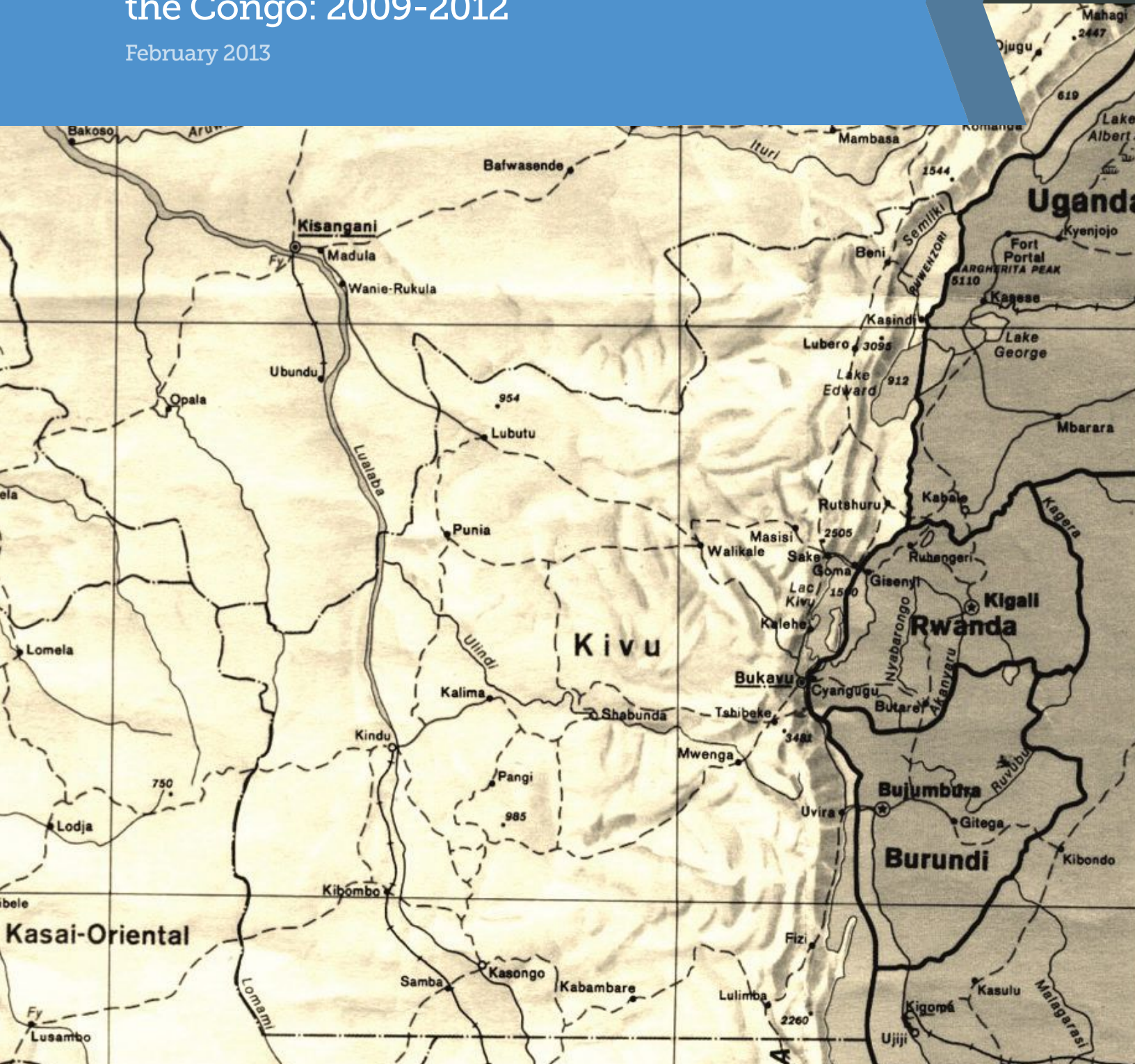




Our work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: 2009-2012

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Founded by retired lieutenant-general and celebrated humanitarian Roméo Dallaire, we are a global partnership committed to ending the use and recruitment of child soldiers worldwide, through ground-breaking research, advocacy, and security-sector training.

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Executive summary

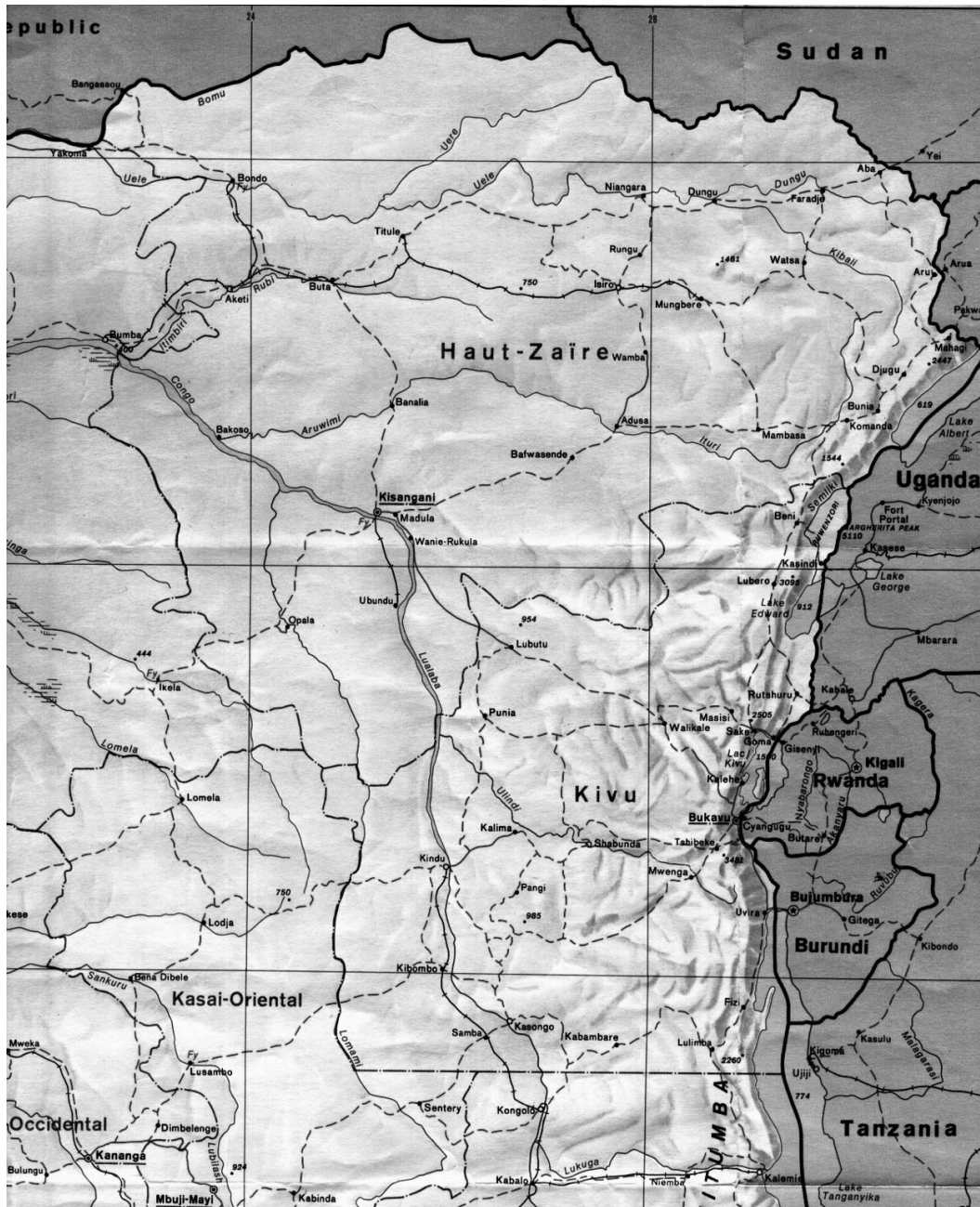
Over the past three years, The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative has developed a growing presence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a region of Africa that has long been blighted by both armed conflict and child soldiering. Through numerous research and training expeditions, it has established itself as a leading advocate for security sector actors' involvement in the quest to eradicate the recruitment and use of children as a weapon of war.

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the work the Initiative has done in the DRC's North and South Kivu provinces, as well as to outline key lessons that have been learned whilst in the field. The period of time that will be discussed spans from the spring of 2009 to the spring of 2012; as such, it will not address the rise of the M23 rebel group (also known as the *Armée Révolutionnaire Congolaise*, or ARC), nor will it detail the Initiative's most recent efforts in country.

Summary of key findings

- Although most security sector actors in the region have faced child soldiers in the past, none had received prior doctrinal training concerning how such engagements should proceed;
- The haphazard *brassage* process (by which surrendered rebels are integrate into the new FARDC) has rendered it more challenging for the Congolese army to rid itself of child soldiers within its own ranks;
- FARDC officers who are sympathetic to the laws surrounding the recruitment and use of child soldiers are prohibited by subordinate personnel from relinquishing their uniformed children;
- For some of the eastern DRC's armed groups, releasing one's child soldiers would result in a loss of income and power;
- Children are the optimal guardians of magical talismans, *fétiches* and *gris-gris*, as they are perceived to be innocent, chaste and pure;
- There is virtually no collaboration taking place between the security and humanitarian sectors with respect to the child soldier problem.”

Map of the Eastern DRC



Source: www.nationmaster.com

The Political Context

The conflict in the DRC has come to exemplify the lack of protection and deliberate targeting of civilians that so characterises modern warfare. Many thousands of lives have been lost in the provinces of North and South Kivu alone, where violence has continued unabated since the formal conclusion of the country's second civil war in 2003. Its first democratic elections, held in 2006 under the supervision of the world's largest electoral support operation, did little to assuage competing grievances and the result has been a persistent nationwide decline in living standards.

Indeed, the DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world, with an estimated 47% of the population living in severe poverty and the average citizen earning less than two dollars a day¹. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the country ranks 187th out of 187 countries in terms of human development indicators². This is true despite the massive amounts of foreign direct investment that the DRC receives on account of its abundant gold, tin, tungsten, tantalum, diamond and coltan reserves.

The most recent phase of political instability in the eastern DRC began in 1994, when hundreds of thousands of refugees flooded the Congolese borders, seeking protection from the conflict in neighbouring Rwanda. Among these displaced persons were members of the pro-Hutu *Interahamwe*, which was itself one of the major forces behind the Rwandan genocide.

In 1998, these former *génocidaires* began launching attacks from the DRC against the governments of Rwanda and Uganda, prompting the latter two states to declare war against Congolese president, Laurent Kabila. The ensuing chaos gave rise to a proliferation of non-state armed groups, some acting as Rwandan or Ugandan proxies that have plundered the DRC's resources on their client state's behalf. Unfortunately, many of these groups have survived to the present day, albeit under the guise of different leadership or nomenclature.

Additionally, the eastern conflict resulted in the creation of various community protection militias, collectively known as the Mai-Mai. While these non-aligned groups were initially meant to be a means of local self-protection, many Mai-Mai commanders are now actively

¹ UNDP, "Human Development Report 2011."

² *Ibid.*

contributing to the conflict and have carved out their own personal spheres of economic influence.

Since the *de jure* cessation of regional hostilities in 2003, the new Congolese government under President Joseph Kabila has overseen the reconstitution of the national army, now called the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC). Comprised of 18 integrated brigades, the FARDC was intended to bring together all of the various state and non-state armed groups that had participated in the war under a single, unified command. The integration process, however, has proven to be highly challenging.

Following the 2006 elections, four armed groups – the FARDC, the Mai-Mai, the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP) and the *Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) – continued to wreak havoc upon populations in the east. In August 2008, for example, heavy clashes erupted between the FARDC and the CNDP, leading to mass rape, murder and the recruitment of many thousands of child soldiers.

In 2009, General Laurent Nkunda, then head of the CNDP, was arrested and removed from the country. The ensuing disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process resulted in the absorption of some 8,000 former rebel combatants into the FARDC³. The haste with which this process was effected has led to numerous problems related to pay, discipline, and command and control. Simultaneously, civilians began to accuse the FARDC of increasingly widespread human rights abuses.

While this disarmament process effectively neutralised the CNDP, the FDLR remained intact. In May 2009, President Kabila approved a law that extended amnesty to those who continued to fight in the east, but this has had very little impact upon the FDLR's operational capacity.

As of December 2009, the United Nations (UN) Security Council decided to extend the mandate of its original peacekeeping mission to the eastern DRC. This new mission is called MONUSCO – the United Nations Stabilisation Mission for the DRC.

Despite all efforts by the Congolese government and the international community, the eastern DRC remains a fragile and often violent place. Civilians continue to be targeted by armed groups such as the FDLR or the new M23/ARC, resulting in extensive sexual abuse, forced labour and the recruitment of children as soldiers.

³ Institute for Security Studies, "Situation Report: 23 November 2010."

The Initiative's work in the DRC

The Initiative began its work in the DRC in the spring of 2009, when it launched a research expedition to Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province. The purpose of this mission was to evaluate the various communication strategies being employed by security and civilian actors to advertise the DDR programme to active child soldiers in the bush. Undertaken in collaboration with Insight Collaborative and Search for Common Ground, the expedition also served to generate important contacts within local Congolese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the FARDC.

In the summer of 2010, the Initiative embarked upon a second research mission to both Bukavu and Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. The aim of this expedition was to identify key tactics used by perpetrators who recruit, command and control child soldiers. This information was then used to inform the creation of a handbook for security sector actors, which debuted in the fall of 2012⁴.

The first three trainings of FARDC troops took place in July/September 2011 and March 2012, as part of a broader regional initiative entitled "Child Protection and Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the Democratic Republic of Congo through Security Sector Reform and Strengthened Capacity". The majority of participants were members of the FARDC's 10th Region, with whom the Initiative has come to develop a strong working relationship. To effect these seminars, the Initiative also partnered with World Vision Canada, World Vision DRC and the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. Funding was also received from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, START.

Since having facilitated these three initial trainings, education has become a key pillar of the Initiative's work, both within the DRC and abroad. Indeed, the Initiative recognises that security sector actors enjoy unique access to remote communities that are often vulnerable to recruitment campaigns. Frequently, they are also the first point of outside contact for captive child soldiers. As such, soldiers and police have a crucial role to play vis-à-vis child soldiers, in both recruitment prevention and demobilisation. Such trainings also serve as excellent research opportunities, as some of the most striking and illuminating anecdotes obtained to date have accrued from candid discussions with seminar participants.

⁴ See www.childsoldiers.org/publications

Research missions

Research Mission I: DDR Communication Strategies

February – May 2009

The first research mission to Bukavu in the eastern DRC occurred from February through May 2009. Orchestrated in collaboration with Boston-based conflict management firm Insight Collaborative and Search for Common Ground, the purpose of this exercise was to evaluate the various communication strategies that military and civilian actors are employing to advertise the national DDR programme to active child soldiers in the bush.

Disseminating such information to active child soldiers is challenging; oftentimes, children associated with armed groups are made to serve in exceedingly remote locations and are seldom afforded access to instructional radio programmes or community theatre skits. Moreover, these various communication strategies are frequently in direct conflict with the anti-DDR propaganda espoused by the children's own commanders.

Research on this subject was conducted using a mixed survey/observational methodology. Interviews conducted for the survey component were open-ended, allowing subjects to explain their work and candidly articulate their views.

In addition, separate focus groups were held with both FARDC members of the 10th Region and former child soldiers who were vetted by ASO. Unlike the one-on-one interviews that were conducted, these group discussions adhered to a standardised questionnaire.

The Initiative also had the opportunity to observe an extraction mission conducted by the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC, now MONUSCO). During this operation, MONUC child protection officers negotiated the release of one 15-year-old boy soldier, who had been unwittingly integrated into the FARDC following a prior demobilisation process. The Initiative was also permitted to interview the presiding colonel of the FARDC field camp.

Research Mission II: Recruitment and Deployment Tactics

July 2010

The Initiative's second research mission to the region took place from 22 to 29 July 2010 and involved field visits to Bukavu, Goma and Kigali (Rwanda). Its purpose was to explore the various tactics employed by adult commanders to recruit and deploy child soldiers. By understanding said tactics, it was hoped that the Initiative could create an instructive, anecdote-rich handbook accessible to all those who are working in the security and humanitarian sectors. This handbook eventually debuted in the fall of 2012.

Research was conducted using a survey methodology, whereby individual stakeholders and small focus groups were led through a semi-standardised questionnaire. Interview subjects included MONUSCO and UNICEF child protection officers, World Vision's Head of Mission in eastern DRC, the Centre Don Bosco interim care centre staff, MONUSCO's civil-military cooperation team, representatives of the ICRC, the Interim Chief of UNPOL-South Kivu and several members of the FARDC, including FARDC recruiters. A particularly illuminating interview was also held with a former girl soldier who was then partnering with ASO. This was a very fortunate encounter, as girl soldiers very seldom agree to discuss their experiences with others.

Training missions

Three training missions to the eastern DRC were conducted between the summer of 2011 and the spring of 2012. All three expeditions collectively formed one component of a larger programme implemented by various organisations across the region, entitled “Child Protection and Prevention of SGBV through Security Sector Reform and Strengthened Capacity”. The Initiative’s main partner was the eastern DRC branch of World Vision.

The first round of trainings took place in July 2011, in the South Kivu capital of Bukavu. Participants included 30 FARDC officers from the 10th Region (five of whom were women) and two civilians from Search for Common Ground and the Harvard Humanitarian Project. Separate seminars were planned for MONUSCO peacekeepers in North Kivu but a scheduling problem rendered these trainings impossible.

The second three-week training mission occurred over September and October 2011. Two seminars were held in Bukavu and one in Goma, each drawing 20 members of the FARDC’s 10th Region (in South Kivu) and 8th Region (in North Kivu). The Initiative’s return visit to Bukavu allowed it to strengthen its existing relationship with the 10th Region, while the training in Goma was its first ever interaction with the 8th Region.

During these first two missions, the Initiative presented the same series of core modules. These included:

- The definition of a child soldier;
- Child soldiers as a security concern;
- The role of security sector actors vis-à-vis child soldiers;
- The unique characteristics of girl soldiers;
- International laws concerning child soldiers;
- The relationship between child soldiers and conflict minerals;
- Working with child-focused NGOs;
- Military ethics;
- Military codes of conduct;
- Simulation exercises (i.e. role playing).

It is important to note that role-playing has become one of the most crucial components of the Initiative’s trainings. Indeed, facilitators have found that the most efficient way for security sector actors to learn and embrace models for improved interaction with child soldiers is to have them practice said models in a controlled environment.

Today, many participants report that the Initiative's simulations are the highlight of its training.

The third and most recent training mission to the eastern DRC took place in March 2012. Unlike the previous two missions, the purpose of this exercise was to train six trainers (including two women) within the 10th Region of the FARDC, all of whom were past seminar participants who demonstrated a particular aptitude for the material. While the Initiative does intend to continue its regular training of security sector actors across the region, such training-of-trainers will gradually take precedence, as one of the Initiative's core goals is to empower security sector organisations (such as the FARDC) to teach and regulate itself.

This training-of-trainers seminar included a general review of the child soldier phenomenon (with particular attention afforded to the experience of girl soldiers), a review of key national and international laws concerning child soldiers, facilitation exercises intended to improve the quality of one's collaborative work, and an orientation on how to use audio-visual tools to improve one's teaching method.

In total, the Initiative has trained 177 persons in the eastern DRC, including 26 women (or 15% of all seminar participants).

Results from the training evaluations

After every training delivered, participants are asked to complete two separate evaluations. The first – which is distributed immediately after the training – is primarily qualitative in nature, while the second – which is disseminated several months later, so as to assess the strength and relevance of the material over time – is primarily quantitative.

Because officers in the eastern DRC are highly mobile and operate in extremely remote locations, it is frequently difficult to remain in stable communication with them. As such, a far smaller proportion of second-round evaluations are completed and returned to the Initiative, as opposed to first-round evaluations. Of the Initiative's 177 training participants in the DRC, 40 have submitted second-round evaluations (i.e. 34 per cent of all participants). The results are as follows:

	The course was easy to understand.	The course was relevant to my needs.	Sufficient amount of detail was included.	I would recommend this course to others.	Overall quality of the course was superb.	Additional materials were clear.	Additional materials were relevant.	Overall quality of materials was superb.	Facilitators spoke with concrete experience.	Facilitators clearly answered all questions.	Facilitators were well prepared.	Facilitators were knowledgeable.	Facilitators were talented presenters.	Overall quality of facilitators was superb.
Strongly Agree	29	24	27	30	27	31	21	23	25	32	27	32	24	27
Agree	8	10	7	5	10	4	12	10	11	4	12	4	10	7
Disagree	1	3	2	0	0	4	2	4	1	1	0	1	2	1
Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	3	2	0	3	2	1	1	0	1	1	1
Did Not Respond	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	3	4

In addition to the questions listed above, the Initiative asks all second-round respondents which aspect of the training they found most valuable. Not all participants choose to answer this question, while others choose to select multiple answers. According to the Initiative's 40 second-round respondents from the DRC, the following training components are of greatest and most enduring relevance to their work:

	The definition of a child soldier.	The existence and experience of girl soldiers.	The international conventions pertaining to child soldiers.	The strategies that can be employed to promote inter-agency cooperation.	The role-playing scenarios and exercises.
Number of Responses	29	22	17	14	20

Documentary mission

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative recently began to partner with White Pine Pictures to facilitate the production of a documentary inspired by Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire's book, *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*. The film chronicles a three-week visit made by Lt. Gen. Dallaire to the eastern DRC, South Sudan and Rwanda during the spring of 2012. He was accompanied by the Initiative's Deputy Director, Tanya Zayed, as well as by advisor Phil Lancaster and journalist Allan Thompson.

The documentary captures a series of interviews conducted by Lt. Gen. Dallaire with a broad cast of stakeholders who have been affected by or are trying to combat child recruitment, including:

- Matthew Brubacher, UN Political Affairs Officer;
- Lt. Col. Mizan, MONUSCO Joint Intelligence Operations Centre;
- Commander Luanda, Head of Mai Mai-FDC (Goma);
- Mass Walimba, UN officer and former Mai Mai commander;
- Ida Sawyer, Human Rights Watch;
- Abbé Benoit, *Commission Diocésaine pour la Justice et la Paix*;
- Representatives of Invisible Children;
- Representatives of Radio Okapi;
- Recently demobilised Mai Mai and FDLR ex-combatants.

During this expedition, Lt. Gen. Dallaire also had the opportunity to participate in a helicopter mission to Nyabiondo, to extract several child soldiers from an armed group. White Pine Pictures captured this event on film and subsequently conducted two interviews with some of the newly demobilised boys.

The documentary *Fight Like Soldiers, Die Like Children* debuted at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) and will screen at various festivals throughout 2013, before being released theatrically in Canada in spring 2013. Television broadcasts in Canada are to follow on TVO, with the French version premiering on Canal D.

Key findings

A. Security sector actors are not being trained on the child soldier issue

Throughout the entirety of the Initiative's involvement in the eastern DRC, it has been consistently reiterated that **although most security sector actors in the region have faced child soldiers in the past, none had received prior doctrinal training concerning how such engagements should proceed.** Moreover, many security sector actors face extreme difficulty whilst attempting to identify who is and who is not a child soldier. Children assisting armed groups in a support capacity (e.g. as cooks, porters, messengers, etc.) and girl soldiers who act as bush wives are especially under-recognised. This, of course, serves to underscore the profound need for the kind of training offered by the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative.

B. Child soldiers are being accidentally incorporated into the FARDC

During the Initiative's first research exercise in 2009, it was discovered that **the haphazard *brassage* process (by which surrendered rebels are integrated into the new FARDC) has rendered it more challenging for the Congolese army to rid itself of child soldiers within its own ranks.** Indeed, there have been many instances whereby former child soldiers with no birth registration have been inaccurately identified as adults and subsequently absorbed into the FARDC.

Poor discipline within FARDC ranks obstructs the demobilisation of FARDC child combatants

There have also been cases – as when the Initiative was invited to observe the extraction of a 15-year-old boy soldier from a FARDC field camp – whereby **FARDC officers who are sympathetic to the laws surrounding the recruitment and use of child soldiers are prohibited by subordinate personnel from relinquishing their uniformed children.** Oftentimes, said subordinates are former members of Mai Mai community protection militias who have only recently been integrated into the FARDC. When the *brassage* process fails, these officers will secretly retain their old allegiance to the Mai Mai and will continue to perceive children as strategic military assets. As such, should a superior officer wish to surrender a child soldier within his unit, he risks exposing the fault lines within his own command and incurring the ire of his newly integrated subordinates.

C. Relinquishing child soldiers can pose political and economic costs to commanders

During the Initiative's second research mission in 2010, it was determined that **for some of the eastern DRC's armed groups, releasing one's child soldiers would result in a loss of income and power.** Frequently, the number of combatants an officer commands – whether children or adults – determines his or her rank. It also affects his or her ability to control territory and extract resources. This discovery should have implications for the kinds of incentives and disincentives rebel commanders are offered in exchange for the demobilisation of their uniformed children.

D. Armed groups in the DRC place a high strategic value in children due to longstanding beliefs in witchcraft

In 2011, the Initiative began to learn more about the spiritual dynamics of child soldiering. As anthropologist Todd Sanders indicates, "Notions of African witchcraft have proved surprisingly flexible and thus survive – indeed thrive – in novel postcolonial contexts⁵." Unfortunately, one of the ways in which traditional African spirituality has begun to assert itself is through the victimisation of children as occult weapons of war. During the Initiative's July training, for example, every single participant had a personal anecdote concerning the military use of children as fetish carriers. It was suggested that **children are the optimal guardians of talismans, *fétiches* and *gris-gris*, as they are perceived to be innocent, chaste and pure.** It was also claimed that child soldiers could be sacrificed in the service of magic. This phenomenon, which has also been recorded in West Africa and the Caribbean, is very poorly understood and demands significantly greater research.

E. Coordination between the security and humanitarian sectors is lacking

Another crucial determination made in 2010 was that **there is virtually no collaboration taking place between the security and humanitarian sectors with respect to the child soldier problem.** Surprisingly, security sector actors consistently state that they are appreciative of the work being done by humanitarian organisations and that they would be willing to assist their programmes in any way possible. However, most NGOs in the DRC do not see cooperation with military and/or police as being particularly beneficial or desirable. In the case of the FARDC, this is largely because the NGO community is reluctant to partner with an institution that it perceives to be a gross abuser of human rights. The

⁵ Todd Sanders, "Reconsidering Witchcraft: Postcolonial Africa and Analytic (Un)Certainties."

FARDC has perhaps the most extensive reach of any organisation operating in the eastern DRC; if it were able to assist NGOs in their efforts to reach previously inaccessible beneficiary communities, the status of children in the region would undoubtedly improve.

Conclusion

As this report was being written, the new M23/ARC rebel group seized the North Kivu capital of Goma, home of the FARDC's 8th Region and one of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative's two training centres in the eastern DRC. The movement is spearheaded by General Bosco Ntaganda, a man who has already been indicted by the International Criminal Court for his alleged recruitment and use of soldiers who are under the age of 15. Indeed, international human rights organisations across the region have universally reported that the M23/ARC is recruiting children on both sides of the DRC-Rwanda border to serve in its fight against Congolese President Joseph Kabila. Yet the M23/ARC is not alone in its perpetuation of this crime; literally every party to the conflict, including the FARDC, is a known recruiter and user of child combatants. While the rebels have entered into negotiations brokered by the Ugandan Minister of Defence, the situation in North Kivu remains precarious in extreme, most especially for Congolese boys and girls.

Recognising the criticality of the moment, the Initiative recently partnered with the Rwanda Peace Academy and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to present a course titled "Protection of Civilians: A Special Focus on Child Soldiers." The training took place in Rwanda, some 30 kilometres from the Congolese border, and included participants from six regional militaries.

In the face of such widespread criminality, the Initiative remains committed to its training and research in the eastern DRC, and will continue to build upon the vital work that it has accomplished over the past three and a half years. Security sector personnel in North and South Kivu remain among the most influential actors in the region and their efforts may significantly help in the quest to eradicate the recruitment and use of children in their country. However, if they are to contribute to the struggle, their efforts must be informed by proper, child protection-oriented training, lest they become more of a hindrance than a good.

About the Initiative

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative is a global partnership committed to ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers worldwide. It pursues this goal by researching practical solutions, advocating for policy change and conducting comprehensive, prevention-oriented training with security sector actors.

Its unique approach to working with military, police and peacekeepers – often the first point of outside contact for child soldiers – is groundbreaking and critical to the interruption of the recruitment cycle perpetuated by armed groups.

Since 2010, the Initiative has been housed at the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies (CFPS) at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. With nearly 40 years of experience in research, teaching and providing policy advice on Canadian and American interventions abroad, the CFPS is led by a team of academics who boast extensive field experience and who are working on issues of peace and security, development, and child protection on behalf of the United Nations and numerous other international bodies.

In all of its work, the Initiative adheres to the principles outlined in the UN's Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that no person under the age of 18 should participate in armed conflict, either by choice or by force.

Acknowledgements

In order to implement its programmes within the challenging context of the eastern DRC, the Initiative partnered with a number of local and international organisations, including the *Association de Soutien de l'Opprimé* (ASO), the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Insight Collaborative, Dr. Kirsten Johnson of McGill University, MONUSCO, Search for Common Ground, UNICEF and World Vision. We are highly appreciative of these relationships and wish to acknowledge the assistance that has been rendered in support of its work.

THE ROMÉO
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