace endures years of suffering at the hands of the anti-Balaka but has been brainwashed to believe that this is the only way of life. Not only is Grace a victim, she becomes a perpetrator as she no longer needs to be threatened in order to commit violent acts. Eventually Grace dies in combat, in childbirth, or of one of the many diseases one can contract while living in the bush. End of guided experience.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Given what you have experienced as the child, would you consider yourself a victim or a perpetrator of violence? Why?
2. Reflecting on the path options presented to you, do you believe the child had additional options available?
3. Do you see any creative means to break the cycle and allow for the child to move towards a brighter future?
4. How could the child’s community provide more support?
5. Could the child be more proactive in achieving local peace?

**Resources on Children and Conflict**

- *Lost Children.* Dreamer Joint Venture [u.a.], 2005. Film.
WHAT CAN BE DONE?

This particular case study is inspired by the concept of “creative disruption.” While this is primarily a concept related to solving wicked problems within the technology and business world, innovative disruption does not require technology or resource-intensive methods. Instead, certain environments require disruptions focused on the culture of economic practices and civil society practices to create a more progressive and peaceful society. In the case of child soldiers and reintegration, there are two major questions to address: 1) how do we break the cycle of violence; and 2) how do we reintegrate children into a society which has very little to offer? We need a more diverse group of people thinking of creative means to “disrupt” the cycle of violence and to “innovate” the existing society. The answers may be too obvious to those who have tirelessly worked on the issue of children and conflict which is why it is important to expand the dialogue beyond peacebuilders, the security sector, and academics.
REFERENCES


