



Voices of Combatants

Interviews with Mai Mai Soldiers in Eastern DRC

DRC Context



Context

- Beginning in 1993, Mai Mai militias organized to protect their communities from the influx of foreign militias after the 1994 Rwandan genocide;
- Implicated in the looting, rape, abduction, and mass displacement of civilians;
- Current efforts to integrate Mai Mai into the national army.

Project Background



Methods

- 74 combatants were interviewed in three rural towns in eastern DRC (Kamituga, Katogota, Chambucha) – this is sub-analysis of 31 interviews;
- Represented two sub-groups *Shikito* and *Kifuafua*;
- Research conducted from January 2009 to February 2010;
- Interviewers were Congolese men trained as social workers and psychologists;
- Presence of foreign researcher

Challenges

- Creating rapport with interviewee/gaining trust
- Avoiding “coached” responses and “shut down”
 - Interviewer: “According to you, what could be the motivation for men to commit rape?”
 - Interviewee: “I don’t know and I don’t have any answer about it.”
- Not able to get perspectives from other armed groups due to political climate/security

Results



Initiation and Mindset

- New recruits undergo involved and sometimes violent initiation rites upon joining the Mai Mai;
- Removal from home village and social norms;
- Sense of anonymity and impunity that continues throughout soldiers' service.

Civilian Relationships

- Soldiers have a contradictory relationship with civilians:
 - Desire to reintegrate into civilian life and return to pre-war norms
 - Civilians seen as exploitable resource (money, food, other needs) – “fields to be harvested”

Perception of Women

- Rigid gender norms contribute to the view of female civilians as exploitable;
- Traditional conceptions of women as possessions and the helpers of men;
- Dismissive attitudes towards female combatants.

Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence by other armed groups, particularly foreign groups, is seen as a motivation to fight (existential threat to Congolese);
- Soldiers see themselves as “protectors” of population and may rely on civilians for support.

Sexual Violence

- Soldiers justify sexual violence perpetrated by members of their own group;
- Sexual violence is driven both by military and personal motives;
- Soldiers make distinctions between different kinds of rape, and of acceptability of different types of violence.

Fear of Infection

- High awareness of HIV/AIDS and risks associated with rape;
- Messaging received over radio;
- Some soldiers cited this as strong disincentive to rape.

Demobilization

- High amount of interest in demobilization or integration into national army;
- However, few sustainable job solutions for demobilized soldiers and little or no steady pay in army;
- As a result, soldiers may re-join militias because lack of viable alternatives.

Implications and Recommendations



Implications

- Mai Mai have fractured and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards sexual violence
- Demobilization does not currently provide adequate support to ex combatants.

Implications

- Each armed group, and even sub-groups, may have their own profile and motivations;
- Messages more effective when tailored to the particular motivations of an armed group;
- Militia attitudes will manifest in the national army, unless active steps are taken to change them.

Recommendations

- Use DDR as an opportunity;
- Improve civil-military cooperation;
- Provide viable employment alternatives;
- Improve messaging about the risks of sexual violence;
- Prosecute rape crimes, from the highest level of command to the lowest, to send a clear message this type of violence will not be tolerated.



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