Reintegrating Child Soldiers in the Philippines:
Agenda for Education and Governance

E. Pacoy[1]

Abstract

Three interrelated factors are identified as "motivators" in child soldiering. These are social realities, political, and economic situation. Given the complexities of culture and relative experiences of young people in the Philippines, sustainable efforts at reintegrating child soldiers into the fold of law and to the communities need a careful crafting of research, policy, and program agenda which are skewed at education, training, and other participation alternatives.

Keywords: child soldiers, sustainable reintegration

[1] Professor, Associate Dean and Program Head of MPA, School of Governance and Management, University of Southeastern Philippines. Email: emiusep@yahoo.com

Introduction

Over 300,000 children under 18 are involved in armed conflicts worldwide. These youngsters are recruited by national armies and other armed groups. They often carry arms and are induced to commit atrocities such as killing, raping, or mutilating, or to support hostilities indirectly as porters, messengers, spies, cooks, and mine detectors. Girls are particularly vulnerable as they can also be used as soldiers 'wives' or sexual slaves, (ILO 2008).

According to Hazen (2008), Asia has the highest armed conflict in the world. Much of this armed conflict is protracted and has lasted for decades and proven extremely resistant to efforts at resolution, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Philippines. As of May 2006, the World Bank placed the Philippines among the countries considered under the post-conflict status. Hazen further noted that armed conflicts do not always involve all part of the country, but may be localized to specific geographical areas or to the front lines between forces or areas that border between two ethnic or religious groups (2008). Such is the case of the Philippines, where armed conflict is largely contained within the southern provinces of Mindanao and the surrounding areas. This is brought about by both communist and Muslim separatist groups.

In the Philippines, since the time of the late President Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s up to the present, almost 4.5 million children have become direct and indirect victims of war. The succeeding governments, from Aquino to Macapagal-Arroyo declared periods of all-out war against the communist insurgency and Muslim separatist movements. Forty-two of the country's more than 70 provinces have had recurring incidences of armed conflict, displacing around 1.3 million people. Half of this figure consists of children. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) notes that 11,196 children annually become victims of war as a result of the anti-insurgency campaigns the government is waging in the countryside, (Boele 2005).

According to government sources, the New People's Army (NPA) had 9,463 fighters in June 1999, and between 13% to 18% of opposition forces during the past two years were children under the age of 18. UNICEF estimates that 3% of NPA members are boys and girls under the age of 18. Some 20 to 25% of new recruits are reportedly children. Of 415 cases of child torture from 1976 to 1996, 326 involved children between 15 and 18 years of age who were "suspected of being either members of armed dissent groups or supporters/sympathisers of rebel movements" (Globalmarch 2009.).

In addition, NGOs working throughout the affected areas reported violations of children's rights which, according to the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, include arrest and detention, harassment and physical assault. On several occasions elements of the military have discriminatorily used force and killed civilians in their fight against the New People's Army. These occurrences are clear violations of Article 38 paragraph 4 of the CRC under which a State is under the obligation to ensure protection and care of children affected by armed conflict in accordance with its duties under international humanitarian law, (Boele 2005).

Philippine Laws and Policies Protecting Children

Following is an articulation of relevant laws and policies of the Philippine Government designed and implemented to protect the rights of children:

A1. Philippine Constitution. Article XV Section 3 (2) of the 1987 Constitution states that children have the right to assistance including proper care and nutrition and special protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty and exploitation and other condition prejudicial to their development (Congress of Philippines 2010a). www.chr.gov.ph/MAIN%20PAGES/.../abthr001-005.htm

A2. Republic Act 7610. This Act provides for stronger deterrence and special protection against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination, providing penalties for its violation, and for other purposes. The law was approved in June 17, 1992, by then President Corazon C. Aquino. The State declared that it is its policy to provide special protection to children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation and discrimination and other conditions prejudicial to their survival and development (Congress of Philippines 2010b).

Section 22, Article X of RA 7610 declared children as Zone of Peace stating that children should not be recruited to become members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines or its civilian units or other armed groups, nor be allowed to take part in the fighting or used as guides, couriers or spies (Congress of Philippines 2010b). Article X further states that individuals under 18 arrested for reasons related to armed conflict by the military or the police be separated from adults in detention, be provided with immediate free legal assistance, have their parents or guardians immediately informed of their arrest, and be transferred to the custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development within 24 hours from the time of rescue, (Child Soldiers Global Report 2008).

A3. Republic Act No. 7658. This amends Section 12, Article VIII of RA 7610. RA 7658 prohibits the employment of children below 15 years of age in any private or public undertakings and the child is only allowed to work if it is directly under the sole responsibility of his parents or legal guardian and where only members of the employer's family are employed. It further ensures that the employment of the child should not endanger child's life, safety, health and morals nor impart the child's normal development (Congress of Philippines 2010c).

A4. Republic Act 8371. This is commonly known as the Indigenous People's Rights Act. This law provides that the State shall not recruit children of indigenous cultural communities or indigenous peoples into the armed forces under any circumstances (Congress of Philippines 2010d).

A5. Republic Act 9231. This is an Act providing for the elimination of the worst form of child labour and affording stronger protection for the working child. Section 2 states that it is the policy of the state to protect and rehabilitate children gravely threatened or endangered by circumstances which affect or will affect their survival and normal development and over which they have no control. It further state that that welfare of children is a paramount consideration in all actions concerning them, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, and legislative bodies consistent with the First call for children in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Every effort shall be exerted to promote the welfare of children and enhance their opportunities for a useful and happy life (Congress of Philippines 2010e).

Theoretical Base

The theory of relative deprivation advanced by Gurr (1970) is relevant in understanding the realities, prospects, and arguments in this paper. Gurr emphasized that collective conflicts could be caused by relative deprivation. A group of people perceives a discrepancy between its value expectations *(what people expect or think they deserve)* and its value capabilities *(what they actually have or are capable*

of obtaining). Relative deprivation is a group of people's thinking and feeling that what ought to be is different, perhaps far different, from *what is*. The conflict is driven by a group of people's inability to satisfy its collective values – its failure, by no fault of its own, to get what it desires or deserves. If there is a significant discrepancy between what they think they deserve and what they think they will get, there is a likelihood of rebellion. Gurr posits this to be the case even if there is no question that their basic needs will be met. The first situation may be a desperate one, but it is the second that is frustrating. And, according to Gurr, just as frustration produces aggressive behaviour on the part of an individual, so too does relative deprivation predict collective violence by social groups (1970).

Figure 1. Framework showing the "motivators" of becoming child soldiers
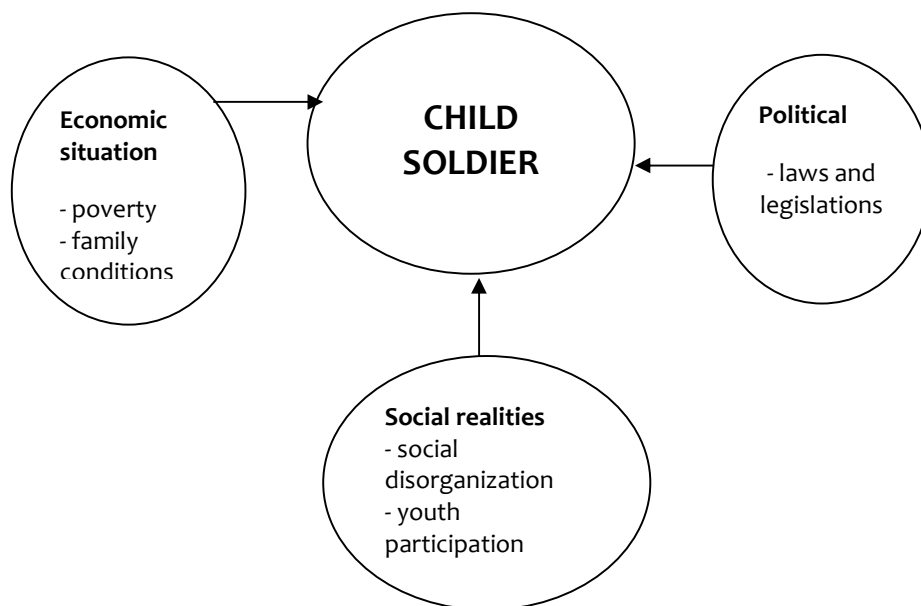
The Framework

The study proceeds with analysing the basic factors perceived to be 'motivators' of becoming a child combatant (see Figure 1). This is patterned from the work of Protacio de Castro (2001) who asserted that motivators can be clustered into three groups which are 'trigger factors', 'circumstantial factors' and 'contributory factors'.

The study framework presents three motivators and these are classified as a) economic situation indicated by poverty and family conditions, b) social realities which include social disorganization, and issues of youth participation and, c) political factors embracing laws and legislations.

Poverty and Family Conditions. The study of Frias (2006) reiterated the work of Sampson and Laub (1994) that the structural context of poverty reduces the capacity of families to raise their children effectively. They claimed that the weak parent-child attachment and large family size are associated with delinquent behaviour. This is further reinforced by the ILO report which indicated that children may see the recruitment to armed groups as an opportunity to receive food and shelter, others as an opportunity to flee from domestic problems like beating, exploitation, sexual violence, or adolescence strains; others are lured by male military models, peer and societal pressure, a family tradition of military involvement; others join after witnessing brutality against their families and communities, to seek protection or revenge. Furthermore, Wasserman, et.al (2003) claimed that

inadequate child-rearing practices such as parental hostility, negativity, rejection, extent of parental monitoring, degree of parental involvement and discipline are among the most powerful predictors of anti-social behavior. It was also found out by Main and Goldwyn (1984) that maltreated children are more aggressive with peers than non-maltreated ones; and abused children have been observed to exhibit anger and threatening behaviors, rather than helpfulness towards peer who is hurt or crying. In longitudinal studies, Thornberry and Lueber (2004) noted that a history of physical abuse in childhood through adolescence predicts chronic and violent offending, such as murder and rape. Fagan (1995), enumerated seven family conditions leading to crime and these include a) fatherless families, absence of mother's love, c) parental fighting and domestic violence, d) lack of parental supervision and discipline, e) rejection of the child, f) parental abuse and neglect and g) criminal parents. He further asserted that:

> In all of these stages the lack of dedication and the atmosphere of rejection or conflict within the family diminish the child's experience of his personal life as one of love, dedication, and a place to belong. Instead, it is characterized increasingly by rejection, abandonment, conflict, isolation, and even abuse. He is compelled to seek a place to belong outside of such a home and, most frequently not finding it in the ordinary community, finds it among others who have experienced similar rejection. He becomes attached to those who are alienated, for, like him, they have been rejected. Not finding acceptance and nurturance from caring adults, they begin conveying their own form of acceptance (Fagan 1995: para17).

Social Realities. Accordingly, social disorganization is more likely in impoverished urban slums and neighborhoods, in highly urbanized areas where migration and mobility is high. Wasserman, et al (2003) also noted that disorganization is high in communities which lack mutual trust and cooperation, high in criminal activity and domestic violence. The presence of weak institutional controls in schools, church, police force, local government, are also considered as contributory factors in social breakdown. This is further substantiated by Fagan (1995), who accounts that a) child's rejection by other children, b) failure at school and c) growth of the gang are the three factors in community experiences which lead children to commit crimes. He stressed that "because of their family experiences, these children already are aggressive and hostile. Normal, emotionally attached children avoid them -- in effect isolating and rejecting them. As a result, they seek compatible company elsewhere, in a group where they feel they belong" Fagan, 1995: para 58).

In the area and issue on young people's participation, Bass (2009) stressed that while planning and community development professions are recognizing the importance of participation, they noted that young people tend to be marginalized from planning processes and limited in their ability to affect decision making. The youths are now meaningfully redefining their paradigm of participation such that governments cannot afford to disenfranchise their involvement.

Boyden (2009) highlighted that young people generally enjoy less social power than adults. In this context, they (young people) cannot assert to protect and serve their interests. The negative consequences of such inequality of power are witnessed at their most extreme, in the physical and sexual abuse within the home, school, workplace, and the wider society. Oledan (2009), in her study on Alternative Peace Building Model in Mindanao, enumerated and identified poverty and conflict, cultural norms, institutional limitations, and gender as socio-cultural barriers to youth participation. She stressed that these factors greatly influenced low level of participation of young people in Mindanao.

Political Factors. Apathy towards politics and a lack of interest to participate in traditional youth organizations seem to characterize the younger generations of many countries, (United Nations 2004). To many young people, the world of politics is much too distant from realities in school, leisure and finding work. Many youth fail to see a connection between those realities and the impact of politics on their daily life. Oledan (2009) highly recommended that the government should expand the actors in the peace building process to embrace the interests of the youth which constitutes more than half of Mindanao's population and called upon the government to strengthen its mechanism to enable local communities to actively participate in local peace building processes.

The Sustainable Reintegration Agenda. Poverty, social disintegration and apathy to politics constitute the web of structural factors and the compelling evidence of child soldiering in the Philippines. Given these hardline motivators, the Philippine government has, for its part, ensure that national and local legislations are compatible with the economic and social cry of the Filipino families. The influence of the family as a basic unit of society has a strong impact on the vulnerability or non-vulnerability of the children and youths to join the armed conflict; and the link between the school and the family will build mutual foundations for child education, research and advocacy.

Preventing and reintegrating child soldiers is a challenge. While it is viewed as an end in itself, it requires sustainable reintegration, and this reintegration requires involvement, coordination, time, resources, and commitment of all potential stakeholders and the communities. According to Janneck (2009), much still needs to be done to understand and improve the suffering of former child soldiers, boys and girls. By raising awareness and supporting research, policy, and programming efforts in this field, meaningful impacts may be achieved for those who have lived through some of the most atrocious scenes in the history of humankind (Janneck 2009). Janneck (2009) emphasized that before any successful intervention can happen, understanding the root causes of these children's involvement is necessary. This will enable the state and other aid agencies to identify the core needs of children and prioritize their interventions.

As the task is multifaceted, this paper is delimited to identifying three agendas that would prepare young soldiers in future mainstreaming. These agenda for reintegration include research, policy and, program agenda (see Figure 2).

Research Agenda. As reintegration needs vary according to culture, age, and experiences of young children and youths, local universities and training institutions have to fully explore opportunities that will provide benchmark for quantitative and qualitative analyses of all possible relationships of factors of child soldiering. The data that can be generated and documented by research and other local resource institutions will serve to dissipate the threats of widening enrolment to child soldiering. Substantially, this will serve as an input to policy interventions.

Policy Agenda. This should involve a sustaining revisit of existing laws and policies enacted for the welfare of children, strengthening the social capital for peace building which will anchor on local capacities and local bodies in managing conflict and local peace initiatives. Local government units must take the lead in providing support and building stakeholders' capacity for conflict transformation, active civic engagement and participation. Arresting weak political will and efficient resource administration is a call to all levels of governance – national, provincial, city and barangay levels, to fully address the economic, social and psychological reintegration needs of children.

Program Agenda. This calls for a serious review of national social programs. Economic and educational assistance programs such as vocational training and income-generating projects are perceived to prime the motivation of young soldiers, especially those unlikely to return to school after demobilization. This should be coupled with the identification of institutions, public and private agencies that can absorb these children after their training. The Technical Educational Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in the country may serve as the lead and coordinating agency in implementing vocational programs that deem fit after thorough analysis and investigation of the capacities and competencies of these young boys and girls. Recognizing the potential contribution of civil societies, the government may tap and mobilize volunteer community efforts, including religious organizations to push for active advocacies. These assistance programs should also cover the receiving families and communities of the children, who, in the first place, were the ones who were unable to cater to their basic needs, including the critical element of access to the reintegration assistance available. Improving access will enable these children and youth to participate in governance where they could legitimize their demands and expand their contributions to community development and peace building as well as strengthen the advocacy and lobbying capacities of the youth. Figure 2 shows the interrelationship of these sustainable reintegration agenda.

Figure 2. Agenda for Sustainable Reintegration
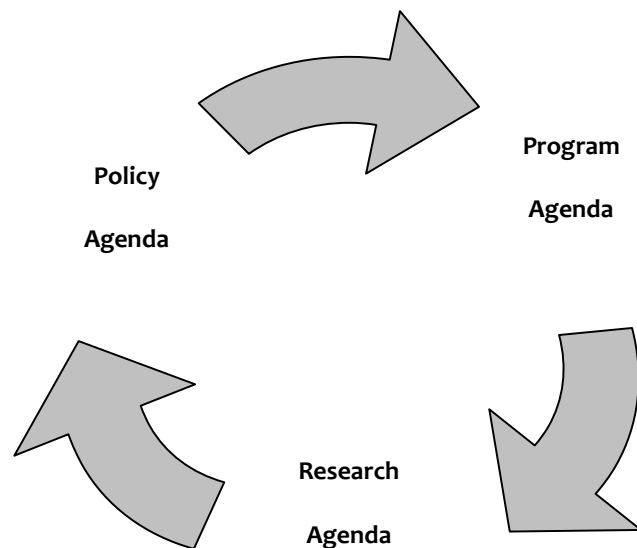
Conclusion

What makes young children join in collective actions against the government through violent means? The answer is complex and almost always poses a challenge to education and governance. Preventing child participation in armed conflicts must transcend from stopping these children to carry firearms and fight, to promoting and developing adequate education and other training alternatives. Young people are vulnerable groups and this vulnerability needs special attention, requires responsive policies and effective programs, enough to sustain efforts at reintegrating these child soldiers into the folds of law and to the community where they once belong.

References

Bass, J. (2009).Young People's Participation: The Alternative Peace Building Model in Mindanao. Unpublished Dissertation. College of Governance, Business and Economics. University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City.

Boele F. (2005). Rights of the Child in the Philippines. Retrieved September 14, 2009 from http://www.omct.org/pdf/cc/2005/report/report_children_Philippines_eng.pdf.

Boyden, C. (2009). Young People's Participation: The Alternative Peace Building Model in Mindanao. Unpublished Dissertation. College of Governance, Business and Economics. University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City.

Childsoldiersglobalreport (2009). Child Soldiers Global Report 2008. Retrieved December 17th 2009 from http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/philippines.

Congress of Philippines (2010a). Philippine Constitution. Article XV Section 3 (2). Retrieved September 23, 2009 from www.chr.gov.ph/MAIN%20PAGES/.../abthr001-005.htm

Congress of Philippines (2010b). Republic Act 7610. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from www.ncrfw.gov.ph/index.php/.../163-republic-act-7610

Congress of Philippines (2010c). Republic Act No. 7658. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from www.ncrfw.gov.ph/.../241-republic-act-7658

Congress of Philippines (2010d). Republic Act 8371. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from www.ncrfw.gov.ph/index.php/.../183-republic-act-8371

Congress of Philippines (2010e). Republic Act 9231. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from www.ops.gov.ph/records/ra_no9231.htm

Fagan, P. (1995). The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community. Retrieved January 26th 2010 from http://www.heritage.org/Research/Crime /BG1026.

Frias, G. (2006). Protection of Children and Children in conflict with the Law: Davao City Experience. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City.

Globalmarch.org (2009). Retrieved December 17th 2009 from http://www.globalmarch.org/ resourcecentre/world/philippines.pdf retrieved 12-17-2009.

Gurr, T. (2009). Why men rebel? Retrieved September 23, 2009 from http://v4.crinfo. org/booksummary/10680/.

Hazen, J. (2008). Armed violence in Asia and the Pacific: An overview of the causes, costs and consequences. UNDP Briefing Paper, May 2008, 2 and 5. http://www.undp.org/cpr/documents /armedviolence/AV Asia Pacific 2008.pdf.

ILO (International Labour Organization) (2008). In Focus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction Recovery and Reconstruction Department. Retrieved May 19, 2008 ilo.org//eval/documents/publication/wcms_083424.pdf

Janneck, L. (2009). Girls and Boys Gone to War: Gender and Mental Health of Child Soldiers. *Global Pulse,* 5 (1).

Main, M. and Goldwyn, R. (1984). Predicting rejection of her infant from mother's representation of her own experiences: Implication for the abused. *Child Abuse and Neglect,* 8(2): 203-217.

Martin, C. (undated). The Warrior is a Child: Experiences of Children in Conflict Afflicted Areas in Mindanao, Philippines. Draft Thesis Proposal. University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City.

Oledan, R. (2009). Young People's Participation: The Alternative Peace Building Model in Mindanao. Unpublished Dissertation. College of Governance, Business and Economics. University of Southeastern Philippines, Davao City.

Sampson, R. and Laub, J. (1994). Urban poverty and the family context of delinquency: A new look at structure and process in a classic society. *Child Development*, 65 (2), 523-540.

Thornberry, T, Huizinga, D. and Lueber, R. (2004). The causes and correlates studies: Findings and policy implications. *Juvenile Justice*, IX (1).

Wasserman, G. et.al. (2003). Risk and protective factors of child delinquency. *Child Delinquency Series.* US Department of Justice.