

MODULE 1, LESSON 1

LEARNER’S HANDOUT

Case Study on Gender Testimonies from a Boy and a Girl

AIM

To bring learners to consider the specific vulnerabilities of children in armed conflict.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the factors and risks that contribute to children being recruited by armed forces or groups
- Identify that one child may be affected by multiple violations, which exacerbate her/his trauma
- Explain the different experiences of girls and boys associated with armed forces or groups

SCENARIO

Two children (a boy and a girl) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were recruited into an armed group. Here are their stories.



Boy’s testimony

Emile was recruited into an armed group when he was 15 years old. This is his testimony.

“I am the oldest of three children. Our father died, and our mother has been working in the fields to help our family get by. One day, when I was 15, I was coming home from school with my friends who lived in the same village as me, and as we were crossing a fruit plantation, I heard someone calling my name. I stopped to see who it was, and a boy, who was about 10 years old, suddenly appeared, coming out of the plantation. He kept me amused by telling me nonsensical stories and asking strange questions. I told my friends to go home, saying that I would follow them. A few minutes later, four armed men appeared and forced me to go with them, knocking me about and striking me with a whip. That is how I found myself recruited into an armed group.

During my time with the armed group, I was brainwashed with their ideology and received training in military intelligence, armed robbery, weapons, livestock theft and intimidation methods for robbing people on the road or in the fields, or abducting them. I started as a cook, was promoted to bodyguard of the camp commander and was eventually made responsible for leading operations on a national road. Sometimes, I was sent with other children to support joint operations with other armed groups. There were times when I cried, especially when I thought about my mother and my two brothers, but I couldn’t leave the bush because all the paths out were watched by members of the armed group. One day, during an operation to steal livestock, I took an opportunity to lay down my weapon and my military shirt. I left them on the roadside and reported to MONUSCO.”



Girl’s testimony

Lucie was recruited by an armed group when she was 11 years old. She is now 16 years old. This is her testimony.

“Five years ago, I joined an armed group in the eastern part of the DRC. I was no longer studying. One day, armed men came into my aunt’s shop where I worked. They drank all we had and then asked me to go with them to their base so that they could pay me. I asked two of my friends to accompany me. When we got there, they locked us up for two days. The armed group was preparing to fight and told us that we could choose between becoming soldiers and dying. We had no choice but to become soldiers. When night came, fighting broke out, and we fought all night. One of my friends who had come with me was killed. I was very angry and decided to stay with the group to avenge my friend.

One day, we were engaged in a clash with another armed group in the bush; we had run out of ammunition. Some members of our group had been captured. Twelve children, including me, decided to try to escape to the nearest village. However, we were intercepted by another group. We were beaten and locked up at this armed group’s camp and then quickly incorporated into its ranks. I continued to take part in fighting with this new armed group.

It wasn’t easy being a girl in an armed group. Sometimes the boys protected us from the violence meted out by the adults, but the commanders took advantage of night patrols to sleep with the girls. They intimidated us, and if you refused to sleep with them, they would kill you and then go back to the camp and say you had been killed in the fighting. One day, when my commander sent me into the town to find food, I took the opportunity and escaped again. I went to the government forces. I was ready to leave the armed group and join the regular army, but they said that I was not old enough. I was transferred to a transit and orientation centre to be demobilized.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss the testimonies based on the following questions:

1. Which factors put Emile and Lucie at risk of being recruited by the armed group



during the conflict?

2. How did the fact that they were children at the time of the conflict increase their vulnerability?
3. How do the experiences of Emile and Lucie differ owing to their gender?

