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Bachelor Thesis in Peace and Development Studies

Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in the Democratic  
Republic of Congo: a Journey from a Deprived Childhood



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## **Abstract**

The severe situation of female child soldiers worldwide continues, and the harsh reality they stand in front of once returning back to their communities is often concealed. By the time former female child soldiers begin their journey back to civilian life and a life of dignity, they face various difficulties. Females are often exposed to marginalisation, stigmatisation, discrimination and isolation, and their livelihood and safety tend to be jeopardised. Females are often disregarded and are desperately fighting a battle to become accepted and to receive needed assistance. Since gender roles and gender identities vary around the world and between regions, communities tend to treat females and males very differently. Expectations of females vary depending on structures in communities and therefore communities tend to treat females in a certain way. This study seeks to explore national reintegration strategies in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and how the gap between these strategies and traditional cultural and social expectations of females affect reintegration processes in the country. The complex situation of female child soldiers in the DRC in terms of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), with particular focus on reintegration is addressed in this thesis.

The objective of this study is to analyse to what extent national reintegration strategies in the DRC are adapted to meet the needs of females and their home community. The findings indicate that the national program of DDR in the DRC, the PNDDR, is not aligned with existing cultural and social expectations of females, which have major consequences in reintegration processes. The findings demonstrate that there are many systems which are vital and have to be considered for reintegration to be effective. These systems have to be considered by the PNDDR on a broader level since there are shortcomings in these systems. It is significant to have knowledge about females to be able to streamline DDR processes and once designing programs of DDR. If reintegration of females is unsuccessful, this has negative effects for peace. This study draws on qualitative approaches and a desk study is performed. A created analytical framework taking surrounding environments, child development and social and cultural components into account is used.

**Keywords:** *DDR, DRC, Females, Reintegration, Traditional Social Expectations, Traditional Cultural Expectations*

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## List of Abbreviations

AfDB	The African Development Bank Group
CAAFG	Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups
CI-DDR	Comité Interministériel chargé de la conception et de l'orientation en matière de DDR
CONADER	Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion
CSUCS	The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	The Democratic Republic of Congo
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
MDRP	The Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program
MONUC	The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PNDDR	National Program of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
TDRP	The Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program
UEPNDDR	Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réintégration
UN	The United Nations
UNDP	The United Nations Development Program
UNDPKO	The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCR	The United Nations Security Council Resolution
WB	The World Bank

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Research Problem**

Since the 1990s, the practice of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) has become an essential component in regard to peace consolidation in post-conflict environments (UN, 2015a; UNDPKO, 2010a:16). Commonly, the World Bank (WB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) are the coordinators carrying out the programs. The process of DDR concerns ex-combatants, former participants of conflicts, and it is through this process the international community attempts to assure the combatants liberation from armed groups (Hobson, 2005:1). The process of DDR involves various elements including socio-economic, military, political, security and humanitarian for the ex-combatants (UNDP, 2015:1). In regard to a national DDR framework, a variety of actors are involved once it is implemented and established. The national government, stakeholders both locally and nationally, civil society such as those involved in the peace agreement are participators. In other words, multiple non-state and state actors are involved at various levels. It portrays abilities, resources such as the judicial, political, institutional and policy framework which are constituted in terms of guidance and structure of national commitment in processes of DDR (UNDDR, 2006:2).

Once a country emerges out of a conflict, and a peace agreement has been implemented between the involved parts, many challenges and obstacles can be expected, not least with the ex-combatants. In post-conflict environments, the process of DDR has the aim to conduce to stability and security so it is possible for development and reconstruction to be implemented. DDR attempts to support the ex-combatants, which is done through a process of eliminating weapons from the ex-combatants, which is the process of disarmament, help the ex-combatants leave military structures, the demobilization process, and last the integration of the ex-combatants, both economically and socially back into society, which is the process of reintegration (UNDDR, 2005).

Ex-combatants are a heterogeneous group, and therefore need to be treated differently in reintegration processes. Distinct components need to be taken into account depending on the specific situation. The realisation that different groups do have varied needs is vital and due to diverse age, health, rank and sex, there is often a differentiation between

ex-combatants (Nilsson, 2005:71). A particularly vulnerable category of ex-combatants with certain needs are child soldiers (ibid:75). It is approximated that there are around 300.000 child soldiers in today's world, in more than 20 countries. Almost half, more particularly 40 per cent of these are females (UN, 2015b). It is assessed that up to 30 per cent of the child soldiers are not going through a formal process of DDR and it is often not recognised by armed groups that child soldiers are used because the international community repudiates it. Therefore, many children are not receiving enough support (Nilsson, 2005:75). Children are already vulnerable when it comes to receiving support in terms of DDR, and one group has to struggle even more, which is the group of female child soldiers (Hobson, 2005:1). By the international community, it is clearly stated that female child soldiers do have varied needs, important to take into consideration (UN, 2015c). In other words, there is no lack of awareness and knowledge in regard to specific needs of females and the fact that processes of reintegration have to treat females differently since they have other requirements because of different experiences.

The importance of additional focus on females and their specific needs are clearly emphasised, seen as vital for reintegration to be effective. Both the mental and physical health of females are most likely to be deeply harmed as a consequence of various experiences of sexual violence and rape. It is also common that females become pregnant during their period as child soldiers, which in turn will affect the process of reintegration. The consequences of pregnancies, being raped and to be connected with rebel groups are often that female child soldiers are no longer welcomed back into their community, leaving them very vulnerable (UN, 2015d). Another important component which needs to be considered is to take the specific medical care into account. Above all, this concerns injuries being physical and related to rape of females, such as various diseases which in this case are transmitted sexually. Because of trauma and discrimination of females, it is also vital to have support on a psychosocial level (CSUCS, 2008:29).

When it comes to females they differ in comparison to males on various levels. Since this is the case, communities also tend to treat females differently in comparison to their male counterparts and the expectations of females and males differ. Gender roles and gender identities vary around the world and between regions, which means that communities treat females and males very differently depending on how females and

males are viewed by the particular community. The strategies of reintegration processes are supposed to meet the needs of both males and females and are important for reintegration to be effective. But what remains to be explored is how national reintegration strategies actually are adapted for females in concern to structures of communities. It has not yet been satisfactorily investigated to what extent national reintegration strategies are adapted to meet the needs of females and their home communities in regard to traditional social and cultural expectations of females.

Regarding literature involving reintegration of female child soldiers, several authors claim that reintegration of female child soldier has to be investigated more in depth, since it is insufficient and not adequately explained (e.g., see Verhey, 2001; Mazurana *et al*, 2002; Hobson, 2005; Wessels, 2011). It is argued by Tonheim (2010:25-26) that the country which has received the most limited attention in regard to reintegration processes is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). According to Michael G. Wessels (2011:3), the research carried out on female child soldiers is still in an early stage, and especially the research on reintegration. Hobson (2005:vi) claims that the needs of females are not being considered in reintegration processes and that reintegration has to be studied in order to ascertain how females can be more involved. According to Verhey (2001:21), the needs of former child soldiers in regard to females have not been satisfactorily investigated and more research is needed.

Mazurana *et al* (2002:97) argue that female child soldiers have received very limited attention, whereas male child soldiers have got more attention. It is also claimed that further knowledge about females is important to be able to reach more effective outcomes in regard to reintegration programs (*ibid*:119). According to Denov and Ricard-Guay (2013:485) much remains before programs concerning reintegration will suit the specific needs of females. In other words, the focus is rarely on national reintegration strategies and whether they are adapted for females in concern to structures of communities, and to what extent specific needs of females actually are considered. It is important to study this topic since the role of females is understudied and has not yet been satisfactorily explained. It is vital to have awareness of females to be able to streamline DDR processes and once designing programs of DDR. If reintegration of females is unsuccessful, this has negative effects for peace.

## **1.2 Objective and Research Question**

The objective of this study is to analyse to what extent national reintegration strategies in the DRC are adapted to meet the needs of females and their home community once they return back. The following research question will guide this thesis.

- How does the gap between national reintegration strategies and traditional social and cultural expectations on females affect the reintegration of female child soldiers in their home community in the DRC?

## **1.3 Relevance of the Study**

In DDR processes, females and women have hitherto been excluded and reintegration has failed repeatedly in the past (UNDDR, 2016). Once nations and communities attempt to reconstruct, needs such as economic, social and psychological are vital in regard to ex-combatants. If DDR processes fail to take into account specific needs of ex-combatants, major consequences on peace and development successes can occur. There are major risks of violence, instability and criminality if factors which were the fundamental reasons as to why the conflict arose continue to be present. Poverty, unemployment and injustice are examples of such factors, which ex-combatants often have to struggle with (UNDP, 2016).

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). With UNSCR 1325, the first resolution referring to armed conflicts and the specific influence on females came to be established (UN, 2015e). The specific needs of girls and women in concern to reintegration and rehabilitation are called upon by UNSCR 1325. Designing programs of DDR it is encouraged and seen as important by the resolution to take the various needs of males and females into consideration in regard to ex-combatants (UNSCR 1325, 2000:3). DDR processes are particularly addressed in this resolution such as the importance of taking specific needs of females into account. It is therefore vital to study in what sense females actually are being considered in reality and whether UNSCR 1325 is implemented. This is important to have the ability to increase the awareness of the situation of females and improve their vulnerable situation, and at the same time streamline DDR processes.

## **1.4 Analytical Framework**

When females return back to their communities and start their processes of reintegration, the surrounding environments are most likely to play a vital role for them in order to develop and reintegrate in the best possible way. To be able to reach the study's objective and to find answers to the research question, an analytical framework which takes surrounding environments, child development and social and cultural contexts into account is required. This will contribute to the understanding of how the surrounding environments and development interact in regard to female child soldiers once returning back to their communities.

The sociocultural theory by Lev Vygotsky and the ecological systems theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner will be combined and together create a new analytical framework. Both theories address child development and what role surrounding environments play in regard for them to develop, such as the interaction between these. Bronfenbrenner focuses on different levels of environments where he argues that development takes place and includes factors that have an impact on development. The focal points of Vygotsky are culture and social factors and the emphasis is on the impact of culture and social interconnections in a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Salkind, 2004). These factors are also included by Bronfenbrenner, but the angle of approach varies from Vygotsky. The two frameworks overlap to some extent and are complementary. Insights from both frameworks will be gathered and an original analytical framework will be developed for the purpose of the thesis.

## **1.5 Methodology**

To have the ability to find answers on the research question and reach the study's objective, a text analysis will be performed since the study intends to analyse literature on the selected topic. In this study, qualitative methods will be utilised and a desk study will be performed. The research will follow an abductive approach. According to Danermark *et al* (2002:80-81) the fundamental structure of abduction is that an individual phenomena is interpreted within the applied analytical framework. The phenomena which will be interpreted is reintegration of female child soldiers in the DRC, which will be done within the created analytical framework.

A case study of the DRC will be conducted in order to gain an in depth understanding of reintegration processes of female child soldiers. The data in this thesis will be gathered from secondary sources and therefore these sources will be relied upon. Books, reports, websites and scientific articles will be used. The electronic databases One Search and Google Scholars will be utilised in order to collect relevant scientific articles for the study. Reports will be collected from trustworthy non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within the field.

## **1.6 Limitations, Delimitations and Ethical Considerations**

The collected information of the topic will be relied upon, which may be considered as a limitation. Since the gathered data will be from secondary sources, one has to rely upon others who have collected the data, which implies that eventual opinions of authors have to be kept in mind and have to be treated with caution. Since the official language in the DRC is French this may be a hindrance under certain circumstances to get access to needed information. However, many documents on DDR in the DRC are translated into English. In this study, a few delimitations also have to be put forward. Reasons and arguments on why females join armed forces and become child soldiers, alternatively, what the underlying reasons are for becoming a child soldier if it is not a voluntary action by them, will not be taken into account. The reason is because the focus of this thesis is on DDR, and particularly on reintegration of female child soldiers in the DRC. The focal point is on female child soldiers and therefore male child soldiers will not be considered to that extent.

Since a desk study is performed, there are no participants whom have to be safeguarded and taken into consideration. Reliance between the researcher and the participants is neither of importance. The gathered data in this study will not be about specific people, or data received from them. These factors may otherwise be significant and may occur, and if this is the case, ethical considerations are of importance (Creswell, 2014:92). Ethical considerations will not be taken into account in this research since the thesis will be a qualitative text analysis and a desk study, ethical dilemmas will not occur to such extent.

## 1.7 Structure

The thesis consists of eight chapters and the structure is as follows. In chapter one, the *Introduction*, which just has been introduced, the background of the research problem together with the research question and the objective of the study were presented. In brief, the relevance of the study was put forward and the analytical framework and the methodology were presented. Thereafter, the limitations, delimitations and ethical consideration were put forward. In chapter two, *Literature Review*, previous research on the topic is reviewed in depth. Important definitions are also put forward in this chapter. In chapter three, *Analytical Framework*, the chosen analytical framework is introduced and explicated.

Chapter four, *Methodological Framework*, explains the methodological framework chosen for this research. The method and methodology are presented together with an explanation of these choices. In chapter five, *Background*, DDR in the context of the DRC will be explored in order to gain a broader understanding of how DDR has evolved in the country. Chapter six, *Findings*, presents the findings of the research in terms of data on the reintegration of female child soldiers in the DRC. In chapter seven, *Analysis*, the findings are being analysed in regard to the chosen analytical framework. In the eighth and last chapter, *Conclusion*, the main results will be highlighted together with answers on the research question.

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of DDR is relatively new and was introduced by the United Nations (UN) in the year of 1990 for the first time (UNDPKO, 2010a:16). In the 1990s, interventions of DDR were more limited and had a more narrow focus in comparison to today's interventions. Back then, the focus was to minimise a country's military spending and on ex-combatants, whereas the focus today is more wide-ranging taking development, peace and reconstruction of the country into account (Muggah, 2010:1-2). During the last twenty years, literature and studies of DDR have increased, and nowadays researchers from various fields are involved in research on DDR. For example, fields of development, international relations, psychology and military studies are here included (ibid:9-10). Today, a first and a second generation of DDR can be referred to, which relates to two generations of DDR, the first occurring in the 1990s, whereas the second phase began in 2010 (UNDPKO, 2010b:3; UNDPKO, 2010a:17). The second generation takes into account the community as a whole and in what way armed violence impacts the community, whilst the focal point of the first generation was on combatants and various structures being military. Strategically, the objectives of both generations are equal though (UNDPKO, 2010b:3).

Despite the fact that armed violence can cease once a war ends, various challenges remain and are to be expected in the country. These challenges are important to tackle; otherwise the country can fall back into previous violent patterns. For the country's residents it is important to establish new preconditions in order for them to feel safe. Included in these challenges are also armed fighters, former participators of the war, whom have to be handled. It is vital that armed fighters are being demobilized; otherwise it will be easy for fighting to begin once again by various armed groups. Another important component for being demobilized is that it enables a livelihood which in turn is not reliant on armed violence. Structures being military need to be left by these armed fighters and instead it is important to enter civilian life and to be reintegrated. Another challenge which has to be handled is the extensive amount of weapons streaming into the country as a result of the conflict. Programs of DDR are most likely to come about in the above mentioned context, and the challenges which were put forward are examples that occur and are dealt with during the process of DDR (Mazurana and Eckerbom Cole, 2013:195-196). To be able to gain a deeper understanding of reintegration and what role it plays in the context of DDR, it is

important to define the terms of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and to clearly put forward the definitions which will be used throughout the study.

Disarmament is defined by the UN in the following way:

*“Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes.”* (UNDDDR, 2005)

Demobilization is defined by the UN in the following way:

*“Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion.”* (UNDDDR, 2005)

Reintegration is defined by the UN in the following way:

*“Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.”* (UNDDDR, 2005)

Reintegration of child soldiers differs in comparison to adult ex-combatants and is defined by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in The Paris Principles in the following way:

*“Child Reintegration is the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions*

*needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.” (UNICEF, 2007:8)*

Another important definition which has to be put forward is the definition of child soldiers. The definition which will be used and is internationally agreed upon is the following:

*“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, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.” (UNICEF, 2007:7)*

The current research and literature concerning reintegration of females still continue to be as Wessels (2011:3) puts it, “in its infancy”. According to Mazurana *et al* (2002:97), the focal point has been put on male child soldiers during the years, and the presence of females has been neglected. It is also argued that females are absent in the debate of child soldiers. To be able to stress the problems of reintegration of females, it is claimed that more research has to be done in order to gain a deeper understanding and to increase the knowledge (ibid:119-120). It has also been argued that during the last decade, more attention has been given to females and the research regarding reintegration has increased (Denov and Ricard-Guay, 2013:475). On the other hand, Tonheim (2010:13) argues that even though the research on females has widened lately, it remains to be more deeply explored since it continues to be at an early stage. It is stated that more awareness of females and reintegration is needed since it will increase the chances of received assistance being more suitable in reintegration processes (ibid:18).

Verhey (2004:2) argues that females are not reached in processes of DDR. Verhey (ibid) claims that it is recognised by various organisations working with protection of children that there is a lack of knowledge on how to best support females in reintegration and the fact that more research and focus have to be on the cultural and social parts in concern

to females and their reintegration. It is clearly stated and acknowledged by multiple authors that females do have specific needs and they go through different experiences, vital to take into consideration (e.g., see De Wattewille, 2002; Verhey, 2004; Hobson, 2005; MacVeigh, Maguire and Wedge, 2007; Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008).

When it comes to theoretical and analytical frameworks which have been put forward by scholars regarding reintegration of females, they are in general rare. It is claimed by Torjesen (2013:1) that there are shortages of theoretical frameworks in studies of reintegration and this is an issue. Nilsson (2005:35) argues that there is a deficiency on theories in the field and when it comes to conditions for reintegration to have the ability to succeed for example. It is claimed that only presumptions are done in regard to what is supposed to favour reintegration in order to be successful. Fox (2004:466) argues that there are shortages of theoretical frameworks in general regarding female child soldiers. Studying the subject, various methods are used by scholars depending on their field of study. Some researchers utilise and rely upon various qualitative methods (e.g., see Verhey, 2001; Brooks, 2012) others rely upon a mixed method approach (e.g., see Verhey, 2004; Tonheim, 2014) whereas some scholars are using quantitative methods (e.g., see Muggah, Maughan and Bugnion, 2003).

According to Tonheim (2010:25-26), when it comes to literature of specific countries in the context of Africa, a few countries have gained more attention in comparison to others. The DRC is one country which has received limited attention. According to Tonheim (ibid) a very important component is the in depth investigation of the particular situation in a country to make reintegration effective. It is claimed that the expression "one-size- fits- all" does not work in this context and how important it is to take culture into consideration.

To sum up, the importance of more research in terms of females is explicitly stated by many authors, and at the same time it has been put forward that females do have needs which have to be considered. These statements are recurrent studying the literature. In particular, the case of the DRC is understudied. On the other hand, hardly any research brings up local social and cultural contexts in regard to national reintegration strategies. These social and cultural contexts are in turn rooted in the surrounding environments in within females return to when they begin their process of reintegration. Research on

how these surrounding environments interact with the development of females in reintegration processes is missing. There is also a lack of existing theories to study reintegration in today's literature. In other words, a clear gap can be identified in today's research, hence the need of an analytical framework taking the interaction of a child's development and the surrounding environments into consideration. This analytical framework will be elaborated in the next chapter in depth.

### **3. Analytical Framework**

In this study, two overlapping and complementary theories will be combined to create a new analytical framework. Both theories have the interaction of a child's development and the surrounding environments as their focal point. Through the lens of the analytical framework, consisting of the sociocultural theory and the ecological systems theory by Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, the analytical framework will enable the study of the interaction between female child soldiers, the surrounding environments, development and the reintegration processes. This will work as a lens trying to explain how the environmental systems, which surround the female child soldiers when they have returned back to a civil life affect them. It will also work as a lens to understand attitudes towards females in the DRC in regard to social and cultural contexts and in what way factors of a community impact reintegration of females since these are parts of the surrounding environments. The specific needs of females will also be considered. This enables the thesis to meet its objective and it will be possible to analyse the needs of females and their home community since the analytical framework covers the above explained areas.

#### **3.1 Selection of Analytical Framework**

The specific needs of female child soldiers are important for successful DDR, however, they are often ignored and continue to be largely unmet. As it looks today, current policies are not suited to the specific needs of female child soldiers and they continue to be vulnerable. A particular problem which can be referred to is the mismatch between specific needs of females and the social and cultural contexts, hence the need of an analytical framework that looks at the developmental needs of children in a broader context.

#### **3.2 The Ecological Systems Theory**

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) developed the ecological systems theory. In accordance to the theory, human development is interacting with different environmental systems and is taking place in these various systems (BCTR, 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979:16), development of humans represents the interplay between a human being, which is growing, and its

environment. The ecological environments are in turn considered to consist of various nested structures (ibid:3). Important factors which are considered in the environmental systems are economic, social, cultural, psychological and political. Human development will be affected by the various environmental systems such as the interconnection between them. Depending on how the interconnection is between these systems, it may suppress, or alternatively facilitate the development of humans. Programs and policies can play an extensive role in forming these systems (BCTR, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner (2005:147-148) categorises the ecological environments in four different levels, the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem and the Macrosystem. It is in these levels the various components for development are divided. The Microsystem is the system nearest to the person and represents the system with which one has face-to-face interactions. It also represents the developing person's experiences. Peer groups, school and home are some examples which belong in this category. The Mesosystem, which is the second system, consists of various Microsystems and represents a system of these. To mention some examples it can be the relationship between school and home for a child or the relationship between parents and neighbours. In accordance to the theory the interconnection between microsystems can affect the development (BCTR, 2014). For example, if a child's parents have a strained relationship with their neighbours, the development of a child can be negatively affected. In the Exosystem, the developing person is not included as such, and is in this system not an operative participator. However, the person will still be impacted (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:148). The community can be one example of an Exosystem. It is not possible for a child to affect actions being taken by the community, or what kind of decisions that are being made on a community level. However, the child and its development will be impacted.

The Macrosystem represents the subculture, culture or the wide social context within which the person lives and also involves how the Micro, Meso and Exosystems impact the person (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:149). Bronfenbrenner (1979:26) states that there are various patterns in societies depending on the country one lives in. Relationships also differ, for example the relationship between the school of a child and their home will not be the same in two various countries. Poor societies in comparison to societies being wealthier are diverse, and the blueprints in regard to environmental systems are not the

same for groups which differentiate religiously, ethnically and socioeconomically. On the other hand, it is argued that the structures of Micro, Meso and Exosystems within societies, alternatively in social groups have an inclination to be alike (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:54). Macro institutions, for example the government, are included on the Macrolevel and also public policies (ibid:xiv).

The ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner can relate to reintegration of female child soldiers since the surrounding environments are most likely to play a vital role in regard to reintegration and development of females once returning back to a civilian life. Reintegration processes include various components and the theory covers many different areas which most likely are important in regard to reintegration. With the help of the ecological systems theory, it is possible to answer the research question since the theory covers many needed aspects in terms of social and cultural contexts, community and policies. However, some weaknesses can be put forward with Bronfenbrenner's theory. Since many areas are covered by the theory, some areas are in need of an investigation more in depth. This refers particularly to local culture. Bronfenbrenner covers culture more in general and not local contexts as such. The focal point in regard to culture is more on differences between different countries. According to Tudge (2008:72) Bronfenbrenner focuses on positive development and what needs to be present for this to come about. The term positive development is in turn based on a Western middle-class view in regard to what is considered to be positive development. Tudge (ibid) claims that culture is not covered sufficiently by Bronfenbrenner since it is not considered that there are different cultural groups which vary.

To further the application of the created analytical framework which will be used in this study, the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky will be added since this will fill some of the gaps in the theory by Bronfenbrenner. Vygotsky covers the importance of culture on a local level and the fact that culture differs, important to take into consideration. Vygotsky also has a wide focus on social contexts (Salkind, 2004:279), which will be more elaborated and explained below. Both theories have their origin in the Western World which one has to be aware of. Nevertheless, the surrounding environments are most likely to play an important role regardless where one lives. Vygotsky is very sensitive in regard to culture, and therefore it can be argued that the theory has a more non-Western approach and is assumed to be applicable in this study and to the DRC.

### **3.3 The Sociocultural Theory**

In the sociocultural theory, the emphasis is mainly on the impact of culture and social interconnection in regard to development and the theory was put forward by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). The social context is addressed, and it is within this context that development occurs. It is claimed that various social factors which surround humans impact the development. It is in the social context that behaviour is established and come about, which implicates that behaviours and ideas will differ due to various cultures in which they will come about. The development of a child will be affected upon various interactions. The sociocultural theory indicates that the interplay between a child and a more proficient person, for example a teacher or a parent is very important in regards to a child's development and learning process. For development to occur, it is vital that a child participates in activities that are culturally specific. Examples of such activities are family rituals, activities in communities and education (Salkind, 2004:278-279). Culture in the sociocultural theory comprises knowledge, mutual beliefs, values, customs, practices of socialisation and schemes of symbols. Other components embodied in culture are both physical and social settings. It is through routines being societal and family oriented that culture is being voiced (Miller, 2011:172-173).

The sociocultural theory puts forward that it is not possible to detach development from the social context, development processes are dependent upon environment and maturity, which in turn at all times occur in a social context of some kind. It is claimed that two children with exactly the same genes would not have similar development processes if they were brought up in dissimilar cultures or social contexts. Culture has an influence on children and this influence will differ depending on the culture within which a child belongs (Salkind, 2004:279-280).

The box below summarises how the combination of these theories creates a new analytical framework which is used in this study. Four environmental systems are considered which represent the surrounding environments. The components which are considered in each environmental system are put forward in the second column. In the last column, the included factors in each system are put forward. The box explains how the analytical framework is used analysing reintegration processes of females in the DRC and what is taken into account in the particular context.

**Environmental Systems****Components****Included Factors**

1. Microsystem	Parents, siblings, peers, neighbours, school, teachers, relatives and the community.	Economical, political, cultural, culturally specific activities (family rituals and activities in communities), social and psychosocial.
2. Mesosystem	The relationship between neighbours and parents, the relationship between parents and teachers and the relationship between the community and parents.	Economical, political, cultural, culturally specific activities (family rituals and activities in communities), social and psychosocial.
3. Exosystem	Community and health care.	Economical, political, cultural, culturally specific activities (family rituals and activities in communities), social and psychosocial.
4. Macrosystem	Local culture, national policies and the government.	Economical, political, cultural, culturally specific activities (family rituals and activities in communities), social and psychosocial.

## 4. Methodological Framework

### 4.1 Outline of Methodological Framework

The research will be carried out as a desk study, since it aims at investigate and gain a deeper understanding of reintegration of female child soldiers in the DRC. The research will follow an abductive approach. In accordance to Danermark *et al* (2002:80-81) the essential structure of abduction is: *"To interpret and recontextualize individual phenomena within a conceptual framework or a set of ideas. To be able to understand something in a new way by observing and interpreting this something in a new conceptual framework."* The phenomena which will be interpreted and recontextualised is reintegration of female child soldiers, and it will be done within the created analytical framework consisting of a combination of the sociocultural theory and the ecological systems theory. The analytical framework will work as a lens trying to understand and explain the phenomena of reintegration of female child soldiers.

In this study qualitative methods will be used. In accordance to John W. Creswell in *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2014:4) qualitative research is put forward in the following way: *"Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."* In accordance to Creswell (ibid:183) qualitative methods build upon image data and texts. There are some fundamental characteristics in regard to qualitative research which are recurrent and agreed upon. Examples of such characteristics are that a diversity of data is used and qualitative researchers are not relied upon others in regard to collect information (ibid:185).

A qualitative text analysis will be performed since the study aims to investigate reintegration processes of female child soldiers in the DRC, such as traditional cultural and social expectations of females based on scientific articles, documents, reports, books and other relevant texts within the topic. According to Esaisson *et al* (2012:210), in a qualitative text analysis, a given text material is analysed and the essential content of the text can be identified by meticulously reading the text. Some parts of the text are considered to be more significant in comparison to other parts and are therefore deemed to be the text's central parts. When performing a text analysis, it is important to read the texts actively and the texts have to be investigated in depth by reading them multiple

times, slowly, rapidly, thoughtfully and with an overview. Two text analytical questions can be distinguished in text analysis which are the major types. The first type concerns the systematisation of the content in the texts and the second type is about critically examine what is written in the texts (ibid:210-211). In this research, the content of the texts will tend to be more critically examined. The reason for critically examining the texts is because the study aims to investigate the situation of females in the DRC and how they actually are situated in processes of reintegration. It is important to keep in mind and be aware of the fact that researchers with different experiences can read texts in different ways. That drawn conclusions are affected by the particular researcher and earlier experiences are not unique problems for qualitative text analysis though (ibid:222).

To have a particular focus on females is chosen since the role of females is understudied in reintegration processes. An increased awareness is significant to be able to streamline DDR processes and once designing programs of DDR. If reintegration of females is unsuccessful, this has negative effects for peace. The method of case study is used in accordance to Creswell (2014:14). An analysis in depth in regard to the specific case is elaborated by the researcher within the case study method. Most frequently the case is about human beings, either solely one, or alternatively many, a program, a procedure, an occurrence or an activity. The case study method is common in qualitative designs. The method of case study is in accordance to George and Bennet (2005:18) to investigate single cases inwardly.

Creswell (2014:187) brings forth five methods within qualitative designs, where the method of case study is mentioned, and suggests that qualitative researchers shall select one of these five methods carrying out the research. Grounded theory, ethnography, narrative research and phenomenological research are the other methods which Creswell suggests. Within the design of case studies, researchers can investigate activities, procedures and occurrences. Processes of reintegration in terms of female child soldiers in the DRC are investigated and therefore the case study method is the most suitable qualitative design. It will also be possible to get an in depth view of the topic with the help of this method. The reasons for examining the DRC is firstly because limited attention has been paid in regard to reintegration of female child soldiers. According to Tonheim (2010:25-26) the DRC has particularly received limited attention in the

context of Africa. Secondly, it is a country capsized by various conflicts during the years. For future means, reintegration of females is vital to study in order to make processes as effective as possible. Thirdly, many DDR efforts have been made in the DRC and the country continues to struggle to achieve sustainable peace.

To investigate and identify conditions for the actual outcome to happen, such as investigate mechanisms for these outcomes to emerge are the interests of case study researchers. It is not aimed, and ought not to be either by case study researchers to choose cases being representative in a direct way in regard to various populations. Populations differ, and therefore findings of a particular case should not be demanded to be applied on diverse populations. However, if findings of a particular case are applied on diverse populations, this contributes to the fact that using case study as a method may be a limit of representativeness, and therefore a limitation of the method (George and Bennet, 2005:30-31). In today's literature there are some debates regarding generalisability, which in particular are put forward in regard to case studies where various cases are being studied. If several cases are studied by a researcher and these findings in turn tend to be applied on other cases, a generalisation may emerge (Creswell, 2014:204). Since the findings in this study are not being applied on another case, there is no risk for such generalisation to occur. Another critique in case study research is that selection biases may occur as an issue. It is argued that researchers occasionally tend to, with intention, to select cases which together are sharing a special result (George and Bennet, 2005:22-23). This argumentation is not applicable on this case though since the study intends to study reintegration processes of females in the DRC.

## **4.2 Validity and Reliability of Sources**

Secondary sources will be used in this study in order to collect data and information of the topic. It is of importance to keep in mind that authors may have their own perceptions and opinions which one has to be aware of and bear in mind in the choice of sources. One limitation of using secondary sources is that the gathered information has to be relied upon. The data in this thesis will be collected from scientific articles, books, reports and websites. The scientific articles will be collected from the electronic databases One Search and Google Scholars. Reports will be collected from trustworthy NGOs within the field. The selected reports will offer the most relevant information in

regard to the selected topic of the study. The data collected from websites will mainly be from the UN.

A powerful and advantageous quality of qualitative research is validity. Within validity, the correctness of the findings is controlled by the researcher by utilising several procedures. The procedure of qualitative validity chosen for this study having the possibility to verify whether the findings are of precision and are correct, is the strategy of triangulation. In this strategy various sources are used when it comes to information and data, which makes it possible to justify the information from the sources. In terms of qualitative reliability, a characteristic is that the approach of the researcher is coherent between various activities and researchers (Creswell, 2014:201). To have the ability to control the reliability, qualitative researchers use various procedures. One example of such a procedure is to control and ensure that transcripts are not comprised with errors that are apparent. If codes are used it is of importance to control these, otherwise the definition of the codes can be mixed up which means that they are not correctly coded (ibid:203).

## **5. Background - DDR in the DRC**

In the following chapter, the background of the DRC in terms of DDR phases is put forward which will contribute to a broader understanding of the situation and challenges of females and how DDR phases have evolved in the country.

During 1998 and 2003, eight African countries fought in a war which came to be called the African World War, where the DRC was one of the participating countries (Globalis, 2015). It was attempted in 1999 to end the war through the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, and it was in conjunction with this the initiative towards a framework concerning DDR and the peace process in the DRC was grounded. Despite the signed agreement, the situation in the DRC remained turbulent and unstable (WB, 2009:1-2). Together with the government of the DRC, the primary facilitators in terms of DDR phases in the DRC have been the UN and the WB, especially by means of the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) (Lamb *et al*, 2012:5).

In 2003, the central stakeholders of the DRC signed the Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition (WB, 2009:1). Various attempts had been made to reach a peace agreement between the involved parts, and in 2003 the war was officially over (Globalis, 2015). The MDRP together with the WB carried out the funding of DDR for both children and adults in the DRC. Due to a non-existent national body tasked with the implementation of the DDR, it was firstly NGOs together with UNICEF that were carrying through the DDR (CSUCS, 2008:109). An interdepartmental committee was also created in 2003 by the government of the DRC that was called Comité Interministériel chargé de la conception et de l'orientation en matière de DDR (CI-DDR). The task of the committee was to monitor the national program of DDR in the DRC (PNDDR). It was the UNDP along with Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion (CONADER) that were accountable regarding the establishment of PNDDR. The PNDDR was established in 2004 (Lamb *et al*, 2012:5).

### **5.1 DDR Phase I 2004-2006**

The first phase of DDR began in 2004 and included four processes. First of all, in regard to the DDR, the Congolese forces were targeted. The second process included the withdrawal of forces from overseas in the country, which was addressed by the

Lusaka Accord. The third process concerned the use of child soldiers since they had been used to a wide extent. In the north-eastern part of the DRC, in the province of Ituri, hostilities proceeded, which were aimed in the fourth process (WB, 2009:2). In the same year, CONADER was establishing an operational framework regarding the DDR of children. In a few regions of the country initiatives were made which aimed to be community-based. The goal was to reach females in a broader manner and their specific needs. This was less successful though and females did not receive reintegration support and were never reached. Sexual violence towards female child soldiers were very large-scale and came to be proven in terms of well-documented evidence, but regardless, the specific needs of females in terms of psychosocial and medical needs continued on a high degree to be unfulfilled (CSUCS, 2008:109-110).

The PNDDR ought to support the demobilized in terms of transport home, a cash payment and contribution of money during a year. Various UN agencies together with NGOs ought to administer the socioeconomic reintegration. In the DDR phase 1, PNDDR faced various hardships which affected the program and its efficacy. Challenges occurred within CONADER in regard to a fallible ability of management and there was also a lack of political will to monitor demobilization (WB, 2009:3). In December 2006, 132.000 combatants had been demobilized and 50.000 continued to stay in the established new army, Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC). Of The total amount of 132.000 combatants, 30.000 were children. (WB, 2009:3).

Because of continuing disorder in the country, an absence of military and political will, enmity, funds being neglected, absence of coordination and a non-functioning schedule, the children's DDR was carried through very slowly and became significantly delayed. Firstly in 2006 the majority of reintegration programs began. However, the lack of support in the reintegration and the issue with underfunding continued. Many children had to wait during a long period of time for support and it was reported in the end of 2006 by CONADER that 14.000 out of the 30.000 children had still not obtained any support in concern of reintegration. International funding had in 2007 almost come to an end and CONADER was in the mid-2007 liquidated. Various projects of reintegration in the country based of NGOs were tardily endorsed by CONADER in concern of funding these projects. Particularly, female child soldiers were vulnerable, and they

remained to be used both by armed groups and forces. 40 per cent were calculated to be female child soldiers in this period; however, merely 12 per cent represented females out of the total amount of children being demobilized formally. An official for the WB claimed that not much effort was put on these females and that there was a lack regarding their profile (CSUCS, 2008:109-110).

In the end of phase I, the aims had not been met and the budget had been spent. The reintegration was particularly suffering and many of those who had been demobilized did not receive any reintegration support. The African Development Bank Group (AfDB) together with the WB determined to stand behind another phase of DDR (WB, 2009:3-4). CONADER was superseded in 2007, when the unit of establishment in regard to the national DDR program instead came to be Unité d'Exécution du Programme National de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réintégration (UEPNDDR) (MDNDAC, 2014:5).

## **5.2 DDR Phase II 2008-2011**

In the province of Ituri, instability remained and at the same time the organisations of support in terms of donors was insufficient. Reforms could not be done in the army since units had to be located in the eastern parts. The Goma peace accords in the beginning of 2008 created an optimistic view to solve the conflict of the country's eastern parts, but this came to be wrong. Alterations were made in some areas in the second phase, and the design which primarily had been done by the PNDDR was reorganised in 2009. Particularly, the focal point of phase two was to find more advantageous and adapted occupations for the ex-combatants to make the reintegration more effective. Only 10.000 combatants were demobilized out of the 70.000 that was planned for. In the reintegration, around 40.000 combatants were left from the first phase of DDR without receiving support and 8.000 children still waited for support (WB, 2009:4-5).

In 2009, the MDRP completed its missions in The Great Lakes Region. Instead, monitoring was provided by The Transitional Demobilization and Reintegration Program (TDRP), with financing from the AfDB together with various donor governments led by the WB (Lamb *et al*, 2012:7). The UN operation was prolonged which was made through the UNSCR 1925 in 2010. The United Nations Organization

Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was renamed to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The commitments were reaffirmed by the resolution including the importance for a suitable DDR, the significance of taking children in armed conflict into account and to protect women (UNSCR 1925, 2010:1-3).

### **5.3 DDR Phase III 2014**

On February 24 in 2013, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework was signed in Addis Ababa. Included in this framework was to strengthen stability and reliance between the neighbours in the Great Lakes Region. During earlier phases of DDR, many challenges had occurred, and therefore earlier experiences could be taken into account in the third phase. International actors were partners in forming this plan (MDNDAC, 2014:6-7). The third phase was supposed to be implemented in 2013, but different statements kept occurring. In 2014, the 17th of June the DDR III was concluded concerning its arrangement. Seemingly, in regard to phase III, this phase in comparison to phase I and II seems to be more extensive. There are still various opinions when it comes to the financial part in phase III. Disagreements remain between MONUSCO, diverse donors and the government of the DRC. The phase is in an early stage, more particularly, in a pre-phase of DDR III (HRW, 2014).

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 National Reintegration Strategies in the DRC

In 2004, the national DDR program, PNDDR, was implemented in the DRC which was put forward in chapter five. The PNDDR came to be based on the presidential decree n° 4/ 092 from October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004 (MDNDAC, 2004:12). Four groups were put forward to be particularly considered in the strategy, whereas two groups came to be non-beneficiaries. Child soldiers, here referred to as children associated with armed forces and groups (CAAFG), female fighters, chronically ill and disabled, and people in the military leaving forces on a voluntarily basis came to be the target groups. It is clearly put forward in the strategy that females are included in the definition of CAAFG and the fact that various roles can be performed by them. Relatives of combatants and widows are not target groups in the strategy (ibid:29-30). For CAAFG, it is put forward that economic and psychosocial support is given. In accordance to the strategy, CAAFG are reunited with their families and the occupation for children in the reintegration process is to return to school. It is stated that the reintegration may be more difficult in places where families of former combatants have fallen apart (ibid:35-36).

The PNDDR acknowledges that the needs vary depending on which group ex-combatants belong to (ibid:30). In paragraph 56 in the PNDDR it is put forward that conflicts affect people in various ways depending on if you are a woman, a man, a girl or a boy. It is acknowledged that there is a gender dimension in the context of conflict and the fact that characteristics of people vary (ibid:22-23). The responsible actor in terms of ensuring that all groups are reached is the government of the DRC, which also coordinates and designs the operations of DDR (ibid:21). The awareness of the PNDDR is put forward as a component for those participating. According to the strategy it shall be put forward what the aims of the program are, explicate why the participants are going through the program, and also what criteria that have to be fulfilled in order to participate (ibid:23). It also appears that civil society receives this knowledge to be able to comprehend why ex-combatants are going through the program (ibid:38).

The PNDDR in phase I and II failed in the DRC, hence the need of DDR III, which was mentioned in chapter five. The latest initiative towards a national strategy was taken in 2013 by the government of the DRC (MDNDAC, 2014:6-7). Despite the fact that gender issues were supposed to be taken into account in phase I and II, females were not

reached to that amount (Conoir, 2012:20). It is acknowledged that it is vital for females to have their own programs and that they have had a restricted definition in earlier phases in order to be defined as an ex-combatant. The national strategy of DDR III is more extensive in comparison to phase I and II and focuses more on females and children. It is put forward that it is vital to deal with psychosocial support, which is considered to be inadequate today. Sexual violence is an element which the DDR III brings up in its strategy (MDNDAC, 2014:8-10). Socio-economic reintegration is another important component for both children and female child soldiers according to DDR III (ibid:12-13).

According to the report *Democratic Republic of Congo: OPAC Shadow Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child* by The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS) (2011:26) a national extensive strategy has not been elaborated and dealt with in the DRC. The report claims that since 2004, only 13 per cent have been reached when it comes to females and reintegration nationally (ibid:28). Both the international community and the government of the DRC have disregarded females and the fact that a large amount of females are involved in armed groups and forces (Amnesty, 2006:36). It is not guaranteed that the needed support in terms of economic, psychosocial, medical and social which are required factors are given, affecting the process of reintegration. The situation of females has during a long period of time been well-documented but despite this, few actions have been taken (CSUCS, 2011:2).

## **6.2 Traditional Social and Cultural Expectations of Females in the DRC**

Once females enter the phase of reintegration they face various hardships not least in the social sphere. Once returning back to their community, females being associated with armed groups are assumed to have picked up bad and hostile behaviour which lead to fear from the community's side. Aggressive behaviour is not tolerated when it comes to females, and therefore they face a big hindrance since it is less acceptable to have a hostile behaviour in comparison to males (Verhey, 2004:14). The existing social standards of females affect them once returning back to their community and how they are viewed. Females are not supposed to be associated with armed groups (Grace, Brooks and Hounghbedji, 2015:3). Many communities in the DRC mistrust females returning back which have a negative impact on various efforts to increase the

acceptance towards them (Verhey, 2004:17). Females are often considered to have a bad influence on the community's females once returning back and that they aim at trying to recruit females in the community (ibid:3).

According to the study *Reaching the Girls: Study on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo* by Verhey (2004:13), most Congolese communities consider that females do not have any dignity if they are not virgins when they get married. There are very strong opinions in the Congolese community both socially and culturally that females have to stay with one partner during their lifetime. This also applies if the relation has not been chosen by the female herself or if she has been raped. This can cause devastating consequences since females often do not consider it as an option to leave an armed group and they are also scared to return back to their community. Once females return to their communities, the response is unequivocal and people suppose that females have had numerous sexual partners, alternatively have been abused sexually. Females are considered by the community to have disgraced their families and that they no longer have a value, therefore females are often dismissed by their community. Diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis are also factors that communities are scared of (Hobson, 2005:20).

Isolation and marginalisation are often very problematic for females in the DRC. Components being involved are for example that they are often criticised if something goes wrong and there is distrustfulness against them by their family, community and neighbours. They are marginalised when it comes to receiving equal amount of food and they also face isolation of various interactions in the social sphere (Verhey, 2004:19). Sometimes interactions with other children within the household of females are not seen as appropriate either. Being shunned from social events is common since family members are ashamed (Tonheim, 2014:638). This can cause devastating implications on females, leaving them alone socially (Tonheim, 2012:288). Females face discrimination by their family and community, and are often treated differently in comparison to other family members. Examples of this can be the ability to receive education and that their daily needs are not being considered (ibid:285).

The major problems with isolation and marginalisation of females once returning back have been observed in various provinces of the DRC, for example in Orientale,

Maniema, South Kivu, North Kivu and North Katanga (Verhey, 2004:6). Studies from the DRC have shown that external pressure from the community makes it difficult for parents to welcome their daughters home (Wahldén, 2009:83). A study from eastern provinces of the DRC has shown that more than 50 per cent of the females considered that they were dismissed by their family once returning back (Tonheim, 2014:637). There are often deeply established social and moral codes in communities of the DRC which makes the pressure from outside difficult to handle for families (Hobson, 2005:16).

It is socially expected that females, and particularly if they have babies, are supposed to be self-supported once returning back to their community. The reason is that communities state that it has to be proven by females that they commit themselves to behaviour which can change their role in the community so they can be valuable again. However, there are limited alternatives in regard to occupations which are seen as adequate traditionally for females. Marketplaces of communities are merely able to absorb a limited amount of females in concern to occupations which are seen as appropriate for females as well, which is problematic (Verhey, 2004:24).

In some cultures, females do not have the capability to get married because they have been child soldiers, which affect both their safety and livelihood. In many cultures it is the husband who is in charge when it comes to position, possessions and land (Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008:43). Being associated with an armed force will have serious influence on the life of a female. It is often very hard economically, when it comes to job opportunities and to get land (CSUCS, 2011:28). In most African communities it is significant for females to get married and it is viewed as a compulsory part of life (NAI, 2007:4). In accordance to the study *Who Will Comfort Me? Stigmatization of Girls Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Groups in Eastern Congo* by Tonheim (2012:293-294) it is often seen as a dishonour against the family if their daughter is not married. Not being married means that the community will think that she does not have morale. Because of the lost dowry, which otherwise is seen as glory in regard to how the daughters in the family have been raised, it is seen as a failure for the family. Traditionally, it is important that females are good mothers and good wives, which in turn will increase or decrease their value. Automatically, females living alone with their children will be considered by the community to have lower status and value.

Since it is considered by Congolese communities that the opportunity to get married after being associated with an armed group is very low, the focal point of females is livelihood instead of education (Verhey, 2004:24). Being associated with an armed group as a child infringes against how a child is supposed to be according to Congolese communities, since children have to comply and be submissive. Since females are seen as unable to practice violence they face double hardship (Hobson, 2005:20). Females are often being stigmatised by their community because they are considered to have violated traditional gender roles (Wahldén, 2009:217).

Females coming back to their community together with babies being born during their time as a child soldier, or if they are pregnant, are often seen as an extra burden. It is often told by their families that it is impossible for them to take care of the baby. It is also claimed that the family is even more disgraced if the father of the baby is unknown (Hobson, 2005:21). The ethnicity, alternatively the nationality of the father is of concern in communities of the DRC since the child can be seen as a potential foe for the community. This is particularly the case if the child does not have the same nationality and ethnicity as the members of the community (Verhey, 2004:16).

The DRC, Liberia and Uganda are the countries where females being raped, alternatively if they have a child as a consequence of the rape are the most vulnerable in the world and face the highest risk of being dismissed (CSUCS, 29:2008). In South Kivu which belongs to the eastern part of the country, the child pertains to the father and his family. This in turn means that children without a present father will most likely become stigmatised. It is also common in such cultures that the responsibility of raising the child lies in the arms of the father together with his family. Females therefore face difficulties without having a husband or being unaware of whom the father is (Tonheim, 2012:287). Reintegration processes are also aggravated in regard to the low status which females have in the DRC (Amnesty, 2006:36).

### **6.3 Why Females are not Reached and Choose to Avoid Reintegration**

It is common that females feel scared and do not want to proclaim that they have been child soldiers, and therefore decide not to participate in DDR programs. It is also assumed by females that the community will exclude them even more socially when

finding out that they have been soldiers and therefore it is chosen not to register. In communities of the DRC this is particularly an issue, and females reject these programs because it is argued that the community will then be able to identify them. There are a lot of underlying reasons as to why females do not want to participate in programs or reasons why they are not reached. Structures being cultural, social and local in communities are some examples of why females do not choose to be participators in the programs. One example which can be put forward here is that it is considered to be inappropriate for females to participate in these programs by relatives and those being their fighter partners (Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008:26-27).

Often, there is also a lack of information of existing programs. Therefore females are not aware of the programs and are not reached. Many females consider that their specific needs are not taken into account in the process of reintegration and choose not to participate. For example, that they would not like to be mixed with males in transition centres because they are scared of being stigmatised and sexually abused (Amnesty, 2006:37). A high number of females often choose to stay with the armed force since they do not consider it as a choice to escape, scared of being killed, beaten or tortured if they make efforts to run away. Another reason as to why many females stay is because they are afraid that they will not be able to provide their child with food and protection (ibid:38).

Females are well aware regarding the sociocultural views in communities of the DRC when it comes to the fact that they shall stay with one partner during their lifetime. This can affect their choice of not wanting to be released from the armed group since they consider that they will face so many difficulties from their community and family if they go back (Verhey, 2004:13). If females have been abused sexually it is also common that they choose not to participate in programs. Being a participator would be the same as admitting that you have been a “bad” woman (Wahldén, 2009:82-83). When it comes to define a female combatant, many countries share the same problem; there is no recognised definition of what goes under that term which complicates the situation. If countries instead would have had a clear definition of the term, this would probably mean that more females would be justified to go through programs of DDR (Mazurana and Eckerbom Cole, 2013:205).

## **6.4 Changes in Gender Roles in Fighting Forces by Females**

The roles of females vary to a wide extent, everything from being an armed combatant to performing more supportive duties. Various characteristics that may occur for some females during their time in a fighting force are in most traditional communities in Africa not assessed. The characteristics that can occur for females in connection with fighting forces can for example be patience, gain confidence and obtain new skills. (Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008:13-14).

In terms of war, there is sometimes a tendency for an occasional shift in terms of gender roles. This is not always the case though, but it is for some females. New opportunities may occur for them to reach a higher status and reach power which otherwise would not have been conceivable. Returning back after war, it is most likely that they have to go back to traditional roles. It is also argued that females are marginalised by their community once returning back whereas males are deemed to have been fortified in their gender role (NAI, 2007:3-4). In some cases, females have learned new skills during their period as combatants, but these are in turn not taken advantage of in the process of reintegration. Examples of these skills can be medical and negotiation skills. If these skills developed by females instead would have been put forward, it could contribute to a favourable influence on the peace building such as on the reconstruction of the country. However, this would call for a confession that females possess these kinds of skills by those carrying out the programs of reintegration (Mazurana and Eckerbom Cole, 2013:210-211).

There are various existing traditional social and cultural expectations of females in the DRC which have been observed throughout the chapter. These expectations do not go hand in hand with females being associated with armed forces and groups, which also can be reflected in reintegration processes. Traditional cultural and social contexts receive limited focus in national reintegration strategies, and how reintegration looks for females in practice does not correspond with national strategies. In what way this affects reintegration of females, and to what extent the national reintegration strategies are adapted to meet the needs of females and their home community need to be elaborated and analysed more in depth. This will be done in the next chapter.

## **7. Analysis**

To be able to reach the study's objective, which is to analyse to what extent national reintegration strategies in the DRC are adapted to meet the needs of females and their home community, and to be able to answer the research question, a created analytical framework which consists of a combination of the sociocultural theory and the ecological systems theory will be utilised, which has been mentioned earlier. To have the capacity to comprehend existing traditional cultural and social expectations of females in the DRC and what role these expectations have in reintegration processes, the surrounding environments have to be considered, hence the analytical framework taking this into account. It is also significant to explore the important components in accordance to the analytical framework and put them in relation to the national strategies and social and cultural expectations to be able to explain the gap between these and thus the research question. The specific needs of females put in relation to the PNDDR and traditional social and cultural expectations will also be analysed with the help of the framework.

### **7.1 The Microsystem**

The Microsystem refers to the system closest to the developing person, which one has face-to-face interactions. Family, peer groups, home and school are important components in this system in regard to development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:147). These groups receive limited attention in general in the PNDDR when it comes to reintegration of females. Whereas in terms of social and cultural expectations of females these groups tend to have a central role in reintegration processes, which was observed in depth in the findings. The key Microsystems which will be looked at are school, family and the community.

It is put forward in the PNDDR that in terms of reintegration of CAAFG, the occupation will be to return back to school (MDNDAC, 2004:35-36). In reality, females are often not prioritised by their families in terms of going to school (Amnesty, 2006:48). Instead they are socially and culturally expected to support themselves to be able to prove that they are valuable again (Verhey, 2004:24). The PNDDR in the DRC is not adapted to the existing expectations of females in terms of school and education. Through the lens of the analytical framework, it can be explained that females are disfavoured because

there is a gap between the PNDDR and the cultural and social reality. School is vital for a child's development, and since females often lack this opportunity it can work as an explanation to why females are not reintegrated on a good basis.

In the DRC, females face isolation in various social interactions once returning back (Verhey, 2004:19). One example that contributes to social interactions is school. Peer-groups, home and family are also examples that can further social interactions. The development of females is in turn affected by these interactions. It is also here the issue around psychosocial support can be referred to. Psychosocial support is vital for females returning back, which has been mentioned. The conclusion that can be drawn through the lens of the analytical framework is that factors that can contribute to better degree of support for females psychosocially are not being focused on in regard to reintegration of females. Since there is a gap between expectations and the PNDDR, the specific needs of females, in this case the psychosocial support, will not be able to be fulfilled to the needed extent.

One paragraph in the PNDDR puts forward that CAAFG are reunited with their families in terms of reintegration (MDNDAC, 2004:36). In practice females are often distrusted, marginalised and isolated by their families in the DRC once returning back (Verhey, 2004:19). It is common with discrimination and females are often not participating in social events since their families feel ashamed (Tonheim, 2014:638). For development to occur, it is significant that a child participates in activities being culturally specific. One activity which is culturally specific is to participate in family rituals (Salkind, 2004:278-279). Despite the fact that it can be clearly observed that females often face various hardships being reunited with their families and relatives, the PNDDR does not take this into consideration.

The PNDDR brings forth that returning back to a family which has fallen apart can be difficult in comparison to have a family to return to (MDNDAC, 2004:35). The paragraph is not explained in depth and is not related to females and their reintegration in terms of the role of the family. The focus on family is very narrow in the PNDDR and there is a major gap between the PNDDR and what role families have in reality in reintegration processes. Relatives are not a target group in the PNDDR and they are therefore not beneficiaries of the program (ibid:30). Often, relatives in the DRC consider that it is inappropriate for females to participate in reintegration programs

(Coulter, Persson and Utas, 2008:26-27). Through the lens of the analytical framework, contact with family and relatives is important for a child and its development. Females in the DRC often have a very restricted contact with their family and relatives in reality once returning back and these groups have certain expectations of females which in turn are not reflected in the PNDDR. This can work as an explanation to why there is a clear gap between expectations and the PNDDR. In terms of expectations of females in today's DRC, families and relatives have a central role when it comes to how they are reintegrated, which makes it important to take this into account in the PNDDR as well.

The role of the community in the DRC and how deep-rooted traditional social and cultural expectations are were deeply explored in the findings. There are a lot of prejudices towards females in reality by communities in the DRC if they have had associations with armed groups and forces. The focus on communities is very limited in the PNDDR. The PNDDR is not formed based on how females are expected to be by their communities and it has been clearly shown that communities in the DRC play an important role in regard to reintegration processes. Through the lens of the analytical framework, it can be explained that since there has been a limited focus on communities in regard to reintegration, females have not been reached, which has affected them in their reintegration. It can also be explained with the help of the analytical framework that since communities often shut out females there is no interconnection in between the community and females, which affect them and their development adversely.

## **7.2 The Mesosystem**

The Mesosystem consists of various Microsystems and represents a system of these (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:148). Examples of Mesosystems that can be put forward in the DRC are for example the interconnection between parents and neighbours, teachers and parents and between a community and parents. For example, in regard to females, they often do not have the opportunity to go to school in reintegration processes; so therefore, there is no possibility for an existing interconnection between a teacher and their parents. Another example can be that the interconnection between these systems is very strained; for example, the interconnection between parents and neighbours tends to be tense since neighbours often distance themselves from parents of females returning back from being a child soldier. The analytical framework makes it possible to explain that the Mesosystems and the inadequate interconnection between these affect

reintegration processes in an adverse way. The PNDDR has to adapt the strategy in accordance to expectations of females since it can be clearly viewed throughout the findings that various Mesosystems which play a role for females actually exist. For example, neighbours tend to avoid parents of former female child soldiers.

Worth mentioning is the possibility for new systems that females may integrate in due to the failure of the PNDDR. According to Verhey (2004:24) females are socially and culturally expected to support themselves when they return back. School is often not prioritised by their families (Amnesty, 2006:48). Females can for instance start to work instead of returning back to school, which females do in accordance to the PNDDR. This hinders females for being a part of the Microsystem, and thus the Mesosystem. However, this could mean that they join other systems which may be equally good for their development and reintegration processes. Nevertheless, returning back to school is more likely to contribute to a higher degree of development since there is a greater potential for more interactions on various levels being more suitable for children in comparison to start working where the interactions are most likely to be more limited.

### **7.3 The Exosystem**

In the Exosystem, the person which develops is not a participator as such, but will be impacted (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:148). Many examples can be put forward within the Exosystem in terms of reintegration of females. Health care can be one example. Females cannot control themselves whether they will receive the appropriate health care which also is one specific need once returning back. A community can also be an example of an Exosystem. Females are unable to control to what extent they will receive assistance when it comes to their reintegration or to what extent they are accepted.

Through the lens of the analytical framework it can clearly be explained that if Exosystems are not considered, the development will be disfavoured. Many Exosystems can be referred to in the DRC, in this case for example health care and community, which have not favoured the situation of females. To be able to enshrine development, the decisions being taken in the Exosystems have to consider females. For example if females do not receive needed health care, their specific needs will not be fulfilled.

There are many situations in which females have no control over but they will be deeply affected, hence their vulnerability.

## **7.4 The Macrosystem**

The Macrosystem is the subculture, culture or the wide social context in which a person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:149). In the Macrosystem, public policies and the government are two important components when it comes to development (ibid:xiv). The government of the DRC is in charge for the implementation of the PNDDR, which is put forward in the strategy (MDNDAC, 2004:21). Specific needs which female child soldiers are in need of in terms of health care, both physical and mental, medical care psychosocial support and economical support will be affected by decisions made by the government of the DRC to take these in consideration.

The government of the DRC has disregarded females and the fact that a large amount of females are involved in armed groups and forces (Amnesty, 2006:36). The situation of females is well-documented but despite this, few actions have been taken by the government (CSUCS, 2011:2). The PNDDR is not adapted by the government when it comes to how females are viewed socially and culturally, which can be reflected in the paragraphs of the PNDDR. The important role of the government which is put forward in the analytical framework makes it possible to explain why females do not receive enough support. The government has so far put limited efforts on females and how they have to be treated in reintegration processes in order to be reintegrated effectively. Since social and cultural expectations of females in the DRC obviously are very deep rooted in the country it is very important that the government through its PNDDR consider this. What role culture has on the surrounding systems has to be considered for development to be positive. It is important that the PNDDR adapts the strategy in relation to how females are expected to be, so they thereafter can participate in important activities and be able to feel a sense of belonging.

Policies have a comprehensive role in terms of the environmental systems and how these are formed (BCTR, 2014). Existing policies have in general not focused on reintegration of females, which has resulted in inadequate reintegration processes of Congolese female child soldiers. The policies of the DRC have not formed the environmental systems in advantage of the females. For example, the community, has

not been considered by the policies on how to receive females once returning back in order for them to be reintegrated in the best possible way for development.

To receive help economically is one specific need of females, which was brought up in the introduction chapter. According to the PNDDR economical support is received by CAAFG (MDNDAC, 2004:35-36). However, there are no guidelines in the PNDDR in terms of how the economic support will come about. The PNDDR lacks to take into account that females have many guidelines and restrictions in terms of economic activities which are rooted in cultural and social expectations. Through the lens of the analytical framework it is possible to explain that the economic decisions taken on the Macrolevel have not been advantageous for females since their particular needs have not been considered in reintegration processes.

In the DRC, females are expected to be with one partner during their lives, which also applies when it comes to being raped (Verhey, 2004:13). Females in the DRC face very high risks of being rejected after being raped and are very vulnerable (CSUCS, 29:2008). The conclusion that can be drawn is that being a victim of sexual violence is seen as a taboo in the DRC culturally and socially. In regard to sexual violence, mental and physical support belong to the specific needs for females. With the help of the analytical framework it can be explained why the specific needs of females in regard to mental and physical support have not been considered. The PNDDR has not taken into account the fact that a female being sexually abused is seen as a taboo in terms of cultural and social expectations. The analytical framework makes it possible to explain that since cultural and social contexts in the DRC are not considered in the PNDDR; females have been reached to a very limited degree. If the particular contexts in the DRC would have been considered, it would also have a positive effect on the specific needs being fulfilled.

## 8. Conclusion

The study's objective was to analyse to what extent national reintegration strategies in the DRC are adapted to meet the needs of females and their home community. The findings were interpreted within two overlapping and complementary theories by Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner which were combined to create a new analytical framework. The study indicates that the PNDDR is not aligned with existing traditional cultural and social expectations in the DRC. In accordance to the PNDDR, females are sent back to be reunited with their families and to start school again, when this in reality is difficult or even unfeasible. Females are not expected to return to school once returning back. Instead they are expected to support and take responsibility for themselves. The study indicates that families, communities and relatives have a very influential role and affect the degree of reintegration once females return back.

The PNDDR fails to take into account what role families have in terms of reintegration. The conclusion that can be drawn is that in the PNDDR, families are not considered to have an influential role for females during their reintegration, whereas in theory and in reality this tends to be the opposite. Relatives are particularly put forward as one group which is not being considered during reintegration processes in the PNDDR. However, relatives have an influential role and often consider it as inappropriate for females to participate in programs of DDR. Communities in general do not receive attention in the PNDDR and it is not put forward that communities have an important role to play for females and their reintegration.

In accordance to the PNDDR, economic support is given during reintegration processes. However, once returning back to their communities, females are expected to be self-supported to be able to prove that they are valuable again. The limited amount of occupations which are considered as adequate traditionally for females complicates the situation even more. In accordance to the PNDDR, females receive psychosocial support. Sexual violence is one example which most likely will lead to a need of psychosocial support, but since this is seen as a taboo in communities of the DRC, females lack the opportunity to receive the support they are in need of. The PNDDR lacks to take into account how females are shunned after falling victim of this. Many traumas and occurrences that females have gone through during their period as child soldiers are seen as taboos, which means that the degree of support is affected by this.

The study demonstrates that the degree of support in many areas in regard to reintegration of females in the DRC is affected in a similar way.

The study indicates that culture and cultural activities play a significant role in communities of the DRC. The PNDDR does not consider the importance of participation of culturally specific activities, alternatively what role culture actually tends to have in communities. Policies and the government have not focused on females and their needs, and so far it has been a lack of political will to include females, which has affected reintegration processes. In other words, as have been put forward and explicated, there are many systems which are important for reintegration to be effective and are needed to be able to reach females. However, there are shortcomings in taking these into account by the PNDDR, which has been shown throughout the study.

To be able to improve reintegration for future means it is vital to reach females on a broader level. Specific local contexts have to be considered and more resources have to be put within this area. This could contribute to increased knowledge and awareness, which in turn could lead to a broader understanding from the community's side in regard to the importance of reintegration once females return back. The future of DDR in the DRC looks more optimistic in comparison to previous efforts since DDR III is more comprehensive and covers more areas. However, the DRC stands in front of many challenges and it remains to be seen how DDR will evolve in the country.

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