Sara

SARA AND THE BOY SOLDIER

Sara and the Boy Soldier

This is the eighth of a series of comic books produced by UNICEF in Eastern and Southern Africa on the adventures of Sara, an adolescent girl. She is gradually becoming a heroine and a dynamic role model for girls' as well as boys' empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa. The story is about the effects of armed conflict on children's lives as well as that of adults. The main theme revolves around the experiences of Sara and her friends, Maya and Juma, as they are abducted by a group of rebels. In captivity, Sara encounters a boy soldier and also witnesses the sufferings of people in her village as the rebels attack it. Maya loses her leg in cross-fire while trying to escape and she blames Sara for her misfortune. After a heavy battle and casualty, the rebels surrender to government soldiers who rescue the children. Back at the camp for displaced people, Sara finds it hard to cope with her traumatic experience which is further intensified by a man's sexual advances towards her. At the end of the story, this man is chastened for his behaviour, Maya and Sara are reconciled and the boy soldier is reintegrated and returns to school.

Sara and the Boy Soldier is a real life drama that has strong personal appeal and contains elements of education. The story focuses on the traumatic experiences that children go through in armed conflict situations, and how the healing process can be promoted. The story also addresses the issues of rights of children to education, and other child development and protection issues.

The comic book is a part of a package of communication materials, including a users' guide (see back) and a flip chart. An animated video of the story may be produced in the future.

The Sara series is the product of a large team of African writers, researchers and UNICEF personnel who have worked together since 1994, evolving characters, settings and stories through in-depth discussions with hundreds of villagers and peri-urban dwellers in 12 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa as well as in some countries in West Africa. Through this extensive research process, the respondents became partners in the creation of the stories. This story was researched in North and West of Uganda in the districts of Kasese and Gulu.

Sara and the Boy Soldier has been produced by the Communication Section, UNICEF-ESARO, in collaboration with UNICEF Uganda and the National Psycho-Social Team.

Seven other packages are currently available:
- The Special Gift (on girls staying in school);
- Sara Saves Her Friend (on HIV/AIDS and avoiding sexual abuse);
- Daughter of a Lioness (on Female genital mutilation);
- The Trap (on Sugar daddies, or sexual exploitation of young girls by older men and HIV/AIDS);
- Choices (on Teenage pregnancy);
- Who's the Thief? (on child domestic labour);
- The Empty Compound (on HIV/AIDS and living positively with HIV/AIDS).

Other communication packages on different themes are under development. These are:
- Malaria
- Early Childhood Care, Survival, Growth and Development

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United Nations Children's Fund

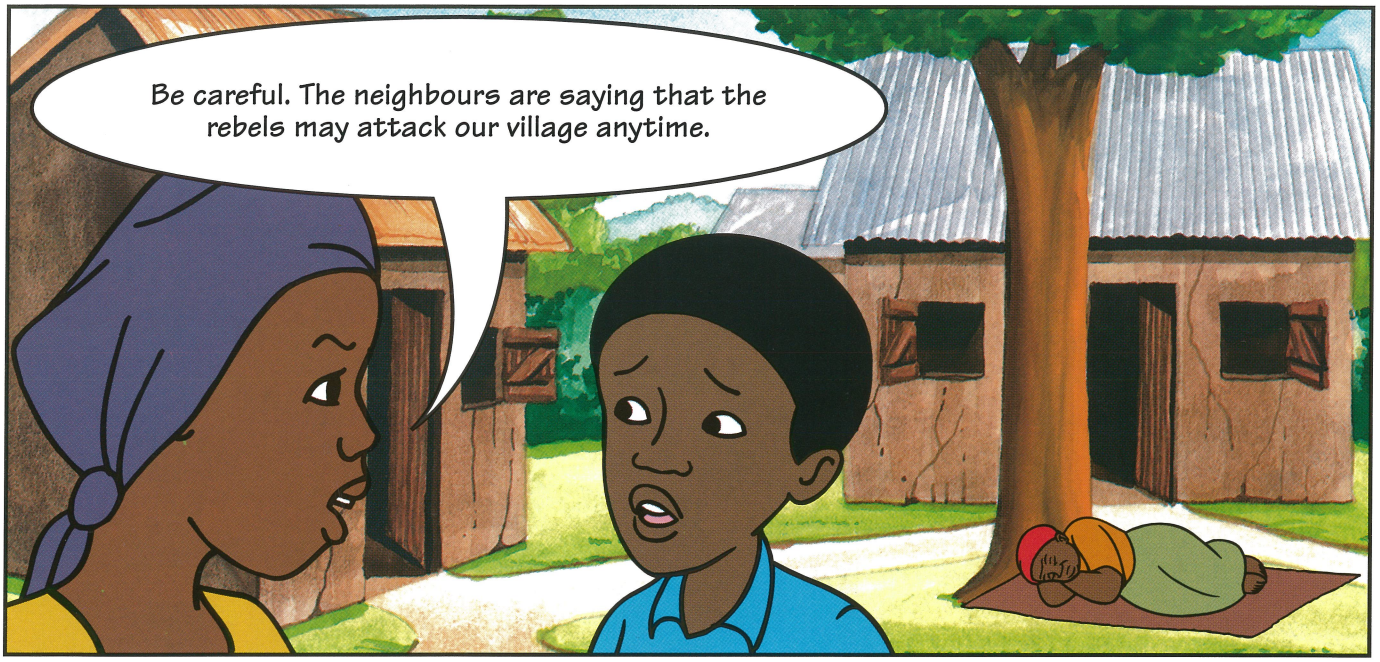
It's a bright Sunday afternoon. Sara and her mother are winnowing millet. Sara's younger siblings, Tsumi and Maria are playing in the compound.

Sara, is that you whistling?
Yes, grandma, I...

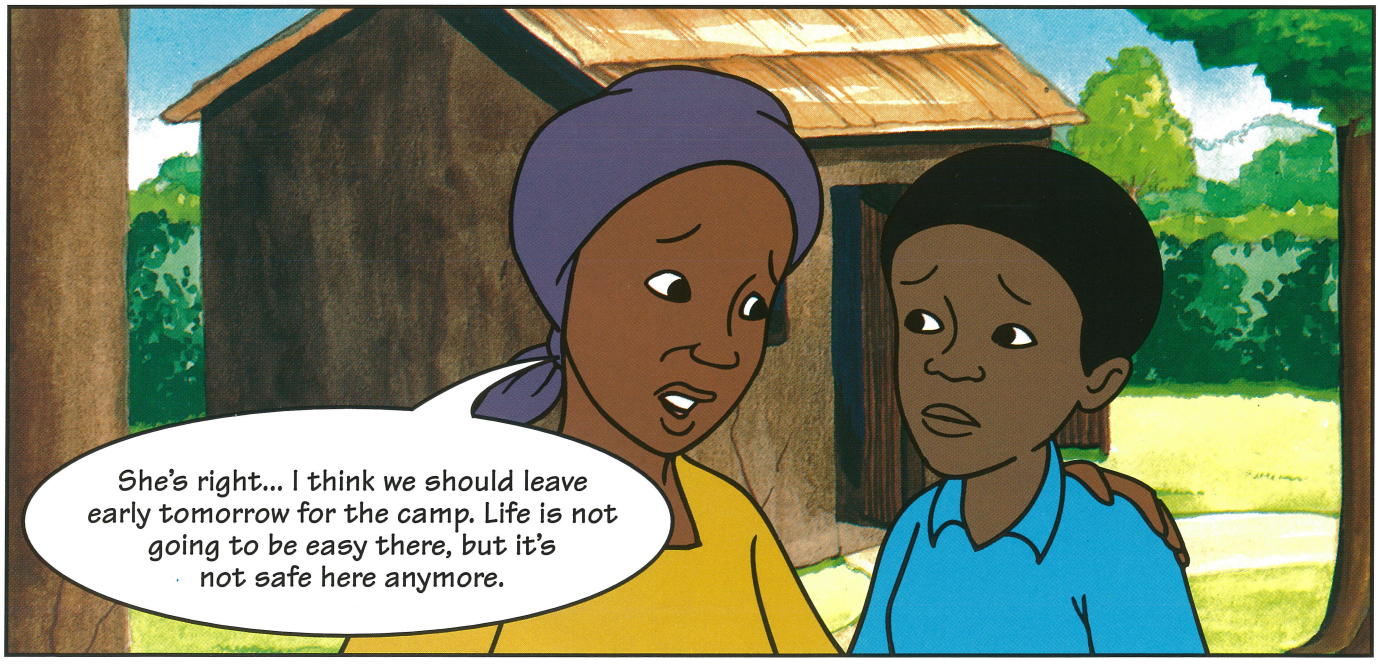
How many times do I have to tell you that women do not whistle?
Grandma, I am whistling to call the wind. You see, it has stopped blowing and I want to winnow this millet.

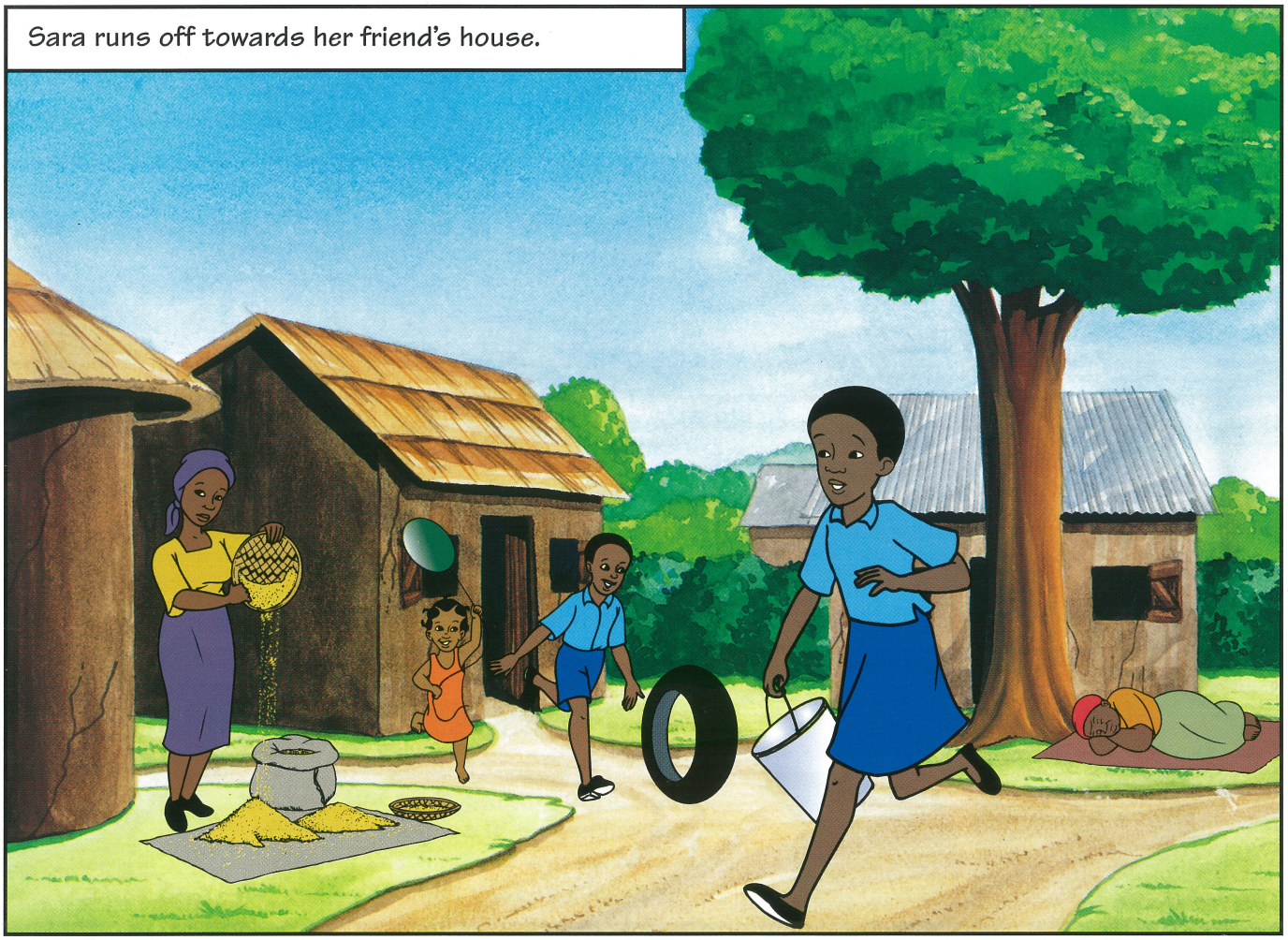
Sara, you have to listen to what your grandma tells you.

Now, go and fetch some water from the well. I'll finish with this work here. And Sara...
Yes, mama.


Be careful. The neighbours are saying that the rebels may attack our village anytime.

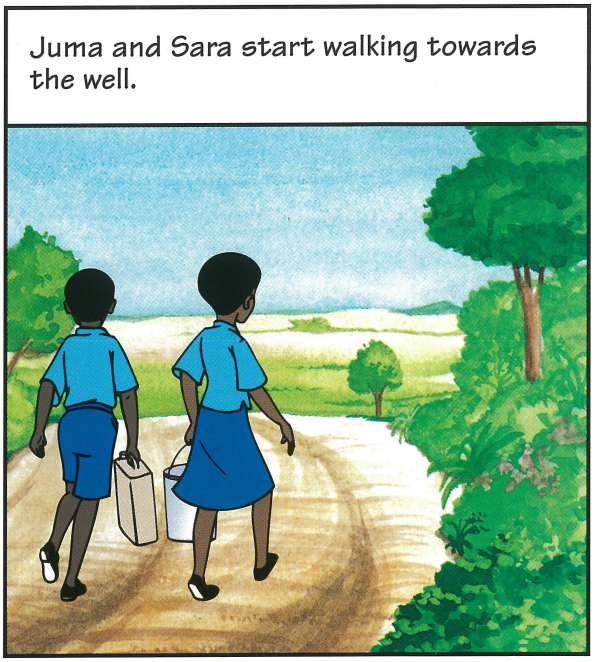
Hurry and get back before it gets dark.
I'll be careful, mama. Even Ms. Matata has warned us in school today. She told us not to run if the rebels attack or they might shoot.


She's right... I think we should leave early tomorrow for the camp. Life is not going to be easy there, but it's not safe here anymore.


Sara runs off towards her friend's house.

Hello, Sara, have you finished your homework already?
No, Juma, not yet. I am on my way to the well.

I'll come with you.

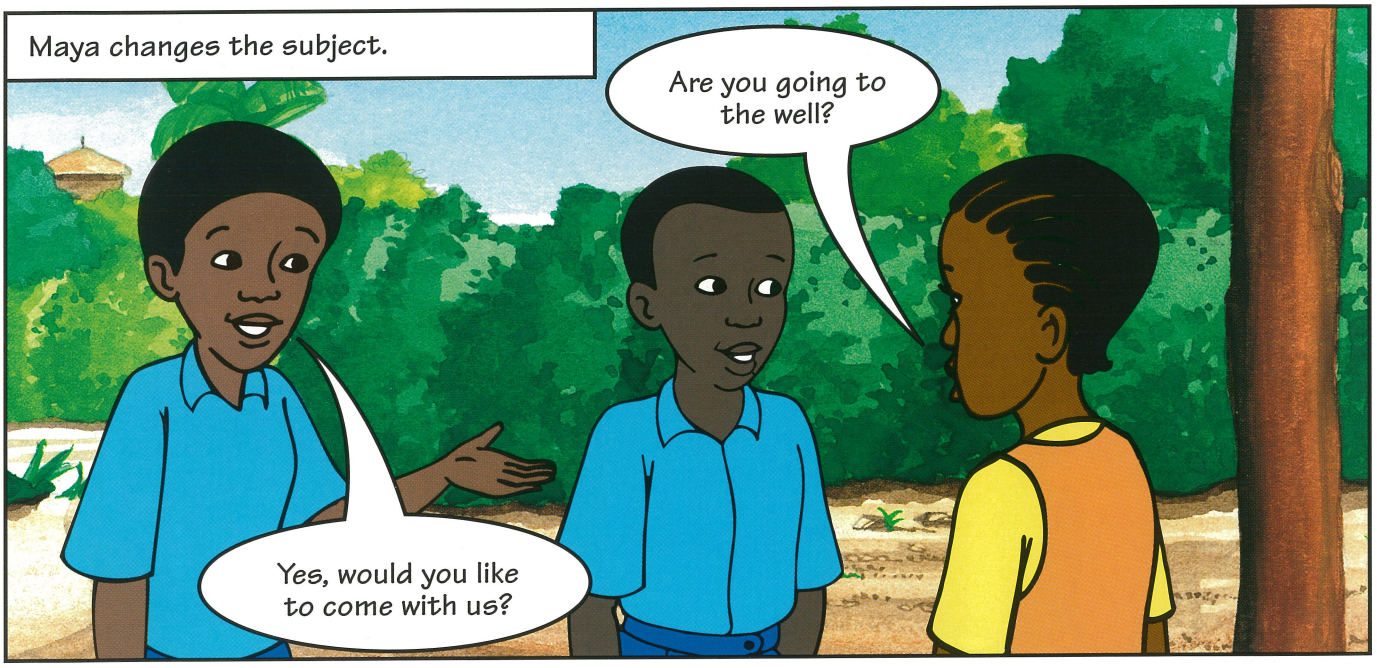

Juma and Sara start walking towards the well.

Juma, do you remember Maya, the girl who has come to live with her grandfather?
Yes, I know Maya. She always looks so sad.

Let's go and see what she is doing. Maybe she would like to come with us to the well.
Sure.

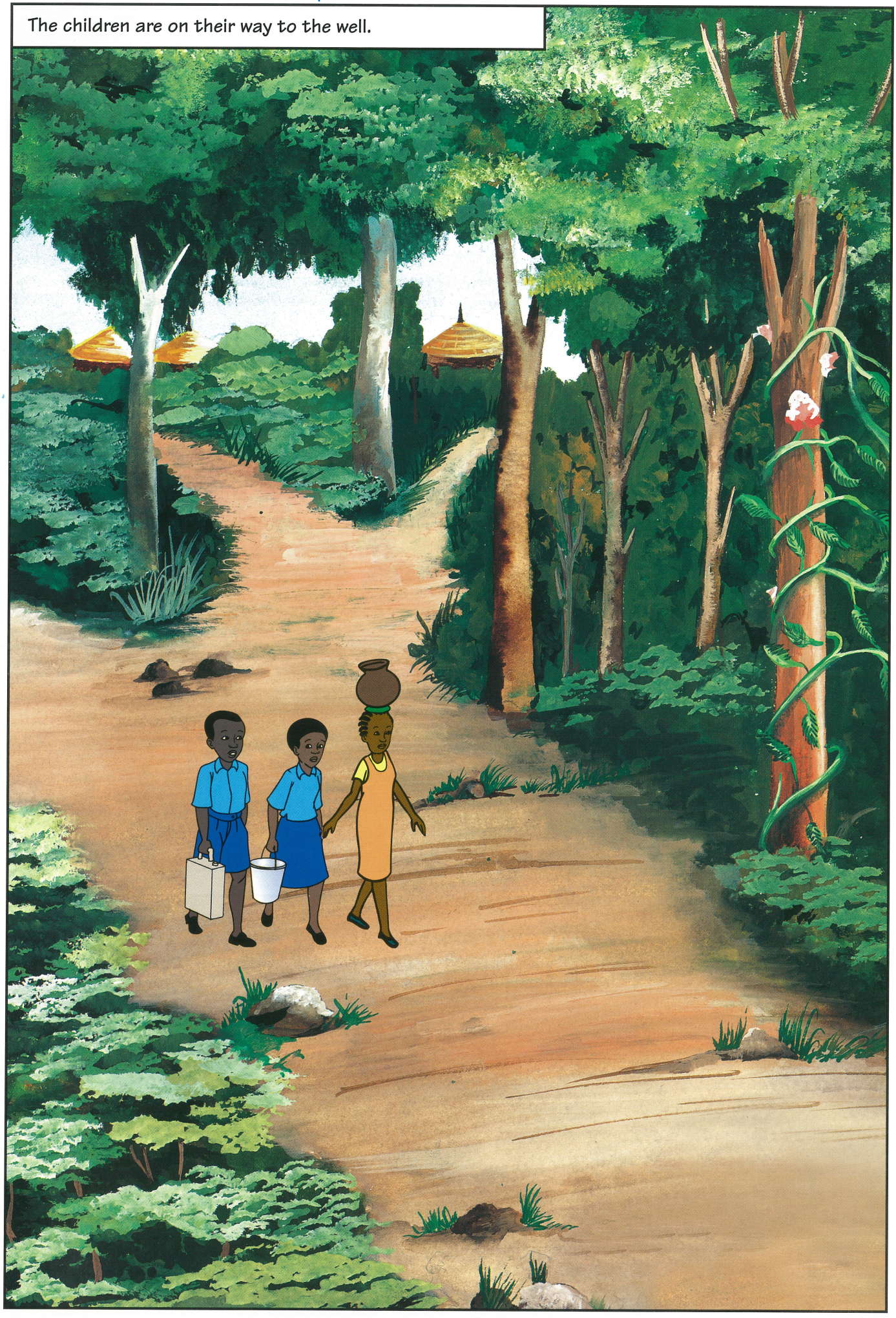
Sara and Juma walk to Maya's house.
Hello, Maya, what are you reading?
It's a storybook. In my old school, my teacher used to read it to the class.
She gave it to me when I left that school... after my parents died.

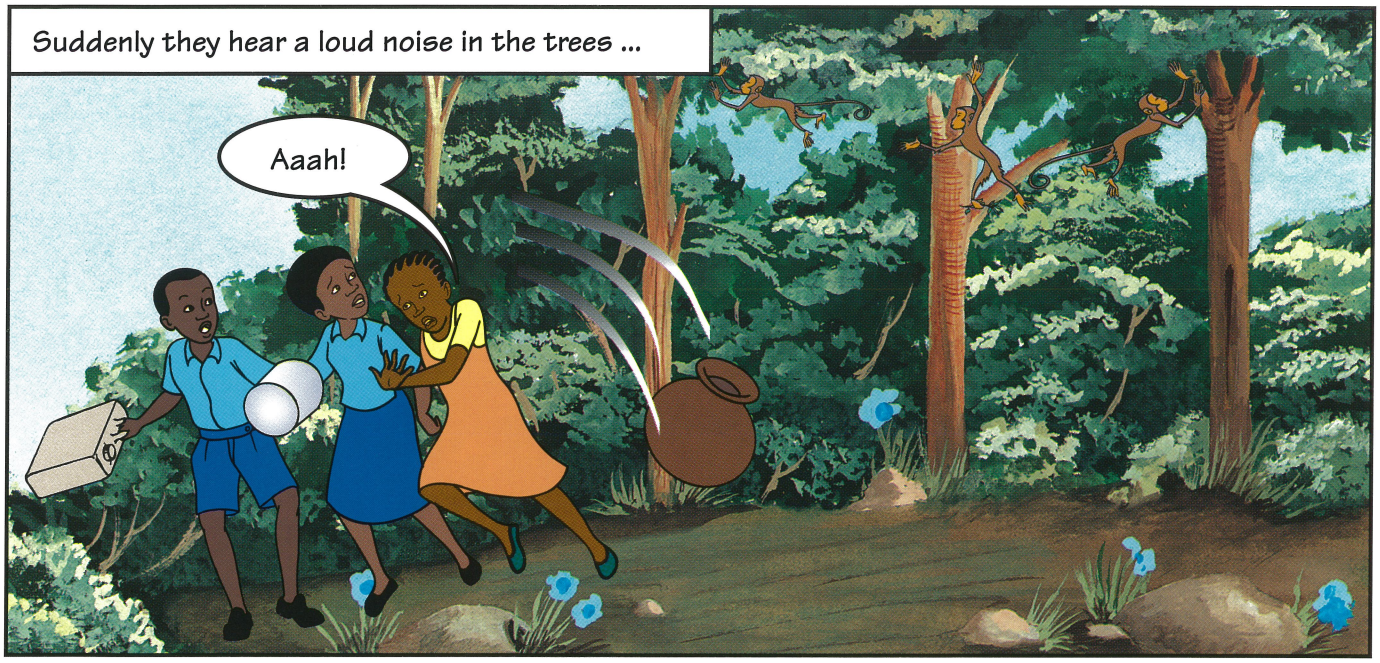
Why don't you bring the book to school tomorrow. I'm sure Ms Matata would love to read it to the class, too.


Maya changes the subject.
Are you going to the well?
Yes, would you like to come with us?

I don't know... Grandpa said the rebels can attack anytime... but I need to fetch water...

The children are on their way to the well.



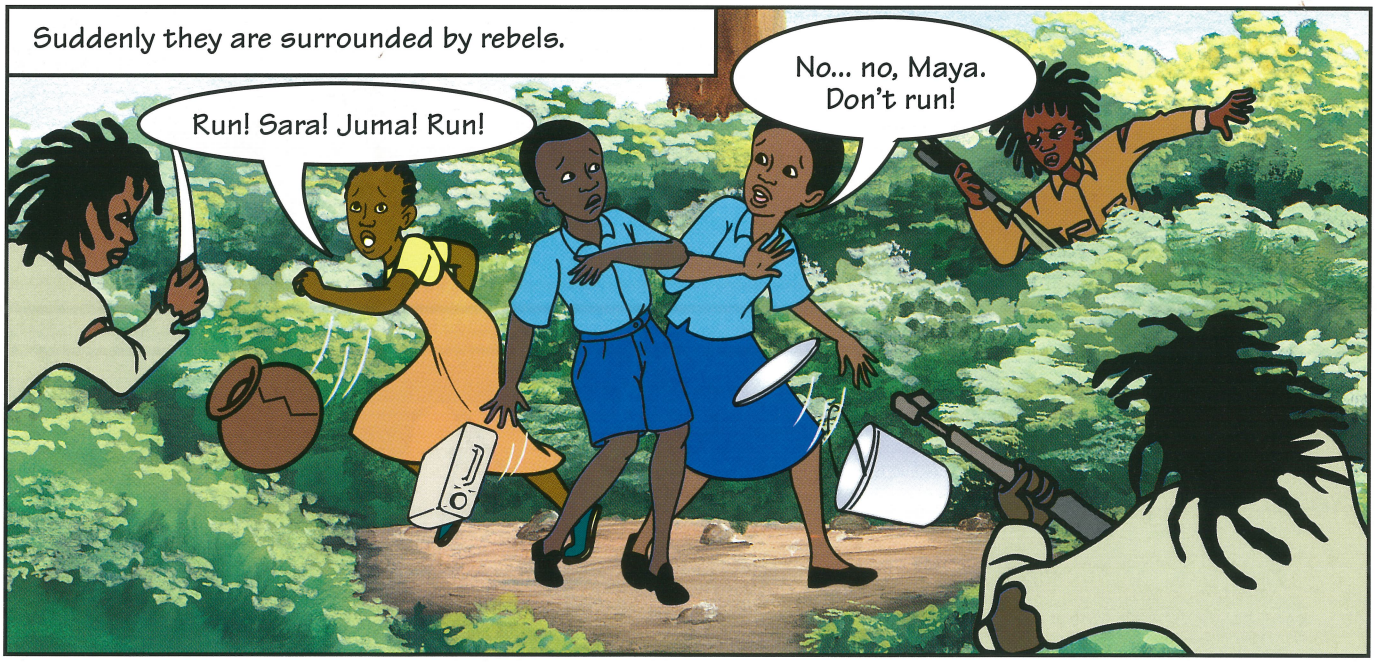

Suddenly they hear a loud noise in the trees ...
Aaah!

Oh, it's only monkeys!
Juma, this is no laughing matter, it could have been the rebels!

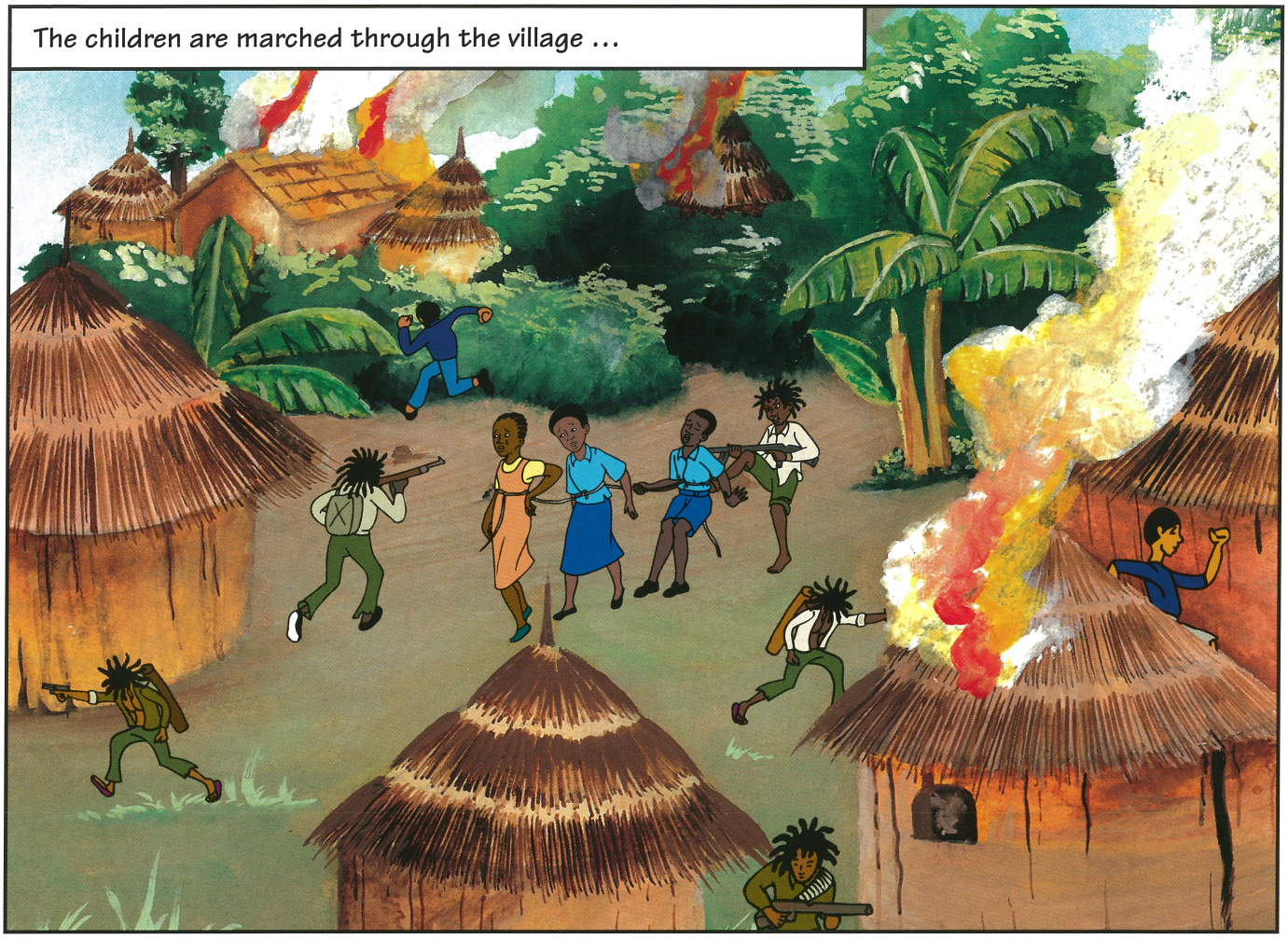
Oh, I'm so afraid.

As they proceed they hear more rustling and branches cracking.
Shh! What's that?

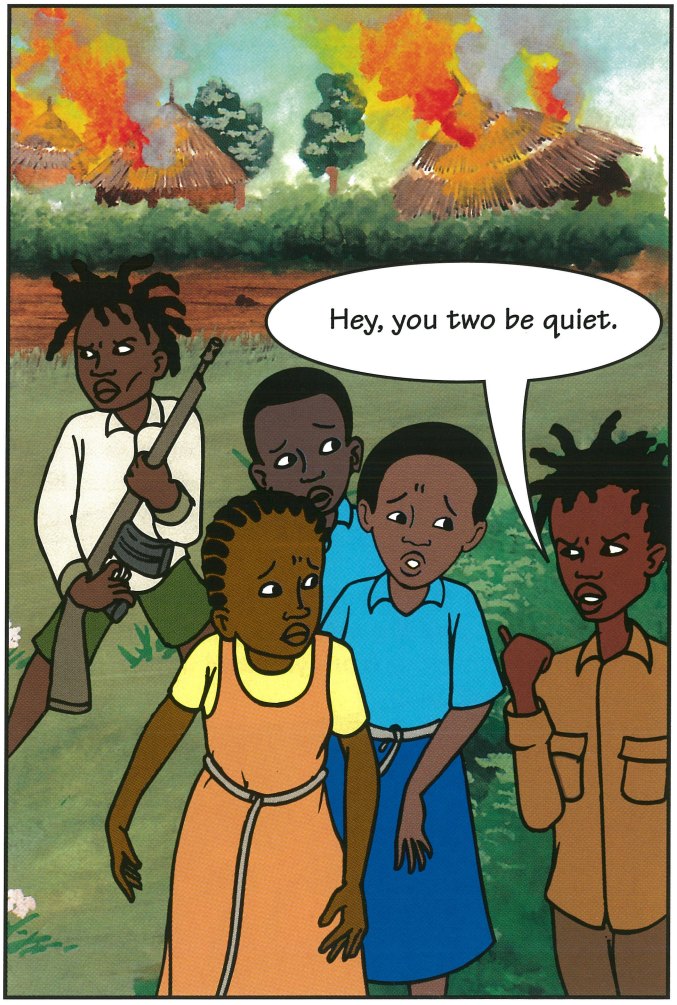
Just birds! Come on.


Suddenly they are surrounded by rebels.
Run! Sara! Juma! Run!
No... no, Maya. Don't run!

Don't try anything funny. We'll shoot if you try to escape...

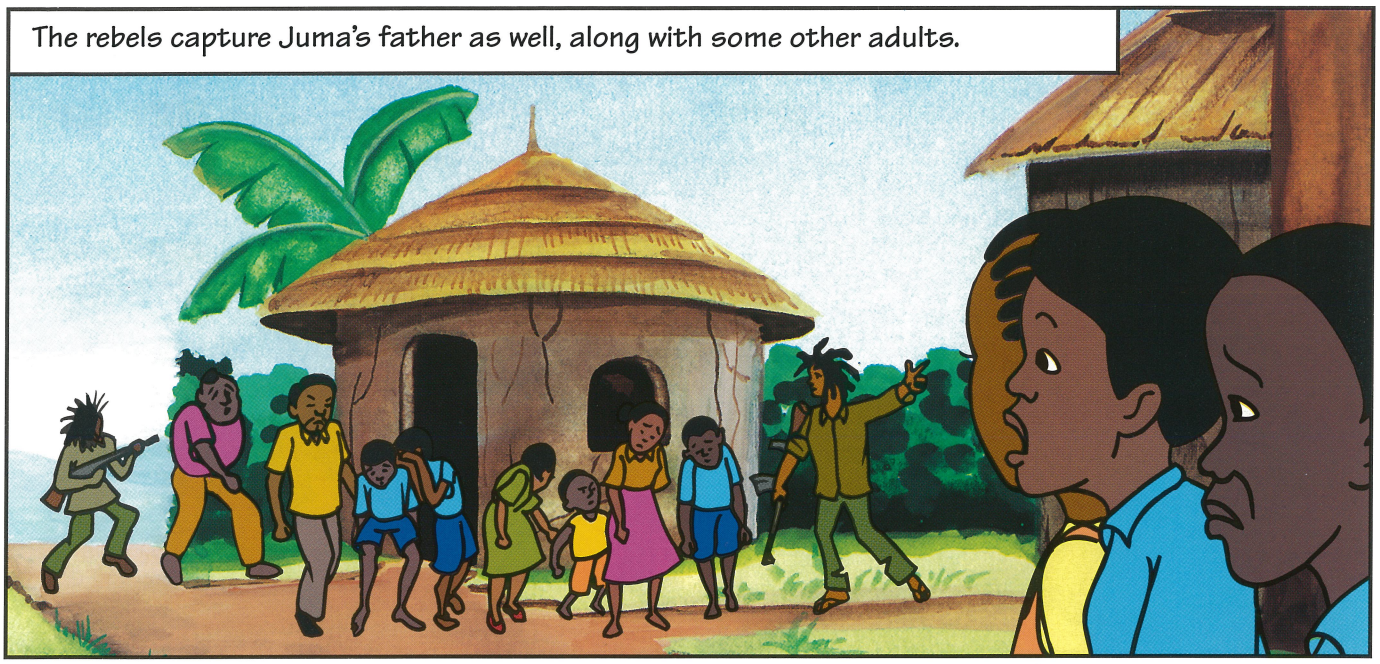

The children are marched through the village ...

It's your fault, Sara, you wouldn't run...
Maya, I only...

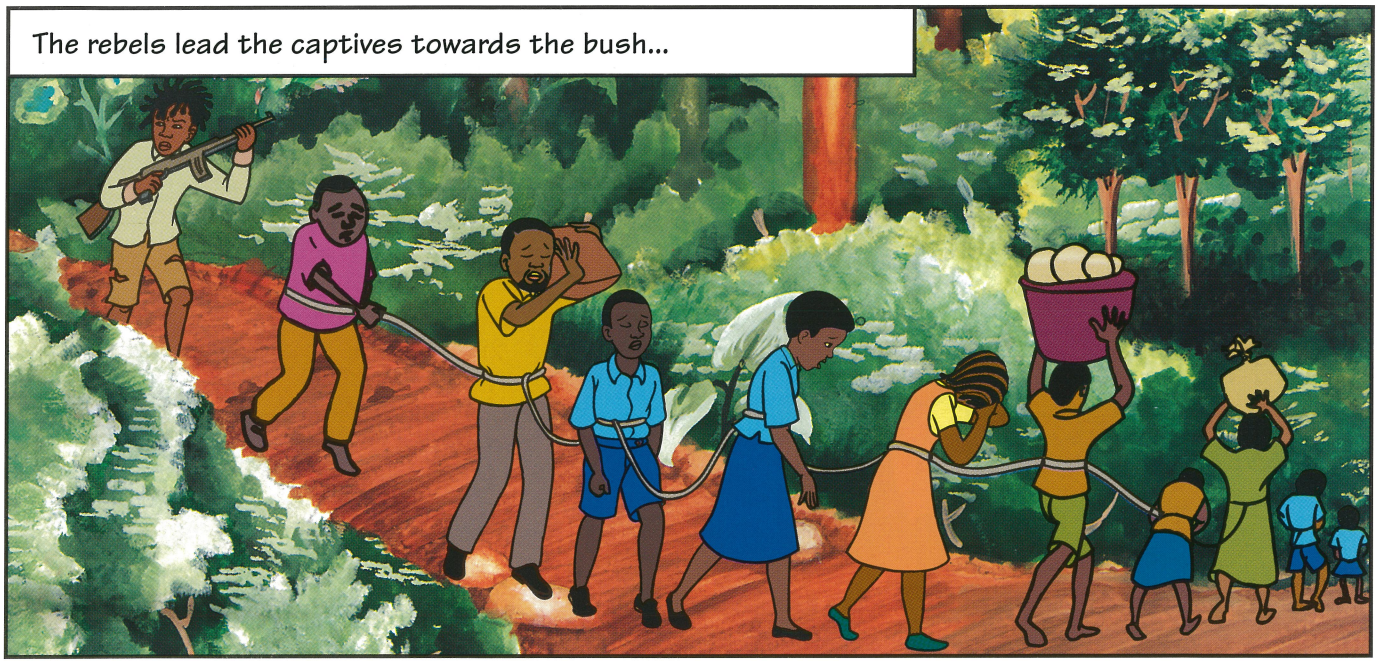

Hey, you two be quiet.

You there, stop crying...
... we don't want to attract the enemy.
The rebels lead the children to a big tree in Sara's neighbourhood and tie them to it...
Oh, they've reached our house...
Oh!... that's our house... please... oh, please... don't let them beat up my grandma...
Stop crying I say! My name is Scorpion and I'm as dangerous... Another whimper from you and I may kill you.

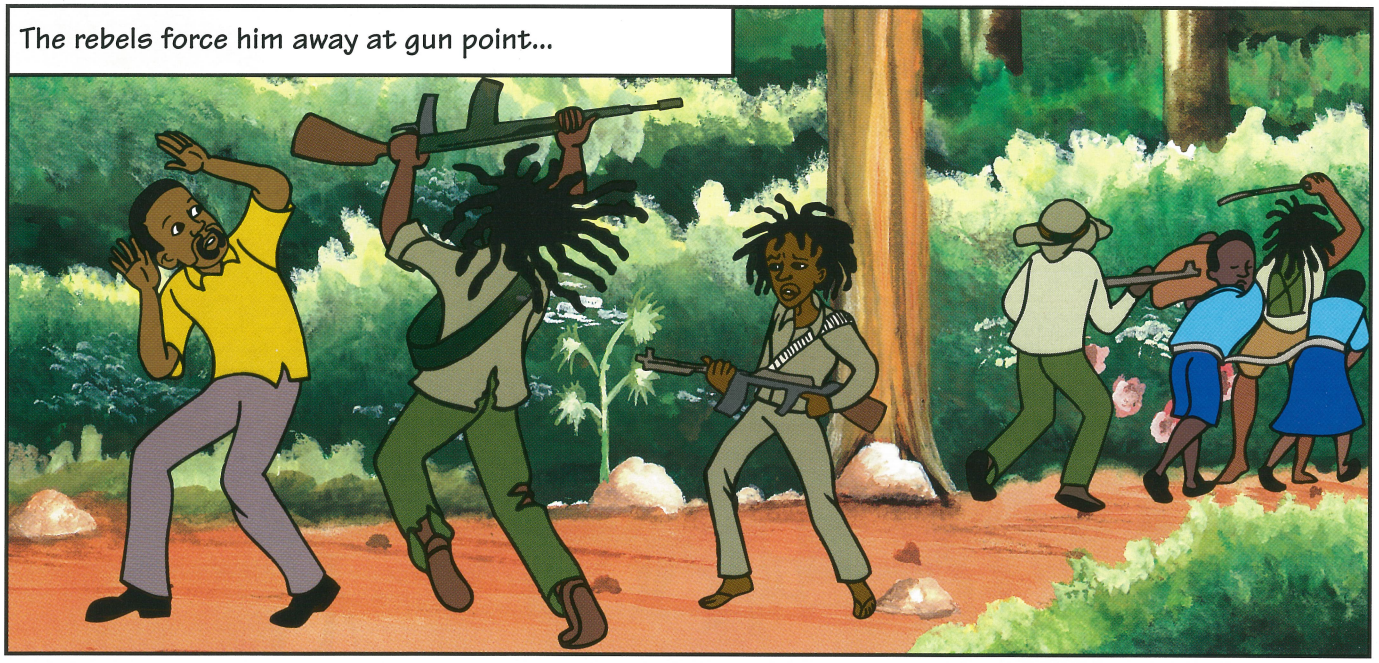
The rebels capture Juma's father as well, along with some other adults.



The rebels lead the captives towards the bush...



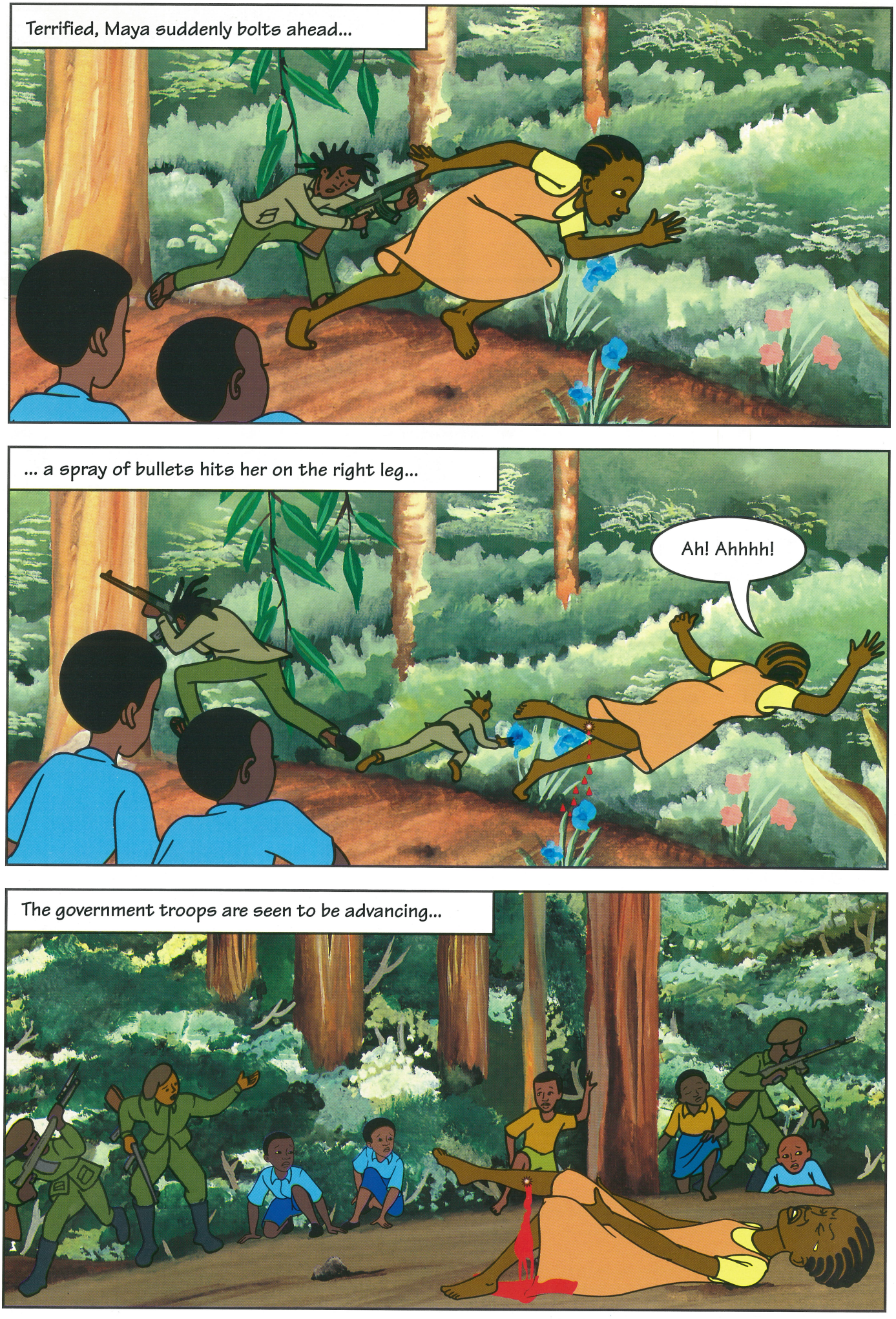
After some time, they order the adults to go back...


The rebels force him away at gun point...

The children march deeper into the bush...

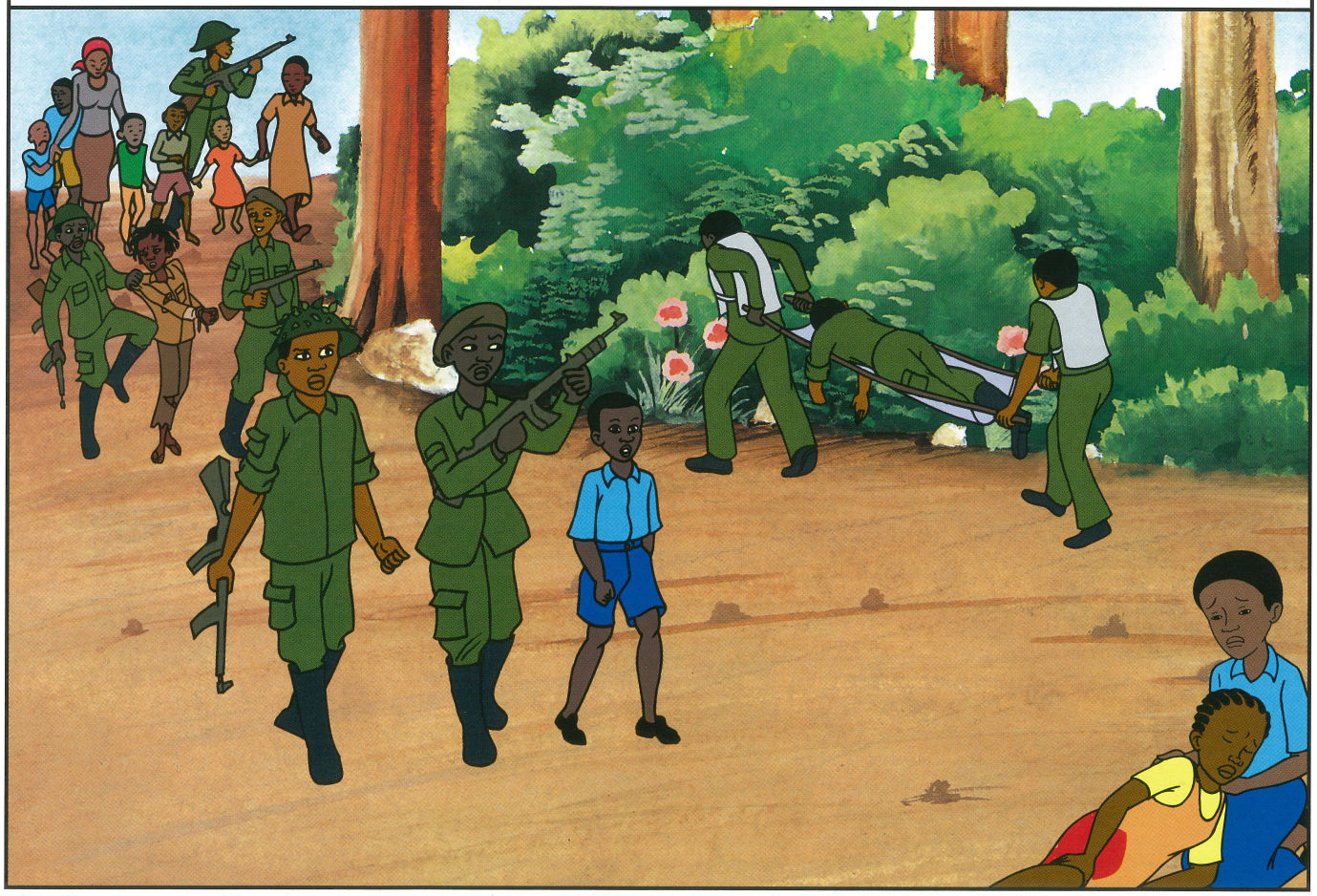
... and deeper...

Suddenly, sounds of gunfire erupt in the air.
Quick! Everybody lie down and wait until the shooting stops!
Aaah!
Ohh!


Terrified, Maya suddenly bolts ahead...
... a spray of bullets hits her on the right leg...
Ah! Ahhhh!
The government troops are seen to be advancing...

As the shooting stops...
My leg is hurting... Oh! Help me...
Oh, Maya ...please try to hold on. We are going to find help. Juma, how far is the hospital?
Sara, you stay here. Let me see if I can get some help.

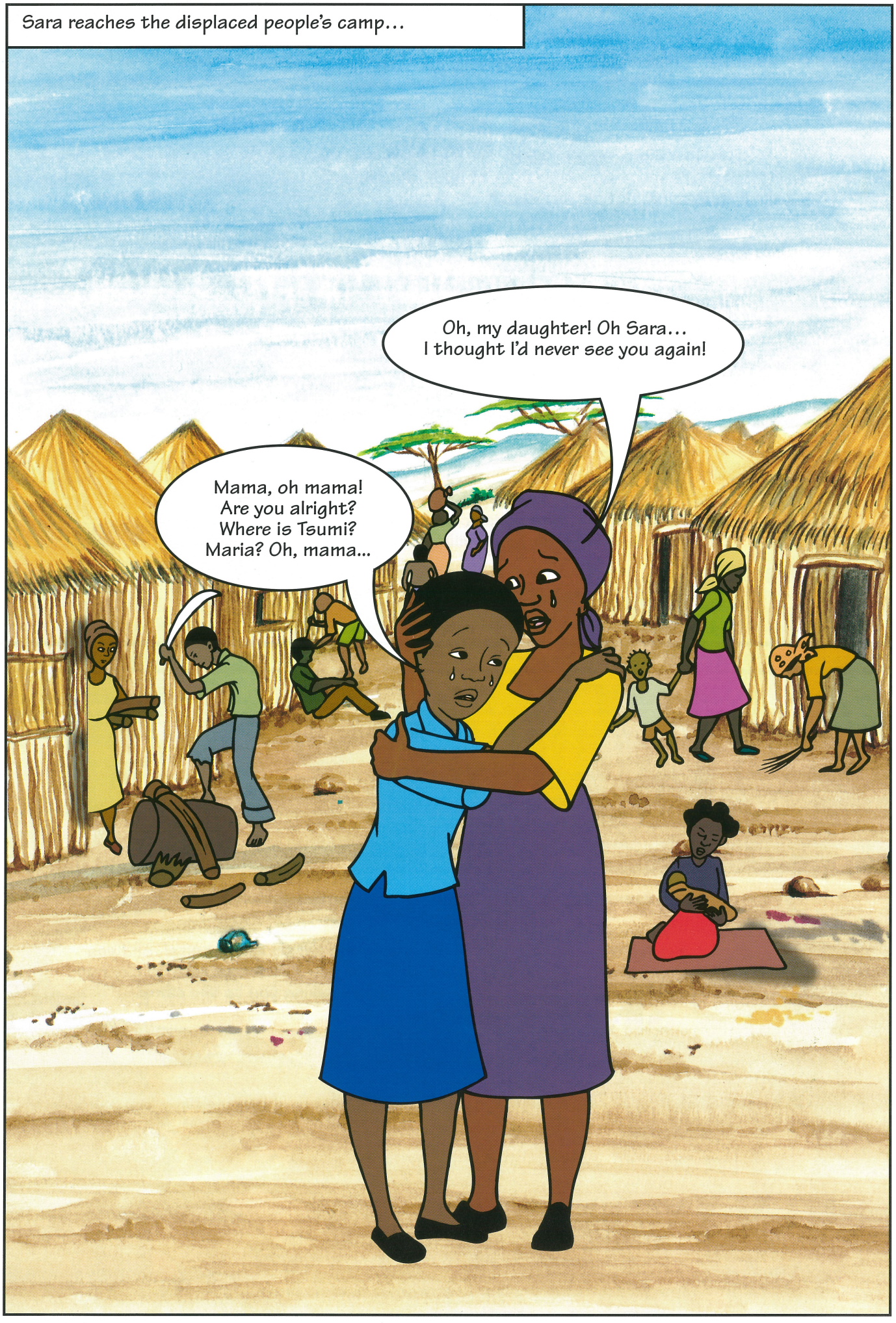
Soldiers from both sides have died in the cross fire. Some rebels now surrender.



What'll happen to him?

We'll take him to the barracks for medical treatment and questioning. Then we'll send him for counselling.

Where are you taking my friend?
We are taking her to the hospital, and you kids, we'll take you to the barracks to clear you before taking you to the camp.

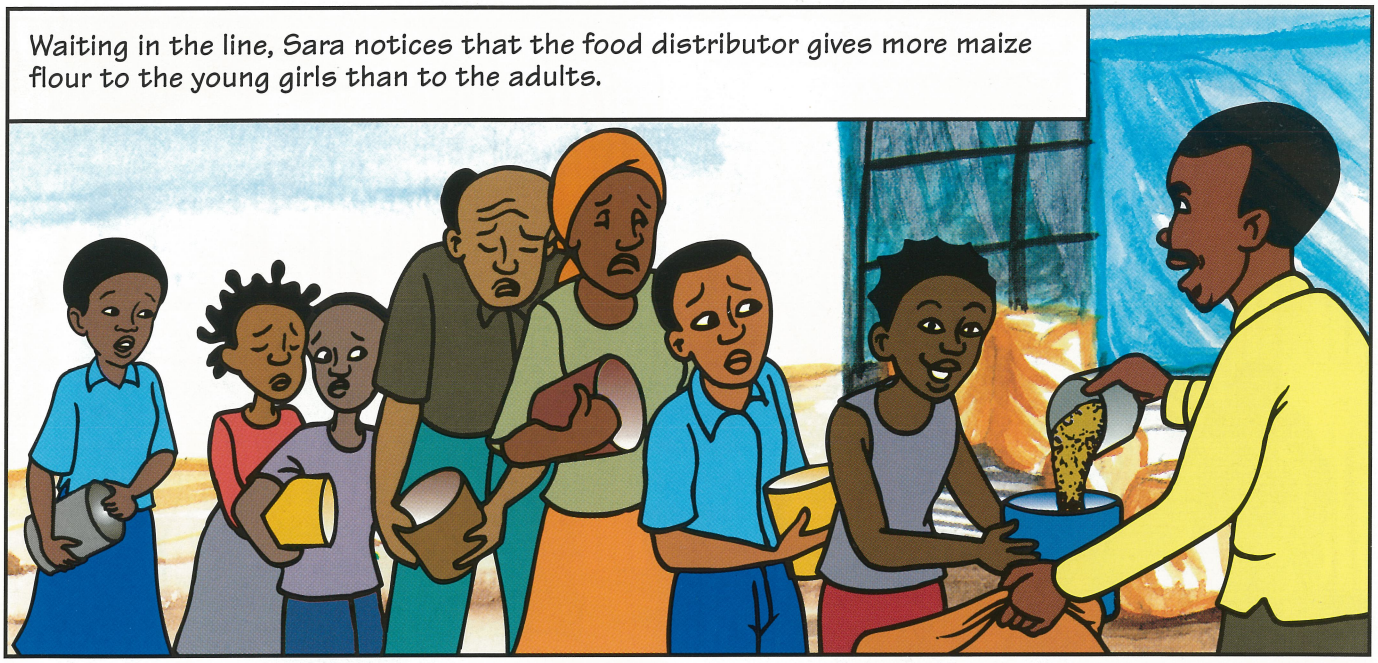

Sara reaches the displaced people's camp...
Oh, my daughter! Oh Sara...
I thought I'd never see you again!
Mama, oh mama!
Are you alright?
Where is Tsumi?
Maria? Oh, mama...

We are all okay, Sara. We survived! But grandma is in hospital. She was beaten badly.
Oh poor grandma! I want to see her. I have to find out about Maya as well.

I know, Sara. But are you alright?

Hearing the commotion, Sara's uncle comes out of the hut.
Welcome back, child. Your father has been informed. He's coming next week to see us.
Thank you, uncle.

I'll discuss with the elders and soon perform the cleansing ceremony for you.
Later...
Mama, I'm really starving. Is there some food?
Food is very scarce here. Everyone is hungry.
But let me get our ration card. I'll go and get some maize flour for the evening meal.
Maria, Sara's little sister, starts to cry.
Mama... Mama...
Mama, let me go. You take care of Maria.


Waiting in the line, Sara notices that the food distributor gives more maize flour to the young girls than to the adults.

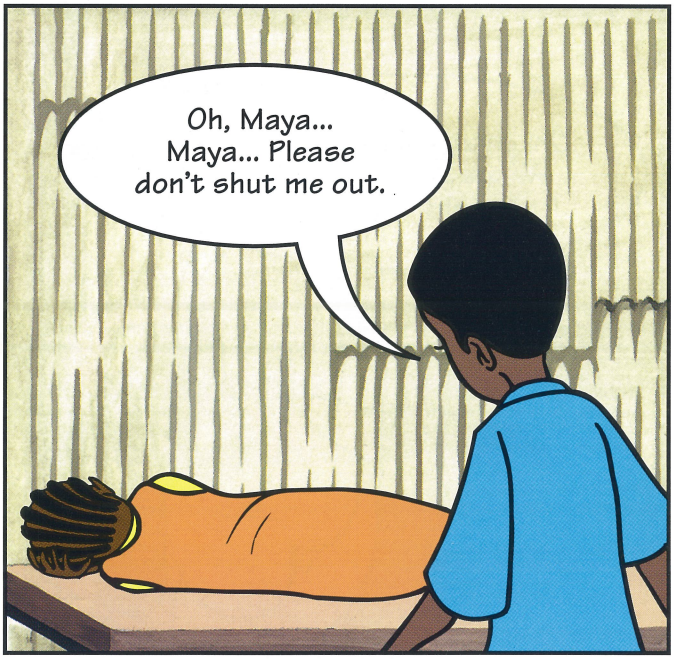
As Sara's turn comes...
My name is Isaac. What's yours, pretty one?
My name is Sara. My mother has sent me to get our evening ration.

And you can come back for more, eh!
Thank you.

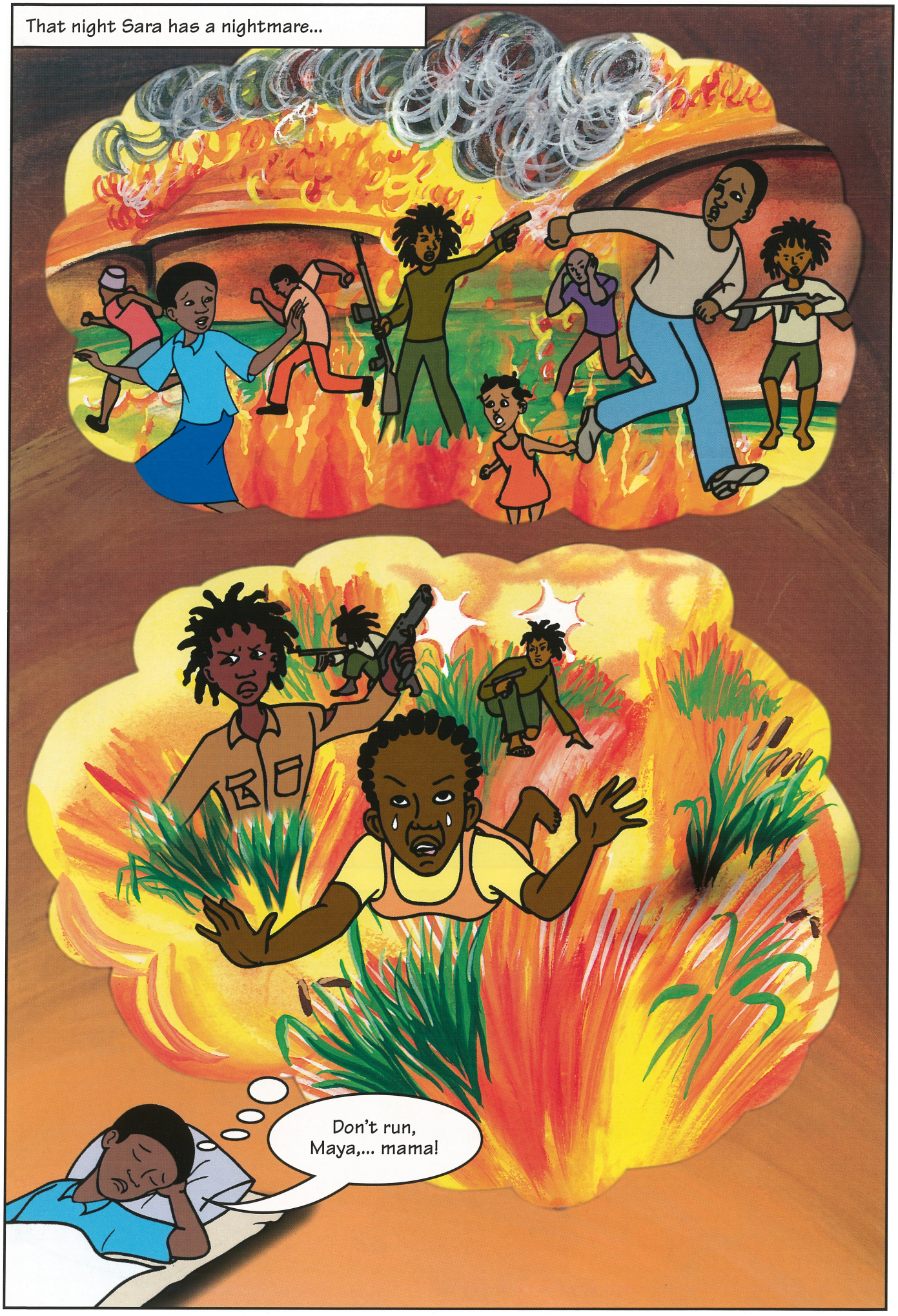
The next day Sara goes to visit her grandmother at the hospital.

Oh, Sara! You are here! I thought we had lost you!
Grandma! Are you alright?

I'm quite fine, child. We were so worried about you!
Oh! Grandma, Those rebels... our house... my friend, Maya...
Oh, child, we are safe now. We are alive! And Maya is right over there.
As Sara approaches, Maya turns her face to the wall.
Maya... Maya... it's me.



Sara returns to the camp, sad and thoughtful... she doesn't notice Isaac watching her.


That night Sara has a nightmare...
Don't run, Maya,... mama!

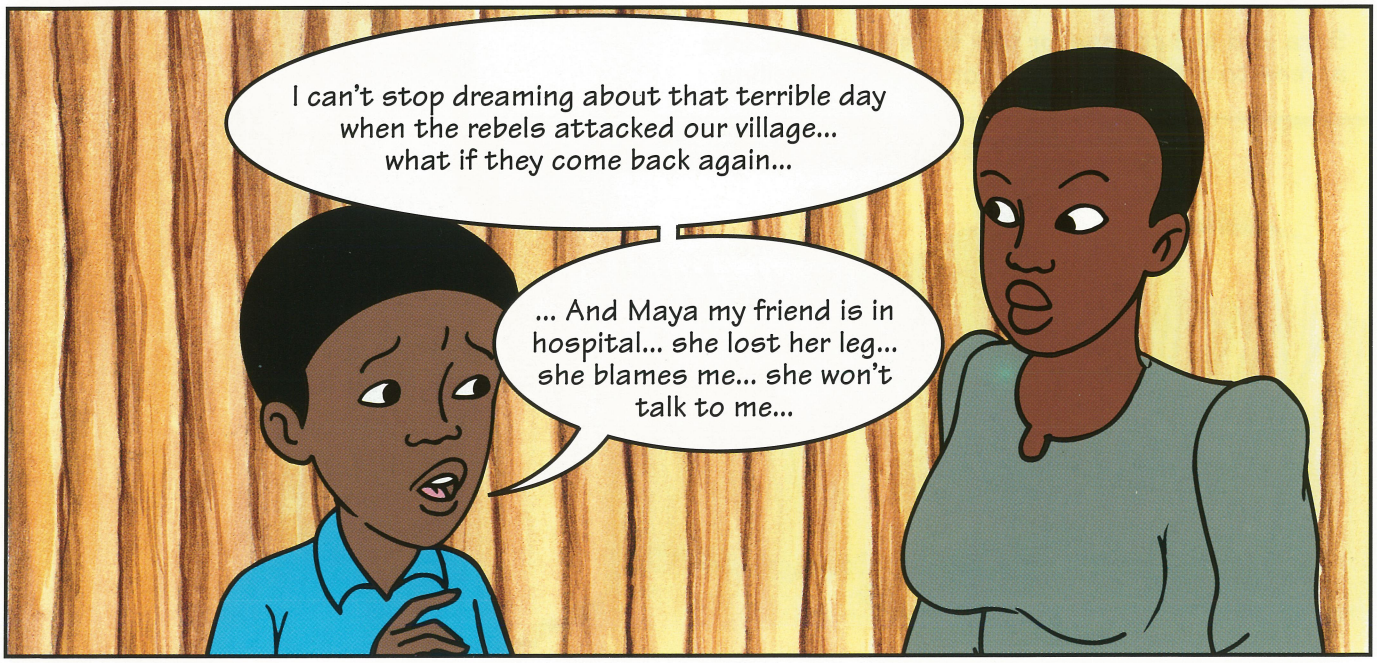
Mother rushes to her side...
Sara, wake up, you're having a bad dream.

Mama, I was calling you. Where were you? I was seeing the rebels... and Maya... Oh, mama, Maya blames me.

Shhhhhh! Everything will be okay, you'll see.

Sara continues to have nightmares, so her mother decides to take her to the counselling centre.

The counsellor takes Sara inside a room...



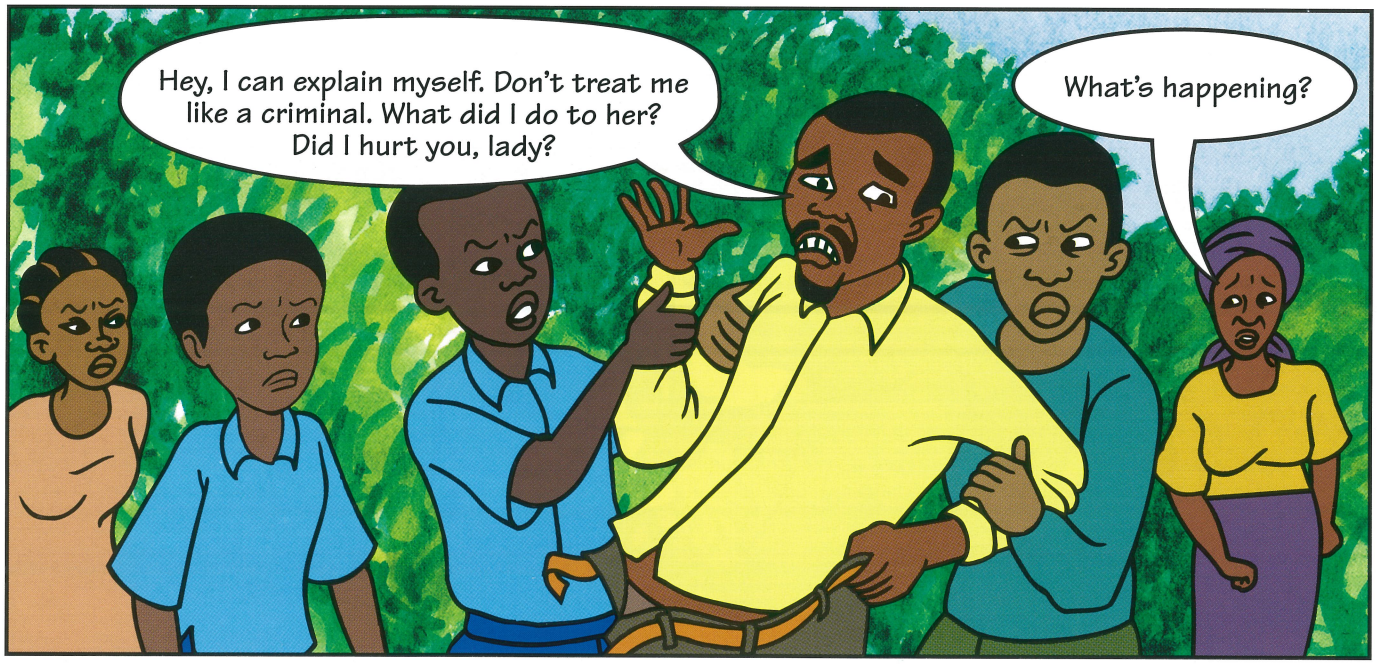
Sara, I understand how you feel. It takes time to heal.

Let's continue talking like this regularly for the next month to see how things go. Meanwhile, why don't you visit Maya in hospital again?

Sara and the counsellor talk for a long time. She agrees to a time to return for more counselling.

But, next afternoon, as Sara is coming back from the hospital...
Stop it, you! Sto... o... p...
I've got you this time... You always pretend not to understand. Are you a child?

The noise alerts people...
No! I said leave me alone!


Hey, I can explain myself. Don't treat me like a criminal. What did I do to her? Did I hurt you, lady?
What's happening?

It's that man, he tried to... he tried to rape me!
It's Isaac again, isn't it? Now he has turned his tricks on Sara.

He has been harassing every new girl who comes to the camp. Is that why you give more mugs of maize flour to the girls, eh?
Last year he made a girl pregnant and she commited suicide in the end. We should do something about it.
Really! Why didn't someone report him before?
Let's punish the scoundrel now!
Punish him! Punish him!
At that point the counsellor arrives.
Stop! Please listen to me! This is not the way to deal with a problem. We should not take justice into our own hands...

I think she's right. Let's take him to the local council of the camp.
I never tried to rape her...

Be quiet! You can tell that to the local council chairman.

Next day, at the hospital, Sara talks with grandma about Maya, who still refuses to speak to her.

Sara goes back to Maya...
Maya, it's me. The last three times I came, you were asleep. How are you feeling today?
Please Maya, how long do you think you'll do this to yourself? You need help, Maya.
I was suffering too but I'm seeing a counsellor. I feel much better.

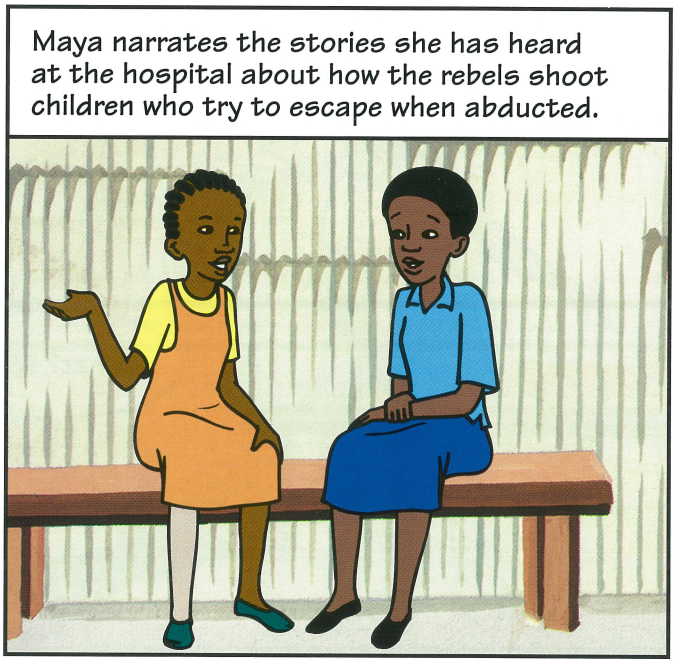
Sara comforts Maya for a long time...
Maya, I'll always be your friend.
I'm so afraid, Sara... I fear no one will ever love me with my one leg... and in school, the children will laugh at me.
I can't go back there. And of course, I won't have anywhere to stay. Grandpa is dead...
Oh, Maya! Don't worry now. You have me and Juma and all our families. We'll take care of you. Mama agrees. Don't you trust me?
Finally, Maya agrees to talk to a counsellor.

A few days later, Maya has some visitors...
Look who has come to see you!
We have good news for you. We have just learnt that your aunt has been living at another camp in the next village. She is willing to take care of you.
Really? I thought she had been killed by the rebels as well... I have not heard from her for a very long time!

Some days pass. Maya is still in the hospital.
Sara!
Sara, look! They've given me a new leg!
What? Who?
An NGO donated this to me.

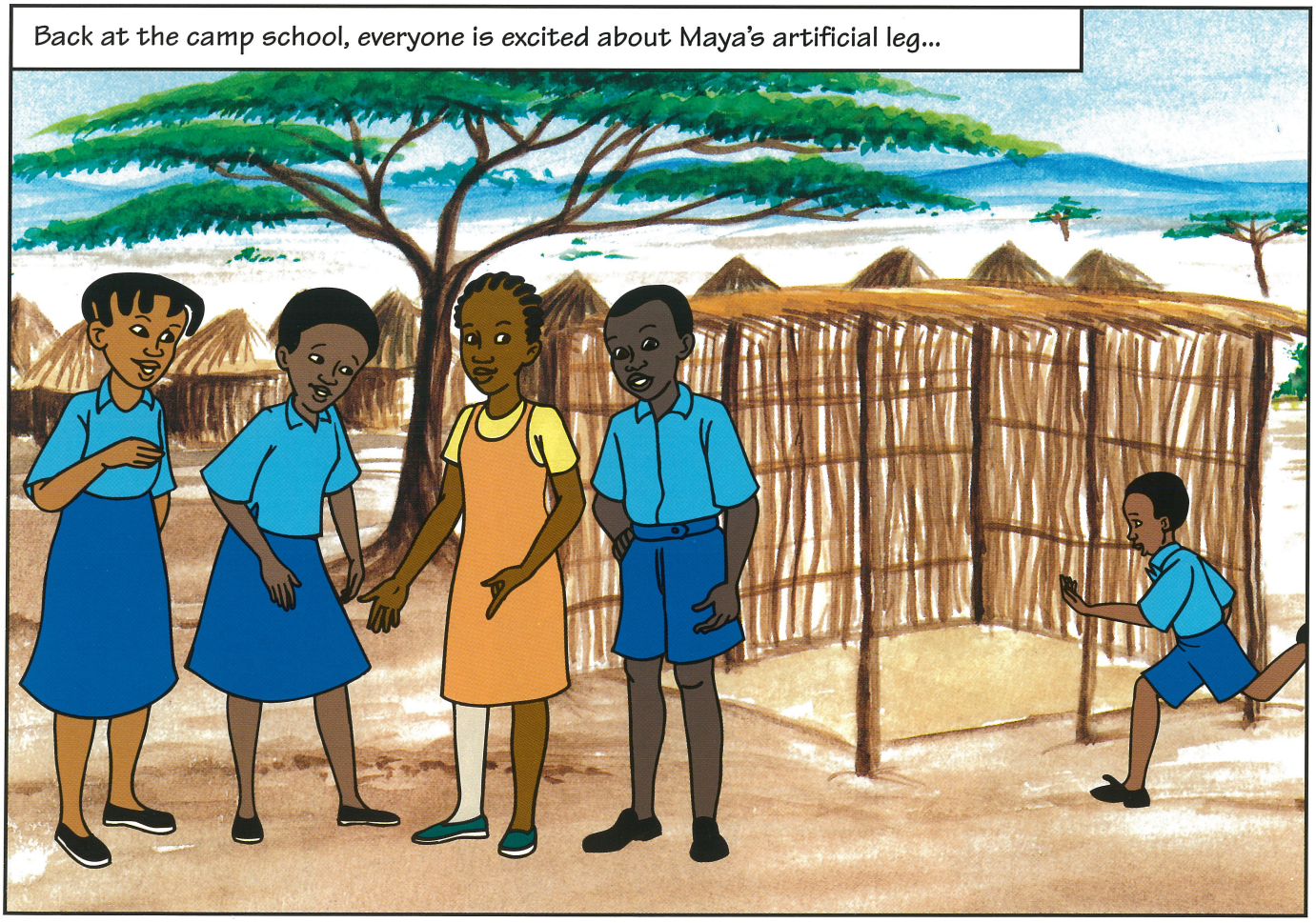
And Sara, I also want to thank you for saving my life!
What do you mean?

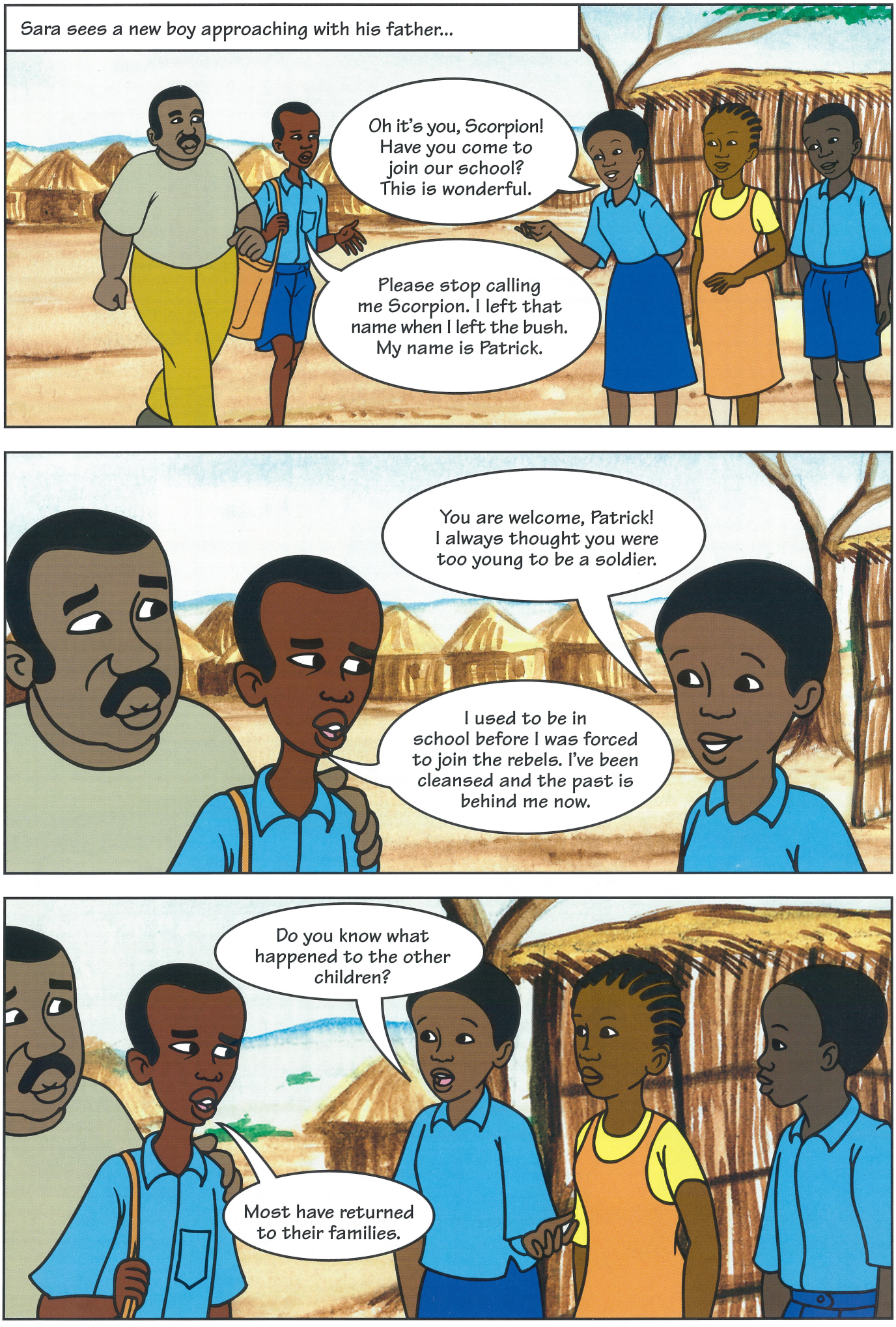
I was wrong to blame you.


Maya narrates the stories she has heard at the hospital about how the rebels shoot children who try to escape when abducted.

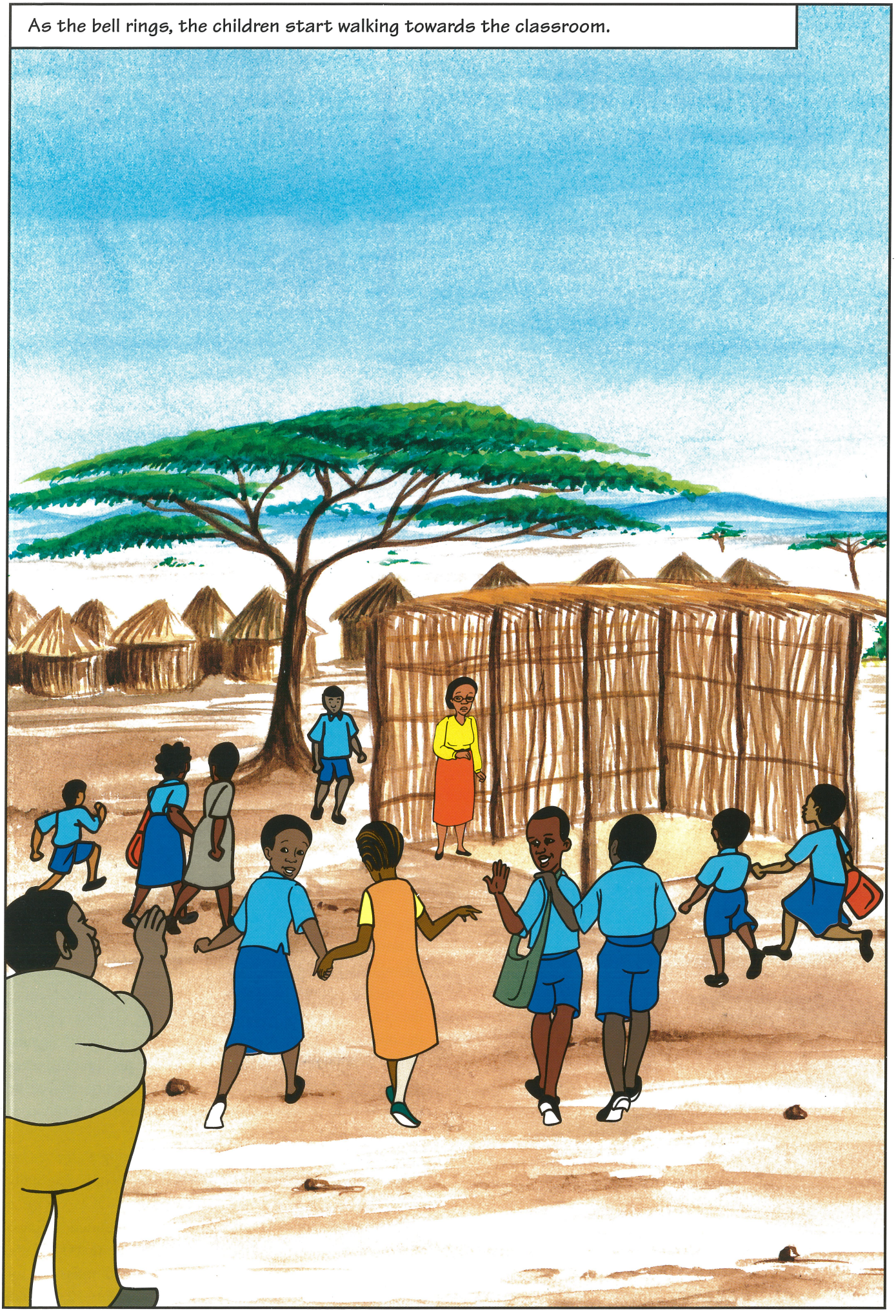
Sara, if you were not there, I would have rotted in the bush! Now I can go back to school.

... if it wasn't for you, I would have committed suicide!
Oh Maya, I'm happy we are friends again!


Back at the camp school, everyone is excited about Maya's artificial leg...


Sara sees a new boy approaching with his father...
Oh it's you, Scorpion! Have you come to join our school? This is wonderful.
Please stop calling me Scorpion. I left that name when I left the bush. My name is Patrick.
You are welcome, Patrick! I always thought you were too young to be a soldier.
I used to be in school before I was forced to join the rebels. I've been cleansed and the past is behind me now.
Do you know what happened to the other children?
Most have returned to their families.

As the bell rings, the children start walking towards the classroom.



Sara
Communication Initiative

USERS' GUIDE TO "SARA AND THE BOY SOLDIER"

BACKGROUND FOR PROGRAMMERS

"Children simply have no part in warfare.... Millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders but targets"- Graca Machel. In the past decade, two million children have died in armed conflicts and three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. The latest estimate shows that there are approximately 300,000 children fighting in conflicts around the world. Of those, almost half are in Africa. Today's wars are fought not just between states but within them, destroying social order, forcing people out of their homes; and making civilians victims of violence, torture, abuse and violation of all human rights.

"Conflicts, by their very nature, are always composed of competing parties who each believe their cause admirable, their use of violence justified and their military objectives second to no other's." However, war and organized violence is totally unacceptable. Children's rights can never be fully realized while they are affected by war. So, from the child's point of view, there are no winners in war. There are no "good-guys."

There are different types of armed conflicts:

National conflicts
- internationalized internal conflicts
- civil wars
- state violence against citizens
- violence against minorities
- civil disorders, disturbances
- tribal, ethnic, religious and racial conflict

International conflicts
- conventional wars
- wars with mass casualties of civilians

Wars of liberation
- non-international
- transcending national frontiers

Structural violence
- violence legitimized by State or Government

Casualty figures confirm that children, women and the elderly are the main victims of any conflict situations. In the 1980's, 85 percent of conflict-related deaths were civilian, as compared to 10 percent during the First World War. Abduction, killing, torture, arrest, detention, rape and physical abuse, psycho-social distress, slavery and forced recruitment in the military are commonly practiced in conflict situations. Globally, every year approximately US$ 1,000 billion is spent on military expenditures and more than 70 million people are engaged directly in military activities. Developing countries, where most of the current conflicts are taking place, are the target for 75 percent of the trade in arms. It is estimated that since World War II, there has been more than 150 major conflicts, 130 of which have been fought in developing countries.

In today's warfare, children are gradually playing more active roles. Children are easy to coerce, recruit and manage. In many countries, force is used as the means of recruiting children, including abduction. Voluntarily sign up, as a result of the glorification of war and poverty leading to lack of options, are also reasons for inclusion of children in the military. The Convention of the Rights of the Children (CRC) optional protocol clearly states that children below the age of 18 should not be recruited into the military.

According to the International Humanitarian Law applicable in armed conflicts: "parties to a conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants in order to spare civilian population and property. Neither the civilian population as such nor civilian persons shall be the object of attack. Attacks shall be directed solely against military objectives." Therefore, under no circumstances should war be glorified, and maximum efforts should be undertaken to protect civilian life and property.

As a direct effect of conflicts, millions of people all over the world are taking shelter in the refugee camps or in internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. At present, OCHA (Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations) estimates that there are approximately 20,000,000 IDPs, while UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) estimates that there are approximately 12,000,000

refugees. Life is difficult in such camps with minimum facilities and other weak protection systems. Corruption and abuse are common.

People around the world continue to search for ways and means to prevent armed conflicts. Some suggested ways include:

Promoting justice, equity, opportunity and basic services: development programmes that contribute to justice, equity, opportunity and basic services can help prevent armed conflicts. Respect and realization of Human Rights should be maintained in all circumstances, as conflict in itself constitutes an on-going series of human rights abuses.

Development and peace education: this includes dissemination of information about development problems and community action for social development. Also, it supports traditional non-violent approaches to conflict resolution.

Promoting a culture of peace: de-glorification of war as well as messages advocating peace should be promoted in public debate, media, educational texts, games, drama and toys.

Strengthening of legal protections: strengthening of local, regional and national laws pertaining to the protection of civilian life, especially that of children, as well as civilian property.

"Sara and the Boy Soldier," produced by UNICEF-ESARO's Programme Communication Section, is designed to promote children's right to life and maximum health, development and protection. The CRC proclaims that all children have right to be protected from all forms of violence (Art. 19), sexual exploitation (Art. 34), armed conflicts (Art. 38) and from torture, degrading treatment and deprivation of liberty (Art. 37). The CRC also demands rehabilitation of child war victims (Art. 39).

OBJECTIVES FOR FACILITATORS

This story has a personal appeal and educational value to be used with different groups and cultures for supporting processes which work towards peace, reconciliation and healing. With some adaptations, this story and the discussion guide can be used in any conflict situation arising out of civil disorder, ethnic, tribal, religious or racial conflicts. Research has shown that this story can be effectively used to:

- Initiate in-depth discussions among young people exposed to conflict situations, on the issues of coping with pain, loss, violence and starting the healing processes.
- Stimulate discussions among adolescents on the concepts of forgiveness, acceptance, and reconciliation within the existing situation.
- Initiate discussions in the communities to search for ways to prevent armed and civil conflict situations and to create a culture of peace.
- Create awareness in communities regarding "de-glorification" of war and on how to strengthen non-violent community responses to deal with any kind of armed conflict or civil disorder, tribal, ethnic and religious.
- Encourage young people to develop psycho-social life skills to enhance and disseminate ideas on tolerance and peace processes for community development.

THE STORY IS AVAILABLE IN

- Comic book format
- Flip Chart format

In the future, it may be developed into an animated film.

BEFORE YOU START

Tell the group that you will hold a discussion on the story. During the session, you can either divide participants into teams of two for reading the story together or distribute the comic books to all to read, one day prior to the discussion session if you have enough copies. Consider the situation of your group. Have some of them been personally involved in traumatic incidents? If so, this story may raise strong emotions in the group, and it may be necessary to offer one-to-one counseling after the discussion. If you don't have experience in counseling, it would be good to involve someone who can assist you in counseling group members, if necessary.

BEGIN WITH QUESTIONS ON THE STORY: FOR ALL GROUPS

- Did you like the story?
- Can someone tell us what the story is about?
- Who are the people in this story?
- Who do you think is the main character of the story? Why?
- Which characters did you like best in the story? Why?
- Which ones didn't you like? Why?

You may ask specific questions on the comprehension of the story:

- How did the story begin?
- What happens when Sara, Maya and Juma are on their way to the well?
- Who are the rebels?
- What did the rebels do in Sara's village?
- Why did Juma's father want to continue marching with the rebels?
- How did the children escape?
- What happens to Maya while trying to escape? Who rescues her?
- Who takes Maya to the hospital?
- Where does Sara find her mother? What's the situation there?

- Who is Isaac? What does he do?
- What happens when Sara meets with Maya at the hospital? Why does Maya refuse to talk to her? Why does she blame Sara?
- What kind of nightmares (bad dreams) does Sara have? Why does she have nightmares?
- Where does Sara's mother take her after she had nightmares?
- What happens there?
- What does the female counselor advise Sara?
- What was Grandma's advice to Sara regarding Maya's attitude towards her?
- What happens to Sara when one afternoon she was returning to the camp from the hospital?
- What does Juma do to help Sara?
- Can you recall the story about Isaac told to the group by the camp woman?
- What happens to Isaac in the end?
- How did Maya react to losing her leg?
- What is the good news given to Maya by Juma and Ms Matata (at the end of the story)?
- Did Maya reconcile with Sara? What did she say to Sara when she reconciled with her?
- What happens to Scorpion?

REFLECTING ON ISSUES IN OUR OWN LIVES: ASK ALL

- Do you know of similar incidents as described in this story?
- Who are the targets of abduction?
- How can one avoid being abducted?
- What could be the adolescents' reactions to their community's or parents' failure to protect them?
- What happens in captivity?
- Are all children (girls and boys) sexually abused in captivity?
- What happens if girls get pregnant? Who helps them at childbirth?
- What happens to babies born to "child-soldier" mothers?
- Are all abducted girls and boys trained as soldiers?
- What are they supposed to do as soldiers?
- Are you aware of laws that prohibit recruitment of children in the armed forces? Who told you about it?
- Are you aware of laws that are supposed to protect children from all affects of war? Do you know that these apply to both government and rebel soldiers?
- How can these children escape from captivity? Why do they escape? What happens if they get caught while trying to escape?
- How are the escapees received by government forces/authorities? What kind of procedures do they have to go through before they are "cleared?" Do they face any problems?
- Are people always forced to join the rebels? If not, what conditions encourage them to join the rebels?
- Are people forced to join the government military? Do governments sometimes forcibly recruit under-age people?
- Is it easy to come back from the bush and begin a regular life? If no, why not?
- What is the attitude of the community about children who come back from the bush?
- What kind of support do the children need to begin a normal life? Do they get such support? Who provides it? Who should provide it?
- What particular support is there for escapees or those who return from the bush?
- Who lives in the internally displaced people's camps (IPDs)? Do people go there voluntarily? Kindly elaborate.
- Are people aware that they have rights to life, property and freedom of movement? What can they do when such rights are violated in conflict situations by rebels, as well as the government authorities?
- What's the situation in the IDP and refugee camps?
- Are women and girls sexually abused in the IDP/refugee camps? Is "sex for food" a common thing in such camps?
- What can be done to stop such behaviour?
- What could be the community's response to armed conflicts, civil disorders, ethnic and tribal conflicts?
- Does abduction or displacement mean that life should stop?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS:

QUESTIONS FOR GIRLS

- Do you like Sara? Why/Why not?
- Are there girls like Sara in real life?
- How do you think Sara handled the situation regarding Maya? Do you think such behaviour is common?
- What do you think of Maya? Are there girls like her in real life?
- Do you know of anyone who has lost their limbs during conflicts?
- How do they cope? Do they need help to heal mentally and emotionally? How long does it take to heal? Who helps them?
- Do such children go back to school and lead a normal life? What's the community's attitude towards them?
- What happens to girls who lose their parents or guardians in conflict situations?
- Are there any community structures to help such girls? If not, what can the community do to help them?
- Are you aware of the consequences of sexual abuse or sexual relationships? What can happen?
- (Probe) Are you aware of any Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)? Could you name any? Have you heard of HIV and AIDS?
- How can one get STIs, and HIV and AIDS?
- Do you think sexual abuse in captivity can lead to HIV

and AIDS? (abducted means in captivity)
- Do abducted girls get raped when they surrender to the government forces/authorities? What happens? Do they report such incidents?
- Are there any structures that can help to bring such offenders to justice? Does the community have any role in resisting such acts of violence?
- What can girls and women do to resist sexual abuse at the IDP camps?
- How can people like Isaac be stopped? Should "mob justice" be used to punish such people?
- Do the authorities play any role in bringing sex-offenders to justice?
- Are you aware of laws against recruiting soldiers below the age of 18? What do you think of such laws?

QUESTIONS FOR BOYS

- Do you think girls can do what Sara did in this story?
- What do you think of Juma? Is it possible to have such boy-girl relationships as you find in the story?
- If Maya were your sister, what would you have done further to help her to cope with her pain and loss?
- What happens to boys who lose their limbs in conflict situations? What's the community's attitude towards such children? Is there any mechanism to support them? What kind of support?
- How do boys /adolescents regard a profession in the military?
- Do you have any idea regarding life in the bush? Are there many female child soldiers as well? Are they treated equally like the male child soldiers?
- What makes the forcibly-recruited child soldiers continue to stay in the bush?
- Are there any structures that can help boys who escape from the bush through a process of reconciliation, acceptance and rehabilitation?
- Do such boys go back to school? If not, why not?
- Is it easy/difficult for them to get jobs? What kind of jobs do they do?
- Do you know if any of the children who escaped have gone back to the bush again? What could be the reasons?
- What could the community or the authorities do to prevent such incidents?
- Are you aware that there are laws against recruiting soldiers below the age of 18? What do you think of such laws?
- What do you think of Isaac? Are there many people like him?
- What should be done to resist or stop such people?
- How should people behave in incidents of civil disorder?
- How should they resolve differences or handle offensive incidents in the absence of support from proper authorities or the legal system?
- What could be the role of adolescents, especially boys, in mediating peace or establishing a process of peace creation?
- How can one break out of the cycle of revenge?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

- Why do you think children are recruited in the military?
- How can the community protect their children and themselves in armed and civil disorders, ethnic and tribal differences?
- What can be done to help children to cope with violence in armed conflict situations? Who should be involved?
- Is it possible to start a culture of tolerance and peace creation? How can that be done? Who should take the lead?
- What could be the community's response to violence in armed conflict situations?
- What structures exist in the community to support children and their families who have been affected by conflict?
- Do parents and children talk about these things? How can parents establish communication with children, especially with those who have returned from the bush, in order to enhance the healing process? Is this possible?
- What should be the role of parents and the community towards people who engage in anti-social behaviour including sex-offences?
- What could be the parents' role to protect their children from sexual abuse in the IDP/refugee camps?

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

The following are suggestions for activities which will improve understanding of this story and how it relates to existing situations of adolescents in their own communities. The activities focus on developing their life skills, like critical thinking, decision making, coping with stress and emotions, inter personal relationships, empathy, negotiation skills, etc., and the role of parents and the community in supporting such development in young people.

A. Group Discussion

Let the group discuss the story amongst themselves. One member can facilitate the discussion, allowing others to join in with their opinions. This can be done in groups of six to ten. In the emergency areas, the groups can be formed with children living in the IDP camps or refugee camps. The facilitator should remain available to assist in mediating the discussion, if necessary.

B. Drawings

The group members can draw pictures of their favourite section of the story and use it as a discussion point. They can elaborate on why they like that part, what lessons can be learnt from it, etc. Chose this activity depending on the age of the participants. This activity can be used as a therapy for affected children.

C. Survey

Ask the group to conduct an informal survey in their community or IDP camps to find out how many children have returned from the bush, whether they are attending school, if they need support for rehabilitation and reconciliation. The groups can connect children in need of psycho-social support with agencies who are involved in providing counseling.

D. Drama

Create a drama or role play on some of the themes and situations in Sara's story, to show how girls and boys can cope with stress in conflict situations, think critically to initiate a process of peace within the community. It can also show how parents can be supportive in helping children through their trauma and ordeal.

Show how the community deals positively with ethnic differences and engages in tolerant behaviour enhancing a culture of peace. Show how girls can build their self-esteem and reject sexual advances in the camp situations. Show how communities can be pro-active in establishing community managed infra-structures to support child war victims who have lost their parents or have been disabled. Ask group members to act out different roles.

Ask questions: How did you feel when you acted as someone else? How did you feel about the situation in which you found yourself in the play? Did it feel real? Ask other members to react to the play.

E. Brainstorming

Brainstorm on a list of actions to be undertaken:

- **for parents and teachers** to mobilize the community for a collaborative peaceful response to armed conflict/civil disorders, including ethnic or tribal clashes, and to promote creation of peace by publicly advocating against messages which falsely glorify war; to devise mechanisms to rehabilitate child victims of conflicts; to build non-violent community resistance to sexual abuse of girls and women in the IDP or refugee camps.

- **for young people** to learn to practice tolerance in cases of differences; to apply their negotiating skills to resolve conflicts within their peer group, family and community ; to communicate and engage opponents in discussions to solve problems; to exhibit self-esteem and assertiveness in cases of sexual harassment and report incidences of sexual exploitation to their parents, school or to agencies (if accessible) that work on children's/women's rights issues; to learn to show empathy to others, especially to child war victims and help them in the process of healing and reconciliation.

- **for adults, young people and the community** to create awareness regarding the rights of the civilian to life, property, freedom of movement, respect and dignity. To set up supportive mechanisms for those traumatized by war/or armed conflicts. They can negotiate with authorities or local leaders and rehabilitation agencies for improved living conditions in the IDP or refugee camps, including proper food distribution, protection from abuse and exploitation, and schooling for children; to set up a support system to get the community to accept the children affected by conflict, and assist in their recovery process.

F. Community involvement

The group could share the ideas of Sara's story with their community through some of the following activities. They can perform these in public, with friends, women's groups, in IDP/refugee camps, in churches and other religious and community venues:

- A brief drama or skit with alternative endings, followed by discussions.
- Story telling with alternative endings and discussions.
- Debates on the issues in the stories.
- Puppet shows with Sara characters.
- Songs, dances, poems and games on the themes of the story.

Some of the activities can be undertaken on an open stage so that more people can watch and participate in discussions. You can think of other activities to popularize the themes of the story and to create awareness among people.

You may want to form a club, committee or forum for girls and boys where they can discuss various issues on how to cope with stress and trauma. Such fora can serve as a resource center and a support system where young people can share experiences and make some joint decisions regarding how to assist those who need support to heal. In groups, the girls and boys should be able to discuss how they can acquire self-esteem and confidence to cope effectively in adverse situations, and resist unwanted sexual advances. These fora can also promote a culture of non-violent problem solving and conflict resolution. School teachers and NGO workers, who are involved in human rights and women's issues, can be active members of such committees/fora. They can discuss with the community how to build a supportive environment for young people's development.

G. Discussing results

After a few weeks, the group can meet to discuss:

- What actions were taken at home and in the community?
- What were people's reactions?
- What activities were successful? What problems arose?
- What further role can the community play in establishing a culture of tolerance and peace, supporting victims of armed conflict and evolving a caring environment in camp situations and recovering communities, as well as in promoting the rights of people to live with dignity and freedom.

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Rebels are approaching the village. One day, when Sara and her friends are fetching water, rebels capture them and begin to march them home. Sara is terrified! Then, government troops arrive and the group gets caught in crossfire. Soldiers, rebels and some of Sara's friends are killed. Sara gets home safely but she begins to have terrible nightmares. When she goes to visit her grandmother in hospital she finds someone who can help.

Sara and the Boy Soldier is part of a series of exciting comic books about the adventures of Sara and the issues that affect her and other girls in Africa. Read them all and look out for the posters and videos.

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ISBN 0-636-048-152
9 780636 048157