

Africa United



The Back Story: Child Soldiers

Leader's Guide



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The Back Story: Child Soldiers

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Africa United is a story about children with big dreams who make an extraordinary journey. On their way across Africa, Dudu, Beatrice and Fabrice pass through amazing landscapes and make new friends, Celeste and Foreman George. But they also come face-to-face with some of the challenges that have gripped the continent.

Foreman George hides a guilty secret. The others eventually learn that he had been a child soldier, and that he carried out terrible acts of violence. But the team's acceptance of George lets him begin to move on, and start his life anew.

This Back Story session guide will help you to look more closely at the issues, and think about what you can do to help. As the session leader, it's a good idea for you to familiarise yourself with the key facts below so that you can inform the discussion. It would also be useful to look through one or more of the websites in the Find Out More section.

The session has been written to be combined with the short video *The Back Story: Child Soldiers*, which is available for free download from www.damaris.org/africaunited. The video features Nivi Narang of War Child talking about some of the issues raised by the film *Africa United*.



There are two sets of questions, one for an adult discussion and one for a youth group session.



What Are the Facts?¹

- It's estimated that there are currently 250,000 children across the world who are actively involved in armed conflict. Most are aged between 14 and 18, though some are as young as nine. Many have been abducted and forced to serve with military groups.
- Even those child soldiers who volunteer often enlist due to a lack of other options. Joining an army may be the only means of survival in impoverished and war-torn areas.
- Child soldiers do not only participate in combat, but are also called upon to perform a range of other tasks. These can include sexual slavery; handling and deploying dangerous explosive devices; scouting and spying; and many other more mundane logistical tasks.
- Girls are frequently recruited as child soldiers, often for sexual purposes, but usually involved in other military and domestic tasks.
- Child soldiers are being used in armed conflict in Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan. There are also child soldiers in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Europe.
- The majority of the world's child soldiers are involved with armed political groups, some government-backed, some opposed to central government.
- Many child soldiers are injured, disabled or killed. But the psychological impact of war is equally damaging. Some children, having been forced to commit atrocities, will be unable to return to their communities. Many will have missed out on education, and face a lack of future options.
- Former child soldiers wishing to return to their communities and to gain new skills benefit from demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programs. However, most programs lack adequate funding and require sustained long-term investment.
- Unfortunately girl soldiers, who have particularly sensitive needs in the aftermath of the sexual violence they have experienced, are often excluded from DDR programs.

¹ Sourced from Back Story video and www.child-soldiers.org



Adult discussion

What are the issues?

Q: What do the words 'child soldier' mean to you? Do you know anything about the issue already?

(Having elicited initial responses, show AU036 The Back Story: Child Soldiers to inform the rest of your discussion)



Q: What is your first reaction to the facts and stories in this video? What surprised or moved you the most?

Q: What rights do children have in life, and what opportunities should they have? How are child soldiers denied these basic rights and opportunities?

Q: What circumstances might lead to children being recruited into conflict? Does it surprise you that some children 'volunteer'? Under what kind of circumstances do 'choices' cease to be choices?

Q: Why is it so difficult for former child soldiers to return to their communities? What factors might lead to them being rejected or stigmatised?

Q: Why might encouraging former child soldiers to share their stories be an essential part of the healing process? What other kinds of help and rehabilitation could the children need before returning to their communities?

Q: What particular challenges might girl soldiers face in being reintegrated into communities? Why should rehabilitation programs make special provision for girls?

What can we do?

Q: This issue might seem very distant from our everyday lives. Why is it important that we take action? What impact might it have on the future of the countries concerned – and so on the world's future – if the use of child soldiers continues?

Q: Why should we focus on tackling the underlying causes of this issue? What bigger problems contribute towards children being recruited as soldiers?

Q: How might education prevent children from being recruited as child soldiers? What messages need to be spread, both in countries affected by the problem, and all over the world?

Q: Our daily actions have significance on a global scale. In what ways might our choices in many areas of life – for example, what we buy, how we vote, whether we campaign or give to charity – impact the lives of child soldiers?

Q: How can your community group find out more about child soldiers? Discuss ways that you could raise money and awareness for this cause.

Young people's discussion

What are the issues?

Q: What do the words 'child soldier' mean to you? Do you know anything about the issue already? Write down five words that you might associate with it.

(Show AU036 The Back Story: Child Soldiers to start off your discussion)



Q: What is your first reaction to the facts and stories in this video? What surprised or moved you the most?

Q: What things do we all need in life to be happy and healthy? If you were taken from your family and forced to fight in a war, which of these things would be taken away from you?

Q: Not all child soldiers have been forced to join armies. Some volunteer because they believe that they will have a better life. What choices are you able to make about your future because you live in a safe country and can get an education? How might your future be limited if this wasn't the case?

Q: Many child soldiers are forced to kill people and carry out other terrible acts. Why might it be difficult for them to go back to their families and communities? What might help them to be accepted there again?

Q: Child soldiers carry not only physical scars from their experiences, but also deep mental and emotional scars. How might talking about their experiences help them? What other help might they need to heal and move on?

What can we do?



Q: This issue might seem very distant from our everyday lives. Why is it important that we take action? What effects might it have on other people, and on our world, if we don't?

Q: Bigger problems like poverty lead to wars, and so to children being forced to fight. Why is it important that we do something to prevent poverty, as well as helping children who are already soldiers?

Q: How might being in school help to keep children safe from being recruited? What do their parents and communities need to know about the problem? What messages can we help to spread about child soldiers in our own communities?

Q: Little things like what we buy to eat or wear can be significant for people in other countries. How might our choices in many areas of

life – including whether we campaign or give to charity – impact the lives of child soldiers?

Q: How can your community group find out more about child soldiers? Discuss ways that you could raise money and awareness for this cause.

Find out more

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
www.child-soldiers.org

War Child www.warchild.org.uk

Child Soldiers Global Report 2008
www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org

