

# Stolen Futures

The reintegration of children affected by  
armed conflict

Submission to the ten-year review of the 1996 Machel study on  
the impact of armed conflict on children.



**Save the Children**

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

ALP	accelerated learning programme
CAAC	children affected by armed conflict
CAAF	children associated with armed forces
CAAFG	children associated with armed forces and groups
CAAFAG	children associated with armed forces and groups
CAFF	children associated with fighting forces
CONADER	Commission Nationale de la Démobilisation et Réinsertion (Democratic Republic of Congo)
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPC	child protection committee
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
HEA	household economy approach
IANSA	International Action Network on Small Arms
IDDRS	International Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
IDP	internally displaced person
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka)
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
MPCI	Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSRSG	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
PSD	private sector development
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SLA	Sri Lankan Army
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
SRSRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force



# Executive summary

The International Save the Children Alliance (hereafter Save the Children) has worked with children affected by armed conflict since its inception in 1919. Since then, we have developed extensive expertise in dealing with children who have been unlawfully recruited or used by armed forces and groups.<sup>1</sup> We are therefore well placed to contribute to a review of the developments that have taken place in terms of programming, policy and legal frameworks since Graça Machel compiled the first report on children affected by armed conflict in 1996.

Save the Children and our partners have conducted numerous evaluations and reviews of programming for children associated with armed forces and groups (CAAFG) in order to improve tools and programming and to make an informed contribution to the development of international law and policy. This report pulls together the key findings and conclusions from a variety of situations in which children have been associated with armed forces and groups and have then been released and reintegrated into their families or communities. The research addresses children who have been through formal disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes as well as those who have gone directly into their or another community.

The international legal and policy frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict have developed significantly since the 1996 Machel report. Most notable among these are the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the International Criminal Court Statute, UN Security Council resolutions (both those addressing children and armed conflict thematically and those which include specific reference to children in addressing geographical situations) and jurisprudence emerging from international and hybrid tribunals.

This burgeoning of international law has been mirrored, of late, by internationally negotiated and endorsed policy, particularly regarding the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The Paris Principles and the International Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) provide standards for engagement in all areas, including programme approaches. It is to be hoped that the Paris Principles and the IDDRS modules will form the basis of all processes and programming for the release and reintegration of children. Derived from the UNCRC and other international law and agreed standards, the Paris Principles in particular deserve to be internationally recognised and universally applied.

Despite all of the above, children's lives across the globe continue to be blighted by armed violence. Parties to armed conflicts continue to use children to fight adult wars for adults' gain. Impunity for egregious violations of children's rights continues to be the norm with warlords often using the threat of prosecution as a reason not to disarm. At the same time, we see children – many of whom have been associated with armed forces and groups – involved in other forms of organised violence such as violent gangs.

## Key findings and conclusions

### **Inclusive, community-based programming**

We have consistently found that programming is most effective where it is inclusive of other conflict-affected children. This avoids stigmatising children, and reduces the likelihood of reprisals (by the party they were associated with or others). Importantly, inclusive programming significantly reduces the level and likelihood of resentment against children which can easily arise where they appear to be rewarded for their actions during conflict, or to be singled out in ways that other, equally vulnerable and traumatised children

are not. Moreover, ensuring that children can access benefits without having to identify themselves as ex-combatants means that many otherwise invisible children associated with armed forces and groups are able to access services.

At the same time, inclusive programming should be prepared to address issues that may be specific to these children, including family tracing and reunification, mediation between individual children and their families, and the provision of care and assistance for children with particular issues such as trauma, disability or sexual abuse.

The Accelerated Learning Programme in Southern Sudan provides a useful example of the benefits of linking reintegration programming with wider child protection programmes. Here, in collaboration with the children's DDR programme, eight years of primary education were condensed into four for older children who had missed out on years of schooling. Widespread community support meant that, as well as children associated with armed forces and groups, a large number of girls who would otherwise have remained illiterate and innumerate managed to access the programme.

A children's rights approach to programming – such as that outlined in the Paris Principles – accepts that children are complete human beings, with a multitude of experiences and identities. Programming that addresses only one experience (eg, that of being an ex-child soldier, or a child mother) threatens to ignore the range of rights to which children are entitled. It also needs to be emphasised that adult solutions are not always appropriate to children's situations, for example, issuing cash benefits to children, an approach that is widely used for the reintegration of demobilised adults. If the Paris Principles were universally applied, this practice would stop.

### **Ensuring successful reintegration**

We believe that the most useful indicators of successful reintegration are provided by children themselves and their communities. Children identify safety, acceptance, being valued and having a future as central

to their reintegration. They identify education, vocational skills training and otherwise being equipped to be constructive members of their community as essential for their longer-term well-being. Not all children experience returning to their families as positive. The community may have changed, the child may feel they no longer 'fit' into the community, or he or she may be rejected for reasons that existed pre-recruitment or because of acts committed during the conflict. It is important to recognise and plan for these potential difficulties and to support community initiatives that address these issues.

Education (formal or informal) and skills training can make a significant difference to a child's chances of successful reintegration. Even where children are reluctant to go back to formal education, they want to learn skills that will enable them to support themselves. They also want to make a positive contribution and to be valued for doing so. While not detracting from the fact that recruitment and use of children is a human rights violation and a war crime, many children will have learned valuable skills and gained in confidence while associated with an armed force or group. It is important that this is used as a basis for future learning once they go back to civilian life.

To be effective, vocational training and associated income-generation initiatives need to be based on stringent and rigorous market, situational and gender analyses. Children may express a desire to learn skills for which there is little demand, or be otherwise unrealistic about their post-training opportunities. Other children and their families may consider the training primarily as a protective environment and be less interested in the livelihood opportunities it offers.

Successful reintegration is also dependent, in the longer term, on effective economic regeneration and growth. Analysis of Save the Children's experiences in skills and vocational training interventions shows that the positive psychological and social impact of these initiatives is very high. However, meeting the objective of economic survival can be more difficult in certain post-conflict settings. While these are complex areas



outside the scope of this paper, it is important to highlight the need for donors to give early consideration to issues of economic growth in post-conflict situations in order to ensure that children who have left armed forces and groups have a chance for a dignified future.

### **Special consideration for girls**

While the experiences, rights and needs of girls should be considered across all programming for children associated with armed forces and groups, there are particular considerations that need to be addressed, as girls may have faced gender-based discrimination during their recruitment or use and within the communities to which they return. It is important to avoid perpetuating any such discrimination during programming. For instance, many girls will have been subjected to sexual violence during their recruitment and use, often resulting in them having their own babies, with associated problems of early pregnancy and complications at birth. Moreover, these children may themselves face discrimination, be without documentation/identity and suffer from the poor parenting of their equally vulnerable mothers. Further research and policy development is needed to ensure that this does not result in yet another lost generation.

Girls may have joined armed groups in order to avoid gender-based violence or other discrimination at home or in their community. They may be reluctant to return to this negative environment. In their best interests, their experiences and own vision for their future should be incorporated into programming.

Girls, particularly, may be invisible in formal DDR programming because they lack information about their eligibility, because their commanders hold them back or because they are afraid of stigma and assumptions that they have been sexually abused. Girls are more likely, therefore, to end up in hazardous situations such as child prostitution and sexual exploitation and less likely to access education or training benefits. It is important, therefore, for programmes to address any obstacles that may prevent girls from coming forward; it is beholden on the agencies to make efforts to find and help these girls.

### **The impact of insecurity on programming**

Of all the constraints that prevent agencies from keeping their promises to children, continuing insecurity is perhaps the greatest. Key activities – monitoring children, educational programmes to give their lives a constructive shape, the prevention of re-recruitment and protection by an international presence – are all jeopardised when access is restricted by ongoing fighting or banditry. Nevertheless, even when agencies are prevented from working directly in an area, they have a responsibility to conduct co-ordinated, robust advocacy with parties to the armed conflict on behalf of children. This analysis presents a great deal of evidence of ongoing low-level conflict in areas where peace agreements have been secured. Unless the provisions of these peace agreements are upheld and stability is restored, we will continue to find it very difficult to keep our promises to children.

### **Funding issues**

In response to the most urgent imperative of achieving peace, donors are rightly enthusiastic about funding disarmament and demobilisation. Reintegration efforts are funded more slowly, less predictably and often by different departments within the same donors. Save the Children has found reintegration programmes to be funded on an ‘on again, off again’ basis that is disruptive to the community and results in high staff turnover and lack of continuity of programming. Child protection agencies continue to make the case to donors that the successful reintegration of children needs to be longer term, predictable and sufficient.

Child reintegration is different from the reintegration efforts within adult DDR programmes and so the responses, including funding, also need to be different. The need for inclusive, community-based programming as described above is central to the success of children’s reintegration; it can only be effective with adequate, flexible and responsive funding. The key message here is that, at all stages of programming, including the planning stages, agencies and their donor partners need to take account of the fact that the successful reintegration of children does not fit into defined and often short time-periods of

emergency relief assistance, or the normal approaches of programming that are defined with development or reconstruction funding.

### **Peace processes**

The unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups is a human rights violation and, where the children are under 15, constitutes a war crime. The release and reintegration of children, therefore, should not wait for peace processes to start or for peace agreements to be finalised. On the contrary, children's release and reintegration should be included at all stages of peace negotiations and in the final text of peace agreements. The earlier this inclusion takes place, the less controversial it is and it may also provide a negotiating opportunity for parties to the armed conflict who wish to be seen to be doing the 'right thing' for children. Children are often the victims of violations of peace agreements. Mechanisms that are set up to monitor these agreements, therefore, need to focus on children's experience.

### **Co-ordination**

Early and clear co-ordination of child protection actors can have a significant impact on reintegration efforts for children. It means that agencies speak with one voice in their advocacy for children's release and that programmes are designed and implemented in a similar way. Co-ordination includes rationalising decisions such as the age of entitlement to programming and the provision of material benefits,

as well as providing clear lines of accountability for these decisions. It also includes co-ordination with adult DDR programmes to ensure that the needs of dependent children of adult combatants are adequately met and that children are not left out of appropriate programming by being wrongly classified.

### **Implementation of agreed standards**

The Paris Principles provide a comprehensive set of guidance for all concerned with children who have been associated with armed forces and groups. In order to ensure their universal application, we believe that a three-pronged approach is needed. First, at the operational level, there needs to be high-level insistence of implementation wherever there is a UN or international NGO presence. Second, a 'roll-out' programme can complement this across regions, including national and regional meetings to publicise the Principles and to obtain governmental and civil society endorsement. Lastly, at the political level, the key bodies of the UN – the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly – need to be mobilised to ensure that these Principles are at the centre of all resolutions and programme activities, as appropriate.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> Armed forces or groups are defined according to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

# I Introduction

Save the Children welcomes the call for an assessment of the progress made and the challenges remaining since the 1996 Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children. The international community now has a key opportunity to assess how it can better protect children from the negative impacts of armed conflict, and how it can enhance children's participation in building lasting peace. To this end, we undertook an analysis of our programmes that deal with reintegration of children who have been associated with armed forces and groups, looking at outcomes and impact. When working with children affected by armed conflict, it is most appropriate to take a broad approach, including trafficked children, children returning after displacement and separated children. But we have chosen to focus on the reintegration of children who have been associated with armed forces and groups in this report for the following reasons:

- Despite all the progress made in legal frameworks, policy, mechanisms and commitments made to children, many issues remain outstanding and unresolved.
- Standards and lessons applied to children associated with armed forces and groups are frequently ignored in order to meet priorities that do not relate to the protection of children.
- Save the Children's direct, extensive experience working with children who have been associated with armed forces and groups gives us a comparative advantage in this area. Our partners, field offices and headquarters have conducted numerous reviews, evaluations and analyses of programmes for the reintegration of children. We have, therefore, learned much and are able to identify those areas where standards are not applied or where children's protection is compromised.

This paper is a result of that research and analysis. It describes the key issues identified by Save the Children agencies and our partners, using direct quotes from children and their communities where possible. Our aim is to outline some of the main findings regarding the reintegration of these children into civilian life and to identify the major challenges the international community still faces as we strive towards more effective programming for and with children affected by armed conflict.

The paper addresses programming issues as well as issues that are more institutional, including the co-ordination of services and accountability for decision-making. It briefly examines some of the major constraints on programming for the reintegration of children, including continuing insecurity, and addresses funding issues that often have a negative impact on programming.

## 2 Defining successful reintegration

Successful reintegration is more than the process of children returning to their families and communities. The challenge is to identify the means for ensuring that reintegration is a positive experience for children and their communities, one that is sustainable and that contributes to building peace. We believe that reintegration works at two levels: for the individual child and family, it is a process that rebuilds an emotional trust between the child, the family and the community, and provides opportunities for the child's education, increased security and an economic means of survival for the family. At the community level, it is a process promoting stability, peace and security. The following definitions – the result of the collective knowledge and experience of numerous child protection agencies and national governments – reflect this understanding.

The document *Interagency guidelines for developing reintegration programmes*<sup>2</sup> defines reintegration as:

*...the process through which girls and boys, their families and community members are enabled to restore or establish sustained family and social attachments and community links leading to mutual acceptance, which were either disrupted or prevented from developing due to conflict-related events.*

The Paris Principles define reintegration as:

*...the process by which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation. Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.*

We believe it is fundamental for children and their caregivers to define what is needed for “successful” reintegration in any given situation. While these situations often have much in common (eg, acceptance by family members and community, enrolment in education, meaningful vocational training), children's needs and hopes may differ; it is crucial that they are allowed to give their views and that these are taken into account.

Children in Sierra Leone<sup>3</sup> described what they want from reintegration: “*To be reunited with family and community*”. “*To go back to your family or community and live with them after the war*” (16-year-old boy, separated). They describe care and love in the family: “*Not only being together, but if they take care of you*” (13-year-old girl, ex-soldier). They value acceptance and active involvement in the community: “*No more grumble, no more harassment, and no more ton det [reprisals]. Work together with them and share fun with one another*” (15-year-old boy, ex-soldier). They wish not to be judged: “*Teachers are very judgemental of us on the basis of what we were involved in*” (16-year-old, ex-soldier). They seek peace and security: “*To live peacefully with people and to drop the bad ways you have been living... respect authority and obey laws*” (16-year-old boy, ex-soldier). They want access to quality schooling, skills training and livelihood opportunities: “*Without education you are nobody and if you have an education you will help your family*” (18-year-old, separated girl).

### Notes

<sup>2</sup> *Inter-Agency Guidelines for Developing Reintegration Programmes for Children Affected by Armed Conflict in West Africa: Field Test Version*, Save the Children UK et al, West Africa, 2007 [unpublished document]

<sup>3</sup> E. Delap, *No Place Like Home? Children's experiences of reintegration in the Kailahun District of Sierra Leone*, Save the Children UK, 2004 [unpublished document]

# 3 A children's rights approach to reintegration

In accordance with the international legal framework, the Paris Principles and stated policy of other organisations, Save the Children asserts that children have the right to immediate and unconditional release from unlawful use by armed forces and groups. We do not wait for a peace agreement or even a peace process to work for reintegration of children. Our work reintegrating conflict-affected children has evolved through years of implementation. Since 1990,<sup>4</sup> our programming has been increasingly based on the UNCRC (including its Optional Protocols) and other relevant child-focused legal frameworks. Programmes are implemented according to the three pillars of children's rights programming.<sup>5</sup>

A children's rights-based approach acknowledges that each child affected by armed conflict has a multiplicity of experiences and needs, while all children share the same rights. For instance, a boy may have been associated with an armed group, is now disabled, a returned refugee and has a parent who is HIV positive. His needs are complex while his rights according to

the UNCRC and other international human rights instruments are the same as his sister who may have spent the war in a camp for internally displaced persons. An effective reintegration programme for these children is one that can be applied to their many realities. By dividing programmes into the narrowest tranches of human experience, we risk creating programming that is irrelevant to the complexities of children's lives and thus fails to attract the very children who need support and protection. Likewise, by "over-programming" in segments, we encourage children to shop around from programme to programme.

## Notes

<sup>4</sup> The UNCRC came into force in November 1990

<sup>5</sup> The three pillars of children's rights programming consist of focusing on practical actions on violations and gaps in provision; strengthening structures and mechanisms; and building constituencies

## 4 Ensuring inclusive, effective programmes of support and assistance for reintegration

On the basis of repeated analysis of lessons learned and evaluations, we know that inclusive, community-based programming that applies to a wider group of vulnerable children is more effective than assistance targeted at a specific group identified by one experience alone (eg, being a girl mother, having been associated with an armed group, having a disability or being a refugee).

At the same time, programmes need to be prepared to respond to issues such as family tracing and reunification or mediation between families and children, and to be flexible enough to provide special care for those children with special needs.

*[The father] of a 15-year-old boy in class 8... was killed. [The boy] became mentally affected and lost his appetite. He has a younger brother and mother in his family. The boy has been seen alone and the social mobiliser went to the school in consultation with the family, and discussed with the boy's teacher how he could be helped.*

Save the Children Norway, Nepal<sup>6</sup>

### Avoiding resentment

Unfortunately, children returning to their families and communities may not always be greeted with enthusiasm. The reality of the impact of armed conflict on children and their communities is such that there will usually be widespread poverty, destroyed or deteriorated infrastructure and a profound lack of

access to basic services. Research with communities in Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda shows that other groups of children or individual boys and girls may be as vulnerable or even more vulnerable than returnees.<sup>7</sup> If children are targeted for assistance and support on the basis of their status as former combatants, this can lead to deep and damaging resentment.

*The children inform us that none of the other resident children in the village will join them in the club, saying 'you are getting support, what about us?' They say that there seems to be unfairness in the matter of who gets support and remark that sometimes the children directly affected by the armed conflict are better off than the extremely poor children in the community.*

Save the Children Norway, Nepal<sup>8</sup>

Levels of resentment against children associated with an armed force or group may depend on a number of additional factors, including whether they were abducted, whether they escaped or waited for release, whether or not they fought for a community-sanctioned armed force or group, their gender, their current family support, whether they have dependants, and so on. In almost every community where we work, there is some tension and resentment surrounding the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups, particularly if other children remain with the fighters, or attacks were targeting their own communities.

*Many fear some backlash from the community for the things they have done. Some in the community want to take revenge. People in the community have some resentment towards the children associated with armed forces and groups [CAAFAG], because when they were with the Maoists they received food and power and now that they are back, they are getting support from NGOs. It seems like they are benefiting from being with the Maoists. People in the community say that a child is responsible for torture, so why should NGOs help them? The community do not want children to get support from the NGOs because they believe that they are bad.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>9</sup>

*[S]ocial workers and assistance providers learned that assisting individual children and families can cause resentment within the community where other families may be equally vulnerable. This situation arose in particular where assistance resulted from having a child released by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE] when the children of other families may still be with the LTTE.*

Save the Children in Sri Lanka<sup>10</sup>

*Programs in the camp were three-pronged to start with, but were more focused on CAAF. Soon [we] realized that that was not [the] best approach, as we were only targeting them more, marking them out more instead of reintegrating. What were we doing – integrating them back into themselves? So [we] opened programming to all children/youth, not just most vulnerable or CAAF.. [The] effects of targeting became very evident when [another agency] started giving backpacks and shoes to separated children, CAAF included, and these CAAF youth came back to our center beat up. We asked why, and they said for their shoes (jealousy, inequality), and we realized we were essentially doing the same thing, offering more support to CAAF and not all.*

Save the Children USA, Guinea<sup>11</sup>

The negative impact of targeted assistance was often particularly evident in the case of girls.<sup>12</sup>

*Specifically targeted assistance, whether through or outside the formal DDR process, may further stigmatise girls associated with armed actors. Indeed, this has been acknowledged by those girls who did receive benefit. In Sierra Leone, communities in both Kambia and Kailahun districts labelled support provided to girls formerly associated with armed actors as ‘blood money’. Differences in repatriation and reunification packages caused resentment in Kailahun. Better packages were provided to those children reunified as formerly associated with armed actors, or from Liberia, than was afforded any other child in the community.*

Save the Children UK, West Africa<sup>13</sup>

Save the Children has learned that, where certain children do require targeted assistance, free access to a service may be more acceptable to the general community than more visible means of aid for a specific group. In addition, this approach can also help local (duty-bearing) structures to eventually assume responsibility for ensuring that these services are available to all in the community.

*In Kambia, the community was generally more accepting of immediate health support provided to the girls, partly as this was a less visible transaction between the agency, the girl concerned and the health post, and partly since the community had observed the destitute condition of a number of these girls and their children.*

Save the Children UK, West Africa<sup>14</sup>

*Others feel bad because they are excluded from some [club] activities and the group can't support all children. Some think we are better than them and may take it personally against the person who chased them away.*

(John, Madhol) Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>15</sup>

## Avoiding negative impact of incentives

In situations of particularly dire need, some children or their communities can regard targeted benefits as an incentive to become involved in the conflict. This is of particular concern in situations of regional instability and seasonal or episodic fighting.

*When support was more extensive and visible, the wider community – including children – viewed this as extremely unjust, raising concerns over the message conveyed that ‘it pays to fight’ and that, in another conflict situation, it is of greater benefit to join the forces to gain the rewards of future demobilisation.*

Save the Children UK, West Africa<sup>16</sup>

*Virtually all families suffer from extreme poverty, exacerbated by the conflict, such that assistance efforts for especially vulnerable children have to carefully balance community realities. Thus, a risk in the social protection programme’s approach was that children might, for example, enrol in armed groups or engage in prostitution in order to later participate in the skills activities.*

Save the Children UK, DRC<sup>17</sup>

The challenge here, therefore, is to ensure that the provision of services and benefits for this vulnerable group of children is used to enhance their reintegration and not to contribute to their further exclusion from their communities. Additionally, programmes at this stage can also pave the way for better protection systems for all children.

## Linking with wider child protection programming

There is clearly a need to link programming for reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups with wider community programming for the protection of children, in particular where armed conflict has resulted in the marginalisation of groups of children. Here, linkages may include work on children living or working on the streets, orphans or children affected by HIV and AIDS.

*The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) in Southern Sudan provides an example of the benefits of linkage with wider programming. Save the Children piloted the ALP in Northern Bahr el Ghazal in 2002 in response to the UNICEF-led DDR of over 3,500 children associated with armed groups in that area. The ALP programme condensed 8 years of primary education into 4 and was found to be particularly suitable for out of school, over age, girls and boys. It received widespread support within the community and reached many children who did not have access to education. In addition to CAAFG, large number of girls also managed to access the programme, including those who had been too embarrassed to attend school with younger children, or who could not attend because of domestic responsibilities.<sup>18</sup>*

Perhaps the key lesson here is to adhere rigorously to the basic tenets of children’s rights: that they have the full set of rights accorded under international human rights law and standards, while being entitled to special and specific provision according to their status as children, their emerging capacities and their whole experience. Agencies may have to resist pressure from donors or other agencies to “just provide” children with benefits – cash or otherwise – where, in consultation with children and their communities, it becomes apparent that this is not in their best interests.



## Notes

<sup>6</sup> E. Jareg *et al*, *Mid-Term Review of Children in Armed Conflict Programme*, Save the Children Norway, Nepal, 2005 pp 32 [unpublished document]

<sup>7</sup> T. Allen & M. Schomerus, *A Hard Homecoming: Lessons learned from the reception centre process on effective interventions for former 'abductees' in Northern Uganda*, UNICEF and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2005; B. Verhey, *Going Home: demobilising and reintegrating child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children UK, 2003; L. Davis, *Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Groups in the West of Côte d'Ivoire: Global Impact Monitoring (GIM) Review*, Save the Children UK, 2006 [unpublished document]

<sup>8</sup> Jareg, *op cit* 10, 2005 pp 37

<sup>9</sup> *Documenting Save the Children US's Work with Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Child protection project in Nepal*, Save the Children USA, Nepal, 2007 pp 10 [unpublished document]

<sup>10</sup> B. Verhey & M. Brown, *Sri Lanka Action Plan for Children Affected by War: Review by JMJ International*, JMJ International 2006 pp 19

<sup>11</sup> *Save the Children's Protection Programming for Refugees in Guinea*, Save the Children USA, Guinea, 2001 pp 7

<sup>12</sup> See Section 12 for a detailed discussion on the reintegration of girls

<sup>13</sup> E. Visman, *Girls Formerly Associated with armed groups and armed forces who did not go through demobilisation: Save the Children's Experience in West Africa*, Save the Children UK, 2005 pp 18

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp 19

<sup>15</sup> S. Wright, *Evaluation Report, Save the Children's Achievements under the Comic Relief Grant: Reintegration of Demobilised Soldiers with Families and Communities South Sudan*, Save the Children UK, South Sudan, 2005 pp 18 [unpublished document]

<sup>16</sup> Visman, *op cit* 13, 2005 pp 19

<sup>17</sup> Verhey, *op cit* 7, 2003 pp 18

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *op cit* 15, 2005

## 5 Avoiding stigma or reprisals: children who make themselves ‘invisible’

*[X] associated with an armed group chose not to go through DDR because he ‘didn’t fight’ in the war, and wanted to avoid the stigma associated with the rebel groups.*

Save the Children UK, Sierra Leone<sup>19</sup>

There are many reasons why children who have been associated with armed forces and groups may make themselves ‘invisible’. Prominent among these are stigma or fear of being ostracised for the very reason that they joined in the first place. Children who have survived sexual assault indicate that they do not want to be singled out. Equally, a child who was abandoned or pushed out of the house by relatives or who escaped violence in the home may not want to bring general attention to his or her individual situation and its causes. Other children and their parents may – particularly where a conflict is continuing or the peace process is fragile – fear reprisals from the armed group or other parties to the armed conflict. In Sri Lanka, for instance, while Save the Children was again receiving some reports of children being recruited by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Karuna group, staff also noticed reluctance on the part of parents to report these and other violations.

Inclusive programming, in addition to all of the benefits already described above, avoids labelling

children and the protection issues they face. To this end, and in order to ensure that children who wish to remain ‘invisible’ are not missed, Save the Children endeavours to operate with a mix of open access programmes for all, as well as specific programmes for children associated with armed forces and groups.

*...since many of [the social workers] work with other Save the Children programmes they are established [as interested in children and their issues]. They are not associated with a specific activity/program to CAAFAG or any other issue so people do not question what they are doing and why.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>20</sup>

The challenge now is for agencies to respect the right of children to remain ‘invisible’ by refining their delivery of broad-based community programmes, while continuing to ensure that service delivery and advocacy meet the needs of individual cases without making it widely known.

### Notes

<sup>19</sup> Delap, *op cit* 3, 2004 pp 13

<sup>20</sup> *Documenting Save the Children’s US’s work, op cit* 9, 2007 pp 18

## 6 Children who do not go through an organised DDR process

Our operational experience shows that a significant number of children associated with armed forces and groups do not go through an organised demobilisation process but return directly to their communities. The risk here is that, where benefits for children and their families are exclusively tied to a formal DDR programme, children who do not go through such a programme are likely to be deprived of those benefits and further resentments may arise. The benefits offered can include material benefits, psychosocial interventions, training and income-generation programmes as well as some protective measures against re-recruitment. In these cases, the situation may arise where some children who have been associated with armed forces and groups receive quite substantial benefits while their contemporaries who were also associated (as well as children who were affected by the armed conflict in other ways) miss out because they did not pass through the formal process.

*Almost all of the children who had been associated with armed groups or forces during the war and had not been through DDR were extremely bitter and upset about being denied the benefits other child soldiers received. Children said that they had experienced the same hardships and fear as these children and felt a deep sense of injustice about being excluded... Children blamed the lack of help with schooling and skills training on many of their current hardships. These feelings led to a worrying degree of resentment against those who had been through DDR.*

Save the Children UK, Sierra Leone<sup>21</sup>

Girls, in particular, may be held back by commanders who are not confident that the peace agreement will hold or who are planning for further fighting; the girls

may be perceived as more useful than boys since they do much of the support work. The girls may be kept until the armed group finally drifts apart, leaving them unsupported and without knowledge of their entitlements. Other girls may stay with their 'bush husbands' for fear of rejection by the community, because they have children of their own and do not know how to cope alone or because they have no support in leaving these men.

These are not the only reasons why children do not access formal DDR processes. They may not know about a programme, it may not be established by the time they leave their commander, they may not wish to delay their return home, or they might not wish to draw attention to the fact that they were with the fighters. Moreover, the commanders may tell them to leave without going through the formal DDR process. Save the Children has found this to be particularly so in the case of children with disabilities, who are often among the first children that commanders quietly release; they may do so either to reduce the numbers of children they are seen to have recruited or to replace them with children of loyal friends.

In many contexts, including Sri Lanka,<sup>22</sup> agencies continue to receive reports of children being associated with militias that are government-backed or even proxy government forces. It is not in the interests of the concerned state to acknowledge these children or that they are fighting on behalf of the national government, particularly where that government purports to be opposed to the recruitment of children. When, therefore, these armed groups enter into an internationally monitored and sanctioned DDR process, children may be sent home before the start of the programme so that the armed group and the

national government avoid international censure or even possible prosecution for recruitment and use of children. In Sudan, for example, there is growing evidence that government or government-backed commanders are releasing children under strict orders of silence.

*One of the major challenges around child demobilization will be how to ensure that all those children who will be part of a 'hidden demobilization' will be assisted to reintegrate in their communities. There are some indications that the Armed Forces are already releasing disabled and 'uneducated' or 'least important' soldiers in a manner that involves... dismissals without certification of service. UNICEF situation analysis shows that coupled with 'denial', there is a risk that the Armed Forces, and some Militia, will release underage members in a manner aimed to avoid acknowledging their existence.*

Save the Children USA, Sudan<sup>23</sup>

## Ensuring that information reaches children

Commanders in charge of children associated with armed forces and groups exert significant control and influence over the children, including the information they receive. Countless reports have been received of children who related how the adults in their fighting unit misinformed them about their right to benefit from organised DDR processes.

*[The] Commission's job was to get into barracks and tell the kids the truth, because commanders were telling them that if they left, there was no chance for getting education, no chance to earn money, that they would be rejected by their communities, etc.*

Save the Children USA, Sudan<sup>24</sup>

*"I was captured by one of the RUF [Revolutionary United Front] commanders and after 2 years with his wife, I managed to cross into Liberia, losing*

*contact with my commander. I later returned with the intention of disarming with him, but when disarmament started, my commander refused to disarm with me because I failed to marry him. He gave my gun to another girl who agreed to marry him."*

(17-year-old girl) Save the Children UK, Sierra Leone<sup>25</sup>

*Some thought they were not eligible because they did not have guns, either because they had never owned guns, or because commanders had given their guns to relatives to enable them to benefit from the DDR package. In other cases, commanders had either lied or were misinformed themselves about eligibility and had told children that only those aged over 18 could disarm. Two girls said that their commanders refused to allow them to disarm because they would not have sex with them.*

Save the Children UK, Sierra Leone<sup>26</sup>

To ensure that children have as much accurate and reliable information as possible, we have developed information campaigns using logistically and culturally appropriate methods, such as radio programmes. Children may not come to DDR facilities but will seek assistance in other ways. For instance, when only a handful of girls appeared at the DDR facilities in DRC, Save the Children and our partners realised that we would have to go to the reproductive health facilities to meet these girls. Children who have already left armed groups are themselves in a good position to help agencies determine the most effective ways of getting information to children still associated with those groups.

Reaching children who have not gone through a formal DDR process, be this their own choice or for the other reasons outlined above, remains a significant challenge in all settings where children have been associated with armed forces and groups. The first step is to be aware that this is an issue; then we need to take appropriate steps to find these children in a way that is non-stigmatising and addresses their realities.

## Notes

<sup>21</sup> Delap, *op cit* 3, 2004 pp 14

<sup>22</sup> *Complicit in Crime: State Collusion in Abductions and Child Recruitment by the Karuna Group*, Human Rights Watch, 2007

<sup>23</sup> *Save the Children's Protection Programming in Southern Kordofan, Sudan*, Save the Children USA, Sudan 2007 pp 2 [unpublished document]

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, pp 9

<sup>25</sup> Visman, *op cit* 13, 2005 pp 16

<sup>26</sup> Delap, *op cit* 3, 2004 pp 13

## 7 Determining successful reintegration

*Children feel bad about their future prospects and were not happy with their lives since returning home. The main reason is the setback to their education caused by their participation in the conflict. All of the children said that prior to the conflict they were doing well in school and they were well loved, but now they feel like they have limited opportunities.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>27</sup>

The ultimate goal of a reintegration process is for children to be like their peers in all positive aspects. Children and their communities, therefore, are best placed to determine “successful” reintegration. Agencies are well advised to follow these indicators as much as possible, where they are consistent with the best interests of the child.

*We asked [former abductees] in our sample and those they were living with what they thought successful ‘reintegration’ involves. Answers tended to focus on what would make real reintegration possible, rather than what was actually happening. Responses included: adequate facilitation; follow-up by reception centers; the provision of foodstuffs, commodities and money; the need for a proper welcome; various healing rituals; the need for something to do; economic opportunities; the need to be taken seriously; and peer support.*

UNICEF and USAID, Uganda<sup>28</sup>

*The channels to social acceptance and participation may differ within rural and urban settings. In West Point, Monrovia, cell phones and jewellery are among those accessories which girls perceive as necessary to demonstrate their social standing.*

Save the Children UK, West Africa<sup>29</sup>

As one study in DRC discovered, children and their caregivers are very clear about the value of reintegration assistance being offered and available within the same community:

*...communities and demobilised children explained that the economic role of the child cannot be independent of the family and community. Highlights of their comments and observations include: self-sufficiency for children is a dream, not realistic. Children cannot be isolated but should be helped in concert with their families. Assistance must be oriented through parents. If done in the presence of children and with awareness raising activities, it will improve parental care for all children. Children want to evolve with their family without being stigmatized. Rather than emphasizing time in transit centres, the programme should prioritise social education and skills activities in the community... Children emphasize that two or three activities, including education, are necessary at the same time for most effective reintegration.*

Save the Children UK, DRC<sup>30</sup>

It is also incumbent upon child protection agencies to help children choose a life path that is healthy and sustainable. For example, one project team in DRC realised that their vocational training programme had not succeeded in its economic objective because they had placed too much weight on children’s hopes to be mechanics and not enough on market realities in the area.

The roles of traditional and spiritual healing processes vary according to culture and community, and there remain diverging opinions about how to work with these indigenous processes. It should also be noted that there are more overtly political “healing” processes that need to be monitored. For example, in Nepal, where the conflict has been highly ideological and many children have become members of political movements, it may not be appropriate, helpful or indeed consistent with their rights to expect that they give up all political persuasions and activities. “We need to recognize that children need... an avenue to participate in the political process.”<sup>31</sup>

## The importance of education

*As Southern Sudan emerges from decades of conflict, a number of lessons can be learned. One critical lesson is that formal and non-formal education, including skills training, cannot wait until the fighting is over. Rather, these must be seen as essential components of humanitarian assistance at the onset of conflict and displacement, for only then will those displaced be able and prepared to fully participate in the peace. The vast majority of Southern Sudanese have been denied their right to education and have missed opportunities to learn practical skills that could prepare them for employment. The international community needs to make far greater investments while populations are displaced so that those years are not wasted opportunities but time used constructively to develop skills and prepare people for the rebuilding and reconstruction of their own countries, communities and lives.*

Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>32</sup>

Education is a fundamental right of every child. It is inappropriate, therefore, to link access to education solely to participation in a DDR process. While most children associated with armed forces and groups aspire to obtain an education, others – including some girls with babies, or older boys – may have less interest in attending formal or even informal education. For all children, it is imperative to establish an appropriate mix of educational opportunities such as numeracy and literacy with life skills and vocational skills.

*Kadiatu [a student] has not attended school since coming back and she says that this is because she hasn't received any of the benefits from DDR.*

Save the Children UK, Sierra Leone<sup>33</sup>

## Notes

<sup>27</sup> Documenting Save the Children's US's work, *op cit* 9, 2007 pp 10

<sup>28</sup> Allen & Schomerus, *op cit* 7, 2006 pp 5

### **Kalume, 17, from Goma, DRC, who fought with a rebel group from 1999–2003 after dropping out of school**

"I saw my friends going to school. They had gone a long way – some were in sixth year, some were in fifth year of humanities, some had already finished their studies. So, I started asking myself so many questions. We say all things without education are worth nothing." He went through the formal demobilisation process and was reunited with his family in Goma, eastern DRC, by Save the Children. He is now in the third year of secondary school and has to pay approximately US\$30 in school fees each semester. Kalume sells petrol to pay the fees but, if he cannot raise enough money, his local community network, which is involved in income-generating activities to help vulnerable children, help him pay the difference. "We remember how things were when we were in combat. We fought against other brothers. All that blood – when we think of all the blood that covered everything, it demoralises us. Now, everything is in the past. Tomorrow or after tomorrow we will help our country develop. In the future, I hope to be an engineer."

Save the Children UK, DRC<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Visman, *op cit* 13, 2005 pp 20

<sup>30</sup> Verhey, *op cit* 7, 2003 pp 56

<sup>31</sup> Documenting Save the Children's US's work, *op cit* 9, 2007 pp 13

<sup>32</sup> J. Young *et al*, *From the Ground Up: Education and Livelihoods in Southern Sudan*, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2007

<sup>33</sup> Delap, *op cit* 3, 2004 pp 14

<sup>34</sup> J. Dolan, *Last in Line, Last in School: How donors are failing children in conflict affected fragile states*, International Save the Children Alliance, 2007 pp 33

## 8 Ensuring that children's experience of reintegration is positive

It is important to reflect on boys' and girls' resilience and abilities to improve their lives. They are constantly looking for ways to help themselves and others in the same situation; sometimes these are spontaneous, informal networks, others are fostered through programmatic interventions, such as clubs and self-help groups. Whatever the form, they aim to console each other, to enjoy each other's company, to learn new skills and wherever possible, to set the agenda for what happens to local children.

*[Former abductees] naturally found peer support groups and these have often been overlooked by agencies working on reintegration. The shared experience of the LRA [Lord's Resistance Army] acts as a form of social capital and many [of them] gain enormous strength and support from such groups. These groups should not be excluded from funding. However, monitoring of such groups is necessary both to ensure that vulnerable individuals are not exploited (including young men as well as young women) and to monitor the security implications (as LRA hierarchies tend to be replicated in these groups).*

UNICEF and USAID, Uganda<sup>35</sup>

Determining whether and when children are successfully reintegrated is a matter of judgement. The most reliable indicators will come from the children and families themselves. The exercise in consultation and participation that this entails is a two-way process, helping families and children to understand what is in the best interests of the child and what is realistic, as well as listening to their definitions of their needs and situation.

Ideally, children will reintegrate into a familiar and positive environment. In reality, children may find a community or culture that they no longer recognise or

no longer recognises them; they may be 'reintegrating' into a community that is beset by the impact of armed conflict and where human rights are not respected; or they may be reluctant, for good reason, to return to families that may be abusive, neglectful or discriminatory.

Given the duration of some conflicts and periods of separation involved (for instance, in Southern Sudan, Afghanistan and Liberia), "returnee children" may in fact be migrating to an ancestral home that they have never seen or do not remember.

*In general, children are returning to fragmented families and impoverished circumstances in a highly mobile population trying to cope with protecting themselves from the LRA.*

Save the Children in Uganda<sup>36</sup>

### When the family is not a safe or happy place for children

Families are not necessarily happy situations for children, especially when these families themselves are under much stress. In every reintegration programme, staff spend days, weeks or even months counselling individual families in an effort to promote reconciliation and healthy communication patterns.

*The family networks to which [former abductees] return are complex and dynamic. The lack of bride wealth exchange has weakened patrilineal structures. Many... end up living with their mothers or their mothers' brothers. Families are not necessarily benign environments for [the returnees].*

UNICEF and USAID, Uganda<sup>37</sup>



*Sometimes youth are being reunified with next of kin because their father is dead or could not be found.*

*It is difficult sometimes for families to embrace a member if it is not their son, and vice-versa.*

Save the Children USA, Sudan<sup>38</sup>

*... he sat with [staff] and listened to their intentions: not to force him to go home but to mediate between him and his family to help create the conditions for his return home. Since then, Save the Children has made several follow-up visits to confirm that, as anticipated, Sadoum's life has very much improved. He has quickly adjusted to being back in school and living with his family again, and his relationship with his father is finally good. By all accounts, Hammad has completely changed his behaviour for the benefit of the entire family.*

Save the Children USA, Sudan<sup>39</sup>

## Where children have changed

Like adults, many children find the transition of going home a very difficult one. Displaced populations tend to have become accustomed to dense living arrangements in camps or towns. These settings have enabled the provision of services that are not readily available in rural or more remote areas. There is the continued problem of aid dependency and many children have never undertaken basic farming activities.

*Children have a difficult time returning to their villages; they have a hard time adapting to their environment. Many have been urbanized and did not want to return to isolated villages.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>40</sup>

*Many IDPs [internally displaced persons] returning from the north are settling first in urban areas. One reason for this may be the extremely poor and treacherous condition of the roads in Southern Sudan, which inhibit travel to rural areas. In addition, returnees may be choosing to resettle in urban locations because they lack the skills necessary to work as farmers after years of living in northern cities or refugee camps, or because they lack interest in*

*returning to the agro-pastoralist lifestyle. This is particularly true for [adolescents and] youth. Some, too, anticipate that economic and educational opportunities will be superior in urban areas.*

Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>41</sup>

*Due to the war, many Liberians have gotten used to living in large groups, camps or urban areas and are now ill prepared or do not wish to live in the rural areas... Furthermore, they stated, the longer they stayed in the urban areas, the less likely they were to return to the rural areas. In some cases, families have settled permanently in urban areas and commute to their home areas for farming or have intermarried into the local urban community.*

Save the Children UK, Liberia<sup>42</sup>

Some children may have missed out on important cultural milestones or may struggle to communicate in a language that is no longer their mother tongue.

*One child returned to his community in Upper Nile from Uganda. The community welcomed him home with the killing of a bull, but it was not enough. Whenever the boy spoke no one could understand him. He had learned Dinka when he was in Uganda and had not retained his Nuer language. His own family found the situation difficult to accept or understand. The boy became 'mentally disturbed' as he had no one to communicate with and was isolated from his community.*

Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>43</sup>

Where children cannot go home, their protection needs escalate. Child protection staff continue to see an increase in children living and working on the streets of local towns and cities in post-conflict settings.

*I convinced my younger brothers to leave our uncle's house and fend for ourselves. We found our way to the market. I left my two younger brothers in the market in the care of a 'foster' home. I became a soldier accompanier where I was a domestic worker and helper. I was demobilised by UNICEF in 2001. I went back to the market to be with my brothers.*

Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>44</sup>

Staff and local citizens see some of the children using drugs and alcohol, engaging in petty theft, being sexually abused or being beaten for petty offences. For example, currently in many towns across Southern Sudan there are reports of increased numbers of seemingly unaccompanied boys and girls.

Where it is impossible for children to reintegrate into their family or even community setting, it is best for them to have a range of supported living options to choose from and to hopefully maintain some type of familial contact by distance.

Communities can also be supported to engage in protective measures for children. For instance, in one town in Southern Sudan, there is an innovative system of monitoring the local market for unaccompanied boys and girls. The local traders keep a watch for children, who are then referred to a child protection committee member or teacher who visits the family or child in a bid to solve any domestic problems.<sup>45</sup>

The challenge for those concerned with reintegration of children, therefore, is to be aware of the reasons why children and their families may need extra or specific support to ensure that reintegration is both possible and positive for all concerned. Here, programming can particularly benefit from adhering to the core rights-based principles of non-discrimination and the best interests of the child.

## Notes

<sup>35</sup> Allen & Schomerus, *op cit* 7, 2006 pp 103

<sup>36</sup> E. Jareg *et al*, *Gulu Support the Children Organisation 2002–2005: Evaluation and Lessons Learnt*, Save the Children, Uganda, 2005 [unpublished document]

<sup>37</sup> Allen & Schomerus, *op cit* 7, 2006

<sup>38</sup> *Save the Children's Protection Programming*, *op cit* 23, 2007 pp 16

<sup>39</sup> *Reuniting Separated Children with their Families: Save the Children's First Success in Sudan's Nuba Mountains*, Save the Children USA, Sudan, 2006 pp 2

<sup>40</sup> *Documenting Save the Children US's Work*, *op cit* 9, 2007 pp 10

<sup>41</sup> Young, *op cit* 32, 2007

<sup>42</sup> *Leveraging Learning*, International Rescue Committee, Liberia, 2002 pp 60 [unpublished IRC document]

<sup>43</sup> Wright, *op cit* 15, 2005 pp 10

<sup>44</sup> *Southern Sudan Separated Children's Study*, UNICEF, Save the Children UK and Save the Children Sweden, 2005, pp 15

<sup>45</sup> Wright, *op cit* 15, 2005 pp 10

## 9 Supporting community-based initiatives

Initiatives that are led or managed by members of the community have the advantages of being relevant, sustainable and accessible. Support to these initiatives is both an investment in effective reintegration and in accordance with a rights-based approach.

Community-based child protection in conflict and post-conflict settings is usually dependent on local volunteers and mobilisers. Organised and supported as committees or networks, they can be extremely successful in preventing and mitigating the effects of violations of children's rights to protection.

*Child protection committees [CPCs] became active in preventing the recruitment and/or re-recruitment of children during periods of crisis. Despite the outbreak of conflict in November 2004, only 25 children in our programmes were recruited... CPCs can play a variety of important roles e.g. members succeeded in negotiating the release of some abducted girls who were still living with their former fighters 'husbands'.*

Save the Children UK, Côte d'Ivoire<sup>46</sup>

As mass repatriation begins to be implemented, it is important to capitalise on child protection agencies' investment in child protection committees and children's clubs by supporting their re-establishment back in original villages. However, it should be noted that it is not always appropriate to have the exact same structure and people involved in these committees and clubs. What is important to replicate and support in home environments is the involvement of communities in preventing and responding to child protection risks.

### Note

<sup>46</sup> 'Working with children associated with armed forces and armed groups: lessons'. Presentation. Save the Children UK, Côte d'Ivoire, 2006, pp 2

# 10 The need to address poverty and invigorate the local economy

*The greatest sources of stress are not always the violence one experienced or perpetrated but the current living situation, which often poses issues of economic stress, inability to marry and raise a family due to hopelessness and lack of livelihood.<sup>47</sup>*

The economic dimensions of reintegration remain one of the major challenges. In situations of dire poverty – such as Southern Sudan, the conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka or Angola – one is tempted to ask, “Reintegrate into what?” It is now almost universally accepted that poverty is one of the most frequent root causes of armed conflict and its resurgence. If a reintegration strategy fails to address the importance of stimulating economic growth, it will have minimal positive impacts in the long term. While children may have been reunited with family and community, they remain highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because of persistent poverty.

*Some children’s mother or father has died, some are poor and face hunger, and some children have to work first to get food, clothes or money for school. I know many children like this.*

Demobilised child soldier, Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>48</sup>

*Under the Nepali national law 16 is the age of [adulthood] but the age of recruitment, suffrage and marriage is 18. This presents a problem for youth because after they return to their communities most people expect them to support themselves. That is why people do not know what to do with older children returning to economically poor and isolated rural communities.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>49</sup>

The development of local economies in countries emerging from war and the reintegration of children are inextricably linked. There is clear evidence linking extreme poverty, economic injustice and the slide back to armed conflict.<sup>50</sup> The EU Communication on Conflict Prevention and the European Commission, for example, include systemic discrimination, economic stagnation, regional inequalities and economic mismanagement as potential drivers of conflict. Also, pro-poor economic growth and demand for labour supports reintegration efforts in fragile post-conflict economies.

## Macroeconomic development

Looking at economic development in the context of reintegration and peace building is relatively new, and a detailed exposition is not within the scope of this paper. Early findings,<sup>51</sup> however, indicate that the international community should look to two policy instruments to stimulate economic development as part of reconstruction and conflict-prevention efforts, provided each is implemented with careful consideration: trade promotion and support to private enterprise.

Donors are beginning to close the gap between their development and trade agendas, although they are yet to systematically put peace building at the core of their trade and trade promotion strategies in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Putting peace and security at the centre of their approaches would entail a modification of donors’ current approaches to strengthening private enterprises

and promoting private sector development (PSD) in developing countries. PSD in conflict-prone and conflict-affected countries that reflects a thorough understanding of conflict dynamics and has a focus on poverty reduction and pro-poor growth is likely to be more effective.

There is more to be done on the relationship between large-scale economic investment and peace building. In some contexts, it could be possible to embark on some of these reforms before a final peace deal. International donors have an opportunity in post-conflict settings to encourage economic investment as a way to mitigate and reduce the vulnerability and instability of communities. Conversely, waiting for a permanent peace agreement before engaging in investment can simply exacerbate the characteristics of unstable communities. Large-scale investment has often been too slow and allows for tensions and divisions between populations to become entrenched.

## Notes

<sup>47</sup> V. Chrobok, *Demobilising and Reintegrating Afghanistan's Young Soldiers: A review and assessment of program planning*, Bonn International Centre for Conversion, BICC Paper No. 42, 2005 pp 18

<sup>48</sup> Wright, *op cit* 15, 2005 pp 10

<sup>49</sup> *Documenting Save the Children US's Work, op cit* 9, 2007 pp 3

<sup>50</sup> The 2003 World Bank report states that in a country with deep poverty, there is an 80 per cent chance of conflict recurring. See P. Collier, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy, A World Bank Policy Research Report*, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development & The World Bank, 2003

<sup>51</sup> [www.conflictprevention.net/library/documents/thematic\\_issues/economic\\_paper.pdf](http://www.conflictprevention.net/library/documents/thematic_issues/economic_paper.pdf)

# 11 Increasing children's livelihood opportunities: vocational training and income generation

Where vocational training is done well, it has significantly positive impacts on children's lives. Reports indicate that training improves children's self-esteem, enhances their status within families and communities, combats gender-based discrimination, and promotes successful reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups.

*I was never an important person in my family but since I started the training and started working on friends' hair at home and now making a little money to help my family, everyone now calls me 'Aunty Mammy'; they listen to me now." The trainee worked on clients' hair during the holidays at the beauty salon of her instructor where she earned some money for herself. Similarly, a child formerly associated with the fighting forces [an ex-CAFF] who graduated from skills training was able to pay for her mother's medical bills; her family and relatives now hold her in high esteem and involve her in major family decisions.*

15-year-old girl, Save the Children UK, Liberia<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, boys and girls involved in several income-generation projects also reported an increased ability to buy food or pay school fees; in one instance, girls in a trading co-operative reported a threefold decrease in the number of sexual partners they had had, as they felt less need to turn to transactional sex.

*Girls formerly associated with armed actors are themselves aware that economic independence will, in turn, enhance their self-respect and re-acceptance amongst the family and community. Those engaged in income-generation activities are aware that their*

*economic success is, in turn, dependent on establishing a loyal clientele. Thus, thoughtful analysis of quick and practical ways for these girls to earn income is needed. Many girls are also aware of the potential for joint activities, whether in farming or putting an acquired skill into practice.*

Save the Children UK, West Africa<sup>53</sup>

## Market analyses

Agencies need to ensure that children and young people are able to engage in productive activity after vocational training. In order to do so, market analyses should be conducted to determine how best to facilitate this. Training programmes and income-generating activities can then be planned and set up. In reality, however, many current responses are unable to meet the economic objectives set and risk wasting scarce finances and leading to disappointment. Too often, subsequent evaluations state that there is a gap between the numbers being trained and the absorption capacity of the market.

*Though the process was participatory and consultative and re-emphasised by an assessment to identify viable and sustainable skills options for ex-CAFF and other vulnerable children affected by the conflict in Liberia, there is a lack of rigorous analysis to give complete information about the feasibility of the different trade areas identified. As a result, most trainings are concentrated around certain trades with quick returns such as pastry, auto mechanic and beauty therapy leaving behind key sectors such as agriculture, which have better long-term potential.*

Save the Children UK, Liberia<sup>54</sup>

In addition, many adolescents show a desire to learn trades that are more urban-based (such as hairdressing, electrical repair and mechanics), as opposed to the often more realistic and sustainable farming and livestock management options.

*Children should actively participate in the planning phase but participation must involve frank two-way discussion of what is in their best interests. For instance, if children express the desire to be trained in skills that have little prospects for sustainability, participation should entail allowing children to realise the problems that might lie ahead.*

Save the Children UK, Liberia<sup>55</sup>

Analysing whether there truly is a cash market and its current or potential composition is an extremely difficult undertaking at the best of times. A range of tools that can be used quickly and yet have a reliable predictive nature need to be developed to complement existing tools, such as Save the Children's household economy approach.

Parents and children themselves often welcome training opportunities as a place of protection where vulnerable young people can be gainfully occupied. In these cases, it is important to ensure that the longer-term goal of providing a pathway to a sustainable and dignified livelihood is not forgotten, while at the same time not creating unrealistic expectations, which may impact on the viability of such courses in the future.

*Unfortunately, engaging demobilised children in a six-month course provides a short-term opportunity to 'occupy' the child but is an inadequate approach to reintegration. In one community, demobilised children resisted the efforts of a local organisation to enrol them in a sewing course because they felt their previous observations showed such training to be unfruitful.*

Save the Children UK, DRC<sup>56</sup>

There remains the challenge of how to provide training opportunities in situations of ongoing conflict. Some parents wish their children to be close to home and in small groups so as not to attract (re-)recruitment; others feel it would be better for

their children to be in residential programmes so as to minimise risky travel and to have protection in numbers. But all seem to agree that courses should have "rolling" dates of entry as their children cannot enrol on one set day.

*Particularly for vocational training, the support projects expected small groups of released underage recruits and other vulnerable children attending courses with fixed start and end dates, but children were referred on an ongoing and individual basis across vast geographic distance.*

Save the Children in Sri Lanka<sup>57</sup>

Currently, much of economic reintegration programming focuses on the labour supply side, aiming at improving employability via vocational training and apprenticeships. But economic reconstruction efforts should also address the need to stimulate demand for labour in local economies: essentially, generating pro-poor economic growth.

Appropriate and adequate income-generating initiatives are both the logical follow-on from vocational training and can be instrumental in the reintegration of children. As with vocational training, these initiatives, in order to be successful, should be based on sound contextual, economic and gender analyses.

*Save the Children in Sri Lanka initially included a livelihood component to support reintegration for vulnerable children/CAFAGs in the new project proposal of 2007, but UNICEF... stated that UNDP [the United Nations Development Programme] is the key responsible agency for micro-credit support. However, the majority of the UNDP micro-credit support programs came to an end by 2006. In addition UNDP is only supporting families from above a certain poverty line, who are presumably capable to pay back revolving loans, whereas the majority of the families of CAFAGs identified for livelihood support are below this poverty line, and were therefore not eligible for micro-credit support within the programs of UNDP. Generally poverty is considered to be one of the main root causes of*

*(re-)recruitment of children or children 'voluntarily joining' Armed Groups in Sri Lanka. Without proper livelihood support opportunities, Save the Children in Sri Lanka is limited to carry out adequate reintegration support and to enhance protection of vulnerable children, including former CAAFAGs.*

Save the Children in Sri Lanka<sup>58</sup>

*children would be transferred back to military structures should fighting resume.*

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, West Africa<sup>59</sup>

## Preventing exploitation in employment

There is evidence that in post-war economies, many children previously associated with armed forces can end up in the labour market, in many cases in highly hazardous and exploitative occupations.

The chains of command established during a conflict are often replicated in post-conflict economies, with children becoming workers instead of soldiers. In mineral-rich post-conflict countries, for example, children loyal to a winning commander may end up working in the illegal mines.

*Children are trafficked and exploited in cocoa and rubber plantations, in gold and diamond mines and in timber industries in all four countries. Various smuggling and trafficking schemes involve children, especially in drug trafficking; the use of weapons is common among members of these operations. These criminal networks and industries are often intertwined with armed groups, and rebel groups have been identified in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire as directing these rings. Former child soldiers remain associated with their commanders in Liberia for instance, their role shifting from soldier to worker. The children exploited in these rings are often former child soldiers or are highly vulnerable to recruitment...*

*The presence of armed children and youth illegally exploiting resources in these areas demonstrates that reintegration efforts have failed in some parts of the country. There is a distinct possibility that these*

As part of reintegration programmes, older children are sometimes encouraged to undertake apprenticeships as part of their vocational training or start working with small businesses. Without adequate planning and support, however, these situations can result in children being exposed to hazardous work and exploitation. Reintegration programming needs to include monitoring of children's activities and of their livelihoods strategies (and those of their families) to ensure that children are not being exploited or engaging in hazardous work. This will mean engaging with children and communities on the impact of such work on children and young people, and holding discussions with officials and inspectors in the appropriate ministries (such as those for employment, reconstruction, internal affairs and revenue) to develop a common approach aimed at preventing and protecting children from exploitation. Such an approach would include setting up or improving monitoring mechanisms; strategies for the withdrawal of children from the worst forms of child labour; negotiations on minimum wages for apprentices; improvement in working conditions in workplaces to avoid young people being exposed to hazards; improved access to education for working children; training; legal support for test prosecutions; and targets and standards for employing young people on public works projects.

Work on livelihoods for children and young people affected by armed conflict, and children who were associated with armed forces and groups in particular, would benefit from further research to produce guidance for communities, agencies and governments. This guidance should include how to prevent children who were associated with armed forces and who might be pursuing alternative livelihood strategies ending up in exploitative and hazardous labour, and how to avoid young people engaged in apprentice programmes



being exploited by their employers. Guidance should also include co-ordinated strategies to ensure that children who are found in the worst forms of child labour (including trafficking, forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, or hazardous occupations such as mining or construction), are withdrawn from such occupations or at least removed from hazardous activities with no adverse impact on their livelihoods.

Self-employment has been promoted in some cases as a means to avoid some of these risks, as it provides opportunities for children to set their own working conditions and for girls, particularly, to break away from gender-based restrictions on their time. However, it can be a very challenging task for young people to start such businesses and make them economically sustainable. It is imperative therefore that vocational training aimed at setting children up in self-employed ventures equips them for the potentially harsh realities of working alone.

*It is dangerous because self-exploitation is often the reality of working conditions and the standards of living of self-employed people. One wonders whether the desire to keep the [hair salon] going, despite formidable financial challenges, will expose these girls to the worst forms of child labour.*

Save the Children UK<sup>60</sup>

Gender considerations are prominent here, also. One of the vocational training programmes in Sri Lanka provided young people with 'start-up kits' of a certain amount of cash with which to purchase their initial equipment. This amount was sufficient for the boys' work of masonry, but insufficient for the girls' work of tailoring. Girls were left to find the extra, and many ended up in poorly paid employment instead of running their own workshop.

Clearly, the challenges of increasing livelihood opportunities for children associated with armed forces and groups are linked to the broader economic and social climate of the conflict-affected environment. There are some key lessons: children associated with armed forces and groups should be integrated with other children and young people as much as possible; training and income generation should be done according to clear market, situational, gender and social analyses; where possible they should be linked to larger anti-poverty strategies; and training and other initiatives should ensure that discrimination is not repeated or entrenched by these activities.

## Notes

<sup>52</sup> Liberia GIM Report 2005–2006: *Social and Economic Reintegration of EX-CAFF and other vulnerable children*, Save the Children UK, 2006 pp 9 [unpublished document]

<sup>53</sup> Visman, *op cit* 13, 2005 pp 3

<sup>54</sup> Liberia GIM Report, *op cit* 52, 2006

<sup>55</sup> M Rizzo, *Linking programming on economic and social reintegration of children affected by war. Learning from the Liberian experience*. Save the Children UK, Liberia 2006 pp 10 [unpublished document]

<sup>56</sup> Verhey, *op cit* 7, 2003 pp 65

<sup>57</sup> Verhey & Brown, *op cit* 10, 2006

<sup>58</sup> Based on interviews with staff in Sri Lanka, Save the Children UK, 2007

<sup>59</sup> *Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa: A survey of programmatic work on child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone*, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2006 pp28

<sup>60</sup> Rizzo, *op cit* 55, 2006

## 12 The particular experience of girls

The situation of girls affected by armed conflict – in particular those who are associated with armed actors – has received much attention in the past decade. Rather than summarising recent research, we note a few important areas that remain unclear or difficult to operationalise.

Many girls report being stigmatised by their experiences during conflict, especially if they were associated with armed actors. Distrust or outright rejection by one's family or community places these girls at high risk of further rights violations. Many face a lifetime of extreme poverty and discrimination. Forced to take whatever work they can find – including prostitution – they are at risk of violence, economic exploitation and a myriad of health problems, most notably exposure to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

There is a need to work with religious and other cultural leaders to ensure that they are as open-minded as possible to the experience of these girls. There may also be a need for specific training and ongoing discussion with members of the child protection committees in order to help the girls as they wish to be helped, and not to be judgemental.

While some girls are looking to redefine their role in society, others require support to return to their traditional gender role. In many cultures, girls and women play the role of heritage keepers; they must know proper traditions, customs and language that are seen as critical to the group's survival. Conflict and displacement can rupture this intergenerational transfer of knowledge and challenge how an individual girl is perceived.

### Changing gender roles: Nepal

*"Girls face much more harassment than boys. Some of the girls we spoke to felt that this was because boys are stronger and some people feared them. The harassment, especially being labelled 'bad girls' or 'bad examples', has a big impact on their potential to live in harmony with the community and start a family.*

*"Marriage plays an important role in Nepalese society and is a source of security for most women. However, many of the CAAFAG girls are no longer considered good brides; many believe they have lost their virginity and are therefore less desirable for marriage. This is the case even among CAAFAG boys interviewed in cantonment camps; there is hesitation about marrying CAAFAG girls. Many expressed limited or no interest in marrying CAAFAG girls. When probed about why, many said that they would not*

*be well accepted into their families, 'they would not make good daughters in law'.*

*"Many perceive CAAFAG girls as more outspoken and difficult to manage. Girls are expected to be soft spoken and obedient. While some girls have gained leadership skills and have an increased awareness of equal rights and demand these rights, many want to remain hidden, have problems with their self-esteem and become very shy.*

*"Because people in the community have a negative perception of CAAFAG girls, they are not always allowed to mingle with other children because people consider them a bad influence. No one stands up for them. They are blamed for what has happened to them and many blame themselves."*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>61</sup>

*Both children and adults stated that it was necessary to ensure that the returnees learnt about traditional and cultural practices. There is a need for women especially to be involved in sharing this cultural information so that girls are seen to have value in the community. [Without this knowledge] returnee girls are not respected and are called 'war children' as they do not know the ways of the community.*

Staff member, Save the Children UK,  
Southern Sudan<sup>62</sup>

Girls frequently want support to be offered in ways that do not single them out as former children associated with armed forces and groups or survivors of rape. They can be highly sensitive to their current situation; for example, despite supported access to schooling in western Côte d'Ivoire, many of the ex-girls associated with armed forces did not want to attend because they were much older than the others. They wanted to be recognised as women with children and all the respect and responsibilities that entails. Given the similarities between their situation and that of other marginalised girls and unwed mothers, there is much opportunity for inclusive programming.

*Organising the girls' clubs as open to all girls in a community is essential to combat the stigmatisation and marginalisation otherwise felt by girls associated with armed groups... Simply put, girls avoid activities that identify or categorise them as having been with an armed group or other stigma such as being the victim of sexual violence. Girls in focus groups and the peer survey for this study consistently, simply expressed that they wanted to be treated, 'approached' like other girls in the community.*

Save the Children UK, DRC<sup>63</sup>

Many girls in a situation of armed conflict attach themselves to an older man for protection. There are many reasons why they might stay in these exploitative relationships. Some marry in haste or unofficially in order to access material benefits;<sup>64</sup> others remain living with their military commander who acts as their 'husband'. For these and other reasons, in Liberia, an estimated 8,000 girls were left out of the DDR

process. They had attached themselves to the fighting forces for protection.<sup>65</sup> Reaching them to inform them of their rights and options remains a challenge. Programmes are using a number of strategies to reach these girls, such as radio bulletins, awareness raising in local marketplaces, and asking (and taking) the advice of girls who have left such situations.

The situation of children born to girls who have been associated with armed groups deserves further research in order to address the issues these children (and their mothers) face. In addition to the economic issues outlined above, these children and the girls who are their mothers face many obstacles: the fathers may be absent or belong to the enemy; their mothers are young – even by local standards – and lack both experience and positive role models. The legal status of these children is often at best ambiguous, especially if they do not have birth certificates. Questions to be resolved include their rights to inheritance, citizenship, and possible claims on them by their father or father's family.

*[It's not] easy for reintegration of females, particularly if they have children out of wedlock. Not necessarily a problem for a family to take the girl back, but they do not generally want to accept her child. [We had a] specific case of this in the village of Beha. Girl mother had 3 children, beginning when she was 14. She was living in the market because her family would not take her back. So, Save the Children acted as mediator with her family, trying to get them to accept her and her child. They eventually did and built a separate house for her within the compound.*

Save the Children USA, Sudan<sup>66</sup>

As with boys, the situation for girls brings all the complexities of their pre-recruitment lives, compounded by their experiences. The challenge is to 'always remember and never forget' that girls have specific experiences, while consistently addressing their rights and their whole realities as girls, as children, as mothers, and as young people who have a great deal to offer their communities.

## Notes

<sup>61</sup> *Documenting Save the Children's Work, op cit 9*, 2007 pp 9

<sup>62</sup> Wright, *op cit 15*, 2005 pp 10

<sup>63</sup> B. Verhey, *Reaching the Girls: Study on girls associated with armed forces and groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Save the Children UK *et al*, 2004 pp 20

<sup>64</sup> One study found that unaccompanied girls were marrying in order to be included in early stages of repatriation convoys. See *Protection of Children in Organised and Spontaneous Population Movements*, Save the Children, 2003

<sup>65</sup> Information received from the Liberian country director, June 2007

<sup>66</sup> *Save the Children's Protection Programming in Southern Kordofan, op cit 23*, 2007, pp 17

# 13 Preventing sexual exploitation

*It is recognised that child prostitution is closely linked to the use of children as soldiers... Some children end up being involved in prostitution part- or full-time after their association with armed groups.*

Save the Children UK, West Africa<sup>67</sup>

In Liberia in late 2005, Save the Children conducted a study (*From Camp to Community*) on the prevalence of sexual exploitation during the delivery of assistance. The study found that child prostitution<sup>68</sup> is fuelled by lack of opportunities for children to earn a safe and dignified income. It found that children as young as five work sell drinks or kerosene to market stall holders to support themselves and their families, and girls as young as ten are engaged in prostitution. Girls reported that they are pressured by friends and in some cases parents.

As part of this research, we sought to understand where the demand for child prostitutes was coming from. Those exploiting children in this way included ‘sugar daddies’; businessmen; video club owners; ‘big men’; officials; police and ex-combatants; soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia; and teachers. They also included humanitarian workers and peacekeeping soldiers. Globally, in 2005, there were 340 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against personnel from the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).<sup>69</sup> Although people in the community know that child prostitution is wrong, they have come to accept it. One of the reasons cited for children engaging in prostitution was the poor standard of humanitarian assistance, and it being deemed not sufficient to meet children’s needs.

Communities agree that attitudes have fundamentally changed since the war. They reported that children were not involved in prostitution before the war and that this level of sexual exploitation is a direct consequence of the conflict.

In Haiti, the DRC and Liberia, the presence of international peacekeepers, military and civilian personnel and humanitarian aid staff, respectively, has led to allegations of widespread sexual exploitation of children in return for goods or payment.<sup>70</sup> The huge power differentials between the communities that we provide assistance to and those providing this assistance establish an enormous potential for exploitative behaviour. In Côte d’Ivoire, boys have told programme staff that some adults have sent girls “to show their breasts to the blue helmets [UN troops] in exchange for food”.<sup>71</sup>

Not only do these exploitative actions undermine peace and stability, they also create an extremely negative environment for reintegrating children and adolescents. The international community has resolved to combat this issue through many forums but it is still prevalent in conflict and post-conflict situations. In addition to the anecdotal evidence received by Save the Children,<sup>72</sup> other reports point to the fact that very few allegations of sexual exploitation are acted upon by the allegedly ‘responsible’ organisations. There is an urgent need to introduce non-negotiable mechanisms to enforce the necessary referral procedures to ensure that all allegations are investigated thoroughly and staff members disciplined as appropriate.

## Notes

<sup>67</sup> *Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa, op cit 59, 2006* pp 28

<sup>68</sup> This term is preferred to that of 'transactional sex' as the latter suggests a situation of equal exchange, which is certainly not the case for children

<sup>69</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary General A/60/862, 6th Session, *Comprehensive Report Prepared*

*Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/296, 24th May 2006, available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/360/52/PDF/N0636052.pdf?OpenElement>*

<sup>70</sup> S. Martin, *Must boys be boys? Ending sexual exploitation and abuse in UN Peacekeeping Missions*, Refugee International, 2005

<sup>71</sup> Davis, *op cit 7, 2006* pp 11

<sup>72</sup> K Allred, 'Peacekeepers and Prostitutes: How deployed forces fuel the demand for trafficked women and new hope for stopping it', 33 (1) *Armed Forces and Society* 5–23, Oct 2006

# 14 Constraints to effective programming

The very involvement of international humanitarian agencies in assistance activities raises expectations among children associated with armed forces and groups in a post-conflict setting. While agencies are prevented from meeting these expectations by a variety of causes, (such as destroyed or limited infrastructure, breaks in the continuity of funding or other imperatives taking precedence over child protection), perhaps the single greatest constraint is continuing insecurity. In all of these cases, children's disappointment at having their expectations raised and not met when programming fails to deliver has negative implications for their reintegration.

*Being given empty promises for further support was the worst memory for a lot of respondents [who had been in transit care].*

UNICEF and USAID, Uganda<sup>73</sup>

*The [demobilised child soldiers or 'DCS'] were also disappointed when they failed to get the vocational training they had been promised at Gitagata Transit centre.*

Save the Children UK, Rwanda<sup>74</sup>

*Said at first that they would be [at a] boarding school, but had to retract on that – very disappointing for the community and led to mistrust.*

Save the Children USA, Sudan<sup>75</sup>

## The impact of continuing insecurity on reintegration

Millions of children continue to grow up in a variety of situations of ongoing armed violence. The chaotic nature of many of today's armed conflicts, the absence of effective peace agreements or situations of 'no war, no peace' all mean that the reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups is at best

threatened and can be rendered irrelevant where there is strong likelihood of re-recruitment or where children's lives are under constant threat.

In northern Uganda, despite the signature of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in August 2006 and subsequent addenda to renew the agreement up until the end of June 2007, the current situation does not point to an immediate peace agreement or ceasefire. The resumption of hostilities between the LRA and the Ugandan armed forces cannot be ruled out. In the midst of this threat of further conflict there have also been reports of the possible induction of LRA returnees into the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF).

## Access to conduct follow-up monitoring of children

In many cases, there is a need for frequent follow-up visits by protection staff or community child protection volunteers to individual children who have left armed forces or groups, their relatives and other community members. Several factors have impeded this critical part of the reintegration process, and continuing insecurity plays a significant role. In Sri Lanka, conflict-related repeated displacement has been identified as a critical impediment to conducting follow-up visits. Staff no longer have access to the people they have built relationships with, and distance and logistics present insurmountable barriers. This has been identified as a problem in Batticaloa and Trincomalee in particular, where large displacements of the population have occurred during 2007.<sup>76</sup> Displacement and insecurity have also led to a reduction in the level of humanitarian support available for children and young people, which in turn acts as a push factor towards recruitment and re-recruitment.

**Case study: murder of Save the Children UK partner in eastern DRC and other security incidents in DRC in 2006 and 2007<sup>77</sup>**

In 2006, a staff member of one of Save the Children's partners in child protection work was brutally murdered due to his role in the demobilisation of children from armed groups.

A group of five people went to his home in disguise and requested to be provided with protection services for their missing children. After a lengthy discussion he became suspicious that they were in fact associated with an armed group and as a result refused to disclose his role in the DDR programme and refused to show them the reunification forms. At this stage, in broad daylight, they took him to the bush, stripped him, tortured him for several hours and later killed him.

The reunification of children in North Kivu province in the east of the DRC has been interrupted at various times in the last two years by fighting between government forces and the Interahamwe, Hutu extremists who carried out the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In May 2007 in South Kivu province, the same forces were accused of massacring up to 20 villagers in the Walunga sector of the province, forcing over 11,000 families to flee their homes.

The National Army Liberation of Uganda (sometimes called the ADEF group) has also been reported to be terrorising people and abducting children in the Grand North region of Northern Kivu province. They abduct children to join their forces, girls are forced to become the 'wives' of combatants and they re-recruit children they consider to be deserters.

Since 2006, areas surrounding Virunga Park in the east of the DRC have also become dangerous due to the presence of local armed factions, with vehicles being attacked and people often killed. In July 2006, for example, a bus escorting children for family reunification was stopped and the children abducted and imprisoned for several days until they managed to escape.

Despite the presence of MONUC, the UN Mission in the DRC, the area around Bunia in Ituri province in the north-east of the DRC has also experienced periods of considerable insecurity.

Over a three-year period (1999–2002) in the DRC, 148 out of 532 children in one programme never received a follow-up visit for a number of reasons, including insecurity due to fighting. Despite the peace process, these issues are still hindering follow-up in the DRC today. In many areas, such as Rutshuru and Masisi, access is also severely restricted due to the presence of armed militias. In areas under the control of these armed groups, law and order is non-existent.

**Regional instability: an example from West Africa, June 2007<sup>78</sup>**

Despite certain improvements in security and stability, it is important not to underestimate the potential risks to the situation of women and children in this region and to maintain the capacity to respond to

any negative changes as a result of political tensions or renewed conflict. Such risks were highlighted early in 2007 when the deteriorating situation in Guinea prompted emergency preparedness activities not only within that country but also at likely border crossing points in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Tensions in Guinea persist; there are forthcoming elections in Sierra Leone and renewed attempts to move forward with the Ivorian peace agreement, including the introduction of a DDR programme. The climate is such that governments, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society groups need to balance resources to ensure that emergency response capacity remains in place while at the same time taking the initial steps to move beyond humanitarian interventions, should improvements in the security situation materialise.



A 2005 Human Rights Watch report<sup>79</sup> – confirmed by UN missions and Save the Children field staff – revealed ongoing cross-border recruitment of children into armed forces and groups. The West Africa region is dealing with the consequences of over ten years of brutal conflict, including mass movements of populations, breakdown in basic services, sexual violence, forced recruitment, with ongoing insecurity and the risk of new emergencies or conflicts arising. A key challenge, therefore, is to support government ministries, local NGOs and communities themselves to take full responsibility for responding to violations of children's rights and for service provision, while at the same time maintaining the capacity to respond to emergencies in the short term.

There are no easy solutions to the problems caused by insecurity. Agencies can, however, take great care in what promises they make to children and their families, and ensure that information about what they do is clear and available in local languages.<sup>80</sup> Transparency with all concerned, including children, communities, parties to the armed conflict and colleagues, can at least reduce children's disappointment and resulting damage to their reintegration when promises cannot be met because of insecurity.

## **Prevalence of small arms and light weapons<sup>81</sup> in communities**

The continued availability of arms has been shown to have a negative impact on human life and poverty: "An average \$22bn a year is spent on arms by countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America – a sum that would otherwise enable those same countries to be on track to meet Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal primary education (estimated at US\$10bn a year) as well as targets for reducing infant and maternal mortality (estimated at \$12bn a year)".<sup>82</sup>

At local level, the efforts of agencies to assist children returning to their communities and restarting peaceful lives can be disrupted by the ongoing availability of

weapons and ammunition. In Sri Lanka, a recent report states:

*The proliferation of small arms in Sri Lanka is reaching crisis proportions. Sophisticated weapons are available for sale at low prices in the community. Official figures estimate that there are 45,000 legally registered firearms and 20,000 unregistered weapons in Sri Lanka... The flow of arms into Sri Lanka is closely linked to the long-running conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE have developed a sophisticated international network for the procurement of arms. However, the use of small arms is not simply confined to the conflict. There is a thriving market for illicit small arms in relation to armed crime and election violence with its roots in a violent political culture.*<sup>83</sup>

Other post-conflict countries where Save the Children is engaged in reintegration work also see similar problems. In recent meetings in Southern Sudan held by the NGO SaferWorld with civil society, police, representatives of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), government ministers and international observers, it was confirmed that the "widespread possession of arms by civilian and militia, including elements opposed to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), continues to be a major threat to peace and security".<sup>84</sup>

Having grown up surrounded by weapons, it is unsurprising that children continue to resort to armed violence to solve their problems. When asked about their access to guns, children formerly associated with armed forces in the DRC told agency staff that they had hidden some guns because as a child they did not need one to enter the organised DDR process, or they had only submitted one of the several weapons in their possession. They also defended their right to defend their families when "the enemy" remained armed.

Efforts to remove arms (including small arms and light weapons) in some cases have also contributed to the egregious violations of children's rights, including the right to life. It is essential that when disarmament is

carried out, it is done in a manner that is participatory and safe for communities, including children and young people. In north-eastern Uganda, actions by the UPDF to carry out “cordon and search” forced disarmament of communities have resulted in grave breaches of human rights. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Uganda has documented a significant number of cases where the “UPDF used excessive force or indiscriminate means during the disarmament exercise, resulting in loss of life, destruction of property and livelihoods”.<sup>85</sup>

Save the Children in Uganda’s preliminary findings on disarmament-related abuses against children reveal incidences of serious violations of children’s rights. An independent verification investigation has been conducted under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda and a final report is to be released in the near future.<sup>86</sup>

The prevalence of unexploded ordnance and uncleared landmines has a devastating impact on all children, including those returning home. In addition to the actual killing and maiming of thousands of boys and girls each year, there is the psychological impact of the fear of harm that children must live with.

*Nepali children also suffered from the explosives that constituted the detritus of the conflict: according to UNICEF, Nepali children suffered the second highest rate of injuries caused by explosives in the world. Hundreds of children suffered as a result of the landmines and unexploded ordnance left behind by the warring sides, particularly as a result of the Maoists’ penchant for using – and leaving behind – improvised explosive devices.*

Save the Children UK, Nepal<sup>87</sup>

## Notes

<sup>73</sup> Allen & Schomerus, *op cit* 7, 2006 pp 9

<sup>74</sup> “Evaluation report of Baratashye project, Rwanda”, Save the Children, 2004, pp 10 [unpublished document]

<sup>75</sup> *Save the Children’s Protection Programming in Southern Kordofan, op cit* 23, 2007 pp 7 [unpublished document]

<sup>76</sup> M. Korthals Altes, *Community Reintegration and Protection for Children Affected by Armed Conflict in North and East Sri Lanka, Project Report February 2007*, Save the Children Sri Lanka, 2007 pp 2 [unpublished document]

<sup>77</sup> Private communication with Child Protection Manager in Goma, DRC, Save the Children UK, June 2007

<sup>78</sup> This section is based on a personal communication with Save the Children UK’s Child Protection Programme Manager for the West Africa sub-region, June 2007

<sup>79</sup> *Youth, Poverty, Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors*, Human Rights Watch, 2005

<sup>80</sup> For more information on accountability to children and communities see <http://www.hapinternational.org>

<sup>81</sup> *Shattered Lives: The case for tough international arms control*, Control Arms Network, Oxfam and Amnesty International, 2003

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid* pp 4

<sup>83</sup> Y. Foster & H. Abeywardana, *Small arms and light weapons: Challenges in Sri Lanka and options for the future*, South Asia Small Arms Network Sri Lanka and Saferworld, 2006

<sup>84</sup> *Saferworld Update, Number 44*, 2007 pp 3

<sup>85</sup> Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Uganda: Update report on the situation of Human Rights in Karamoja, from 16 November 2006 to 31 March 2007

<sup>86</sup> Save the Children’s Senior National Child Protection Adviser in Uganda

<sup>87</sup> S. Zia Zarifi, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists use of child soldiers in Nepal*, Human Rights Watch, 2007 pp 11

## 15 Preventing re-recruitment

Once children have been reunified with their families or have rejoined civilian life they are safe and free from further contact with armed groups. However, this is not the case in many situations where Save the Children works.

*The rebels took me during an attack on our village. They looted everything and took me and three of my friends along by force. I spent a month and a half in their camp, before being able to flee and return to the village. Since the war was continuing, my mother and I, we ran to the bush where I was caught again by Liberian rebels and threatened with death by their leader. My mother came to the camp to ask for my freedom, but they refused. She returned with money and they freed me and we returned to the village. After some time, the Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire [MPCI] came to recruit in the area and a member of the community showed them my house. I was forced to go with them otherwise they would have killed me. They took me to a corridor<sup>88</sup> [checkpoint] where I stayed three months before fleeing when I went to collect water.*

Côte d'Ivoire, girl from Danané

In Sri Lanka, the threat of recruitment and re-recruitment by the LTTE in rebel-controlled areas and by the Karuna group in government-controlled areas is such that some families keep their children at home rather than allowing them to engage in community activities or go to school. It has also been documented that in some cases parents, fearing for their children's safety, are forced to send their children to the Middle East to work, which may also result in other forms of exploitation.<sup>89</sup> A further, extreme alternative is for children to become 'surrenderees', where they voluntarily admit themselves to a 'rehabilitation centre' – in reality an adult prison.

In 2006, Save the Children in Southern Sudan received notification of a specific Sudan People's

Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) order stating that all children in the Gumuruk area that had been demobilised from the SPLA had to immediately rejoin. This was carried out despite the fact that Save the Children had reunified these children with their families and they had returned to school. Instances of re-recruitment were also being reported in other locations, including Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Aweil West County and Unity State. Following direct advocacy on this issue, local authorities facilitated the release of these children. Nevertheless, the fear and disruption caused may take many more years to reverse.

In northern Uganda, it has been reported that recruitment and re-recruitment remains an issue. Despite the legal framework stating that the recruitment age is 18, and though there is no deliberate policy on child recruitment within the national army, there are reported cases of underage recruitment within the UPDF, while some former LRA child captives end up with the UPDF either through induction or voluntarily joining in search of an income. The main problem is found with the auxiliary forces/local defence units. The recruitment process is informal and this is where the local community and elders recommend children to join. Even parents sometimes send their children to join, due to economic reasons.<sup>91</sup>

The fear of re-recruitment is pervasive for children in many situations, including Nepal<sup>92</sup> and eastern DRC. In the latter, the risk of re-recruitment is high because most militia prefer the already trained rank and file in their staff, which includes demobilised children. The militias, especially the Mayi Mayi and Laurent Kunda's group, are still active within the communities that children wish to return to. Some of these children insist on returning, claiming that they wish to contribute to the protection of their families and communities.

### **Case study: Jaffna, Sri Lanka**

Currently (June 2007) approximately 65 children are being kept as 'surrendered' in high-security prisons in Kandy, central Sri Lanka, and in Jaffna in the north. Some of these children were formerly associated with the LTTE and surrendered to the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) with the promise they would receive rehabilitation support in an open prison. Others who were reportedly at risk of recruitment/abduction have been 'voluntarily' admitted to these state prisons for 'protection', because their parents did not see any other way to protect their children, whereas some other underage 'surrendered' in these prisons have reportedly been arrested by the SLA. There are several paramilitary groups and/or armed groups operating in north and east Sri Lanka, some of which are reportedly linked to the SLA. These groups and the SLA are often suspicious of the children released by the LTTE and accuse them of maintaining links with their former captors or they are reportedly being used by the SLA and armed groups to provide information about the LTTE.

These 'surrendered', including children who have reported to the state requesting protection, are being

kept in state prisons with no separate provision for children under Gazette Notification 1462/8 of 2006. Some are being kept in prisons in the north and east of Sri Lanka; the majority are held in Jaffna and in Kandy, where they are together with adult former fighters who have surrendered to the government from the LTTE. No medical care, educational or recreational support is available in these prisons. Under the current emergency regulations in Sri Lanka, 'surrendered' will need one year of rehabilitation, whereas there are no rehabilitation programmes in these prisons. According to UNICEF, there is misunderstanding about the meaning of rehabilitation and the actual needs of these children.

The Rehabilitation Commissioner in Colombo is entitled to take decisions regarding these children, after the magistrate ordered their "imprisonment". Currently most children and their families are requesting release from the prison, because the children are reportedly not able to cope with the harsh circumstances in prison, but the decision lies with the Rehabilitation Commissioner.<sup>90</sup>

Prior to the peace process, with the presence of the LRA in northern Uganda, there were cases of re-abduction of children back into the LRA forces; further abductions are presently taking place in Southern Sudan.<sup>93</sup> Save the Children's efforts to reach children still with the LRA are currently at a standstill; the LRA remain reluctant to release these children, who they may try to use as bargaining chips to avoid the indictments of the International Criminal Court. In Sri Lanka, it has not been possible to reach a peace agreement and in the five years since the ceasefire was signed, the security situation has been deteriorating, resulting in further recruitment and violations of children's rights.

The major lesson regarding re-recruitment is to be aware that children who have been associated with armed forces and groups are more likely to be re-recruited than their contemporaries. They have a well-founded fear of this happening and will need support to ensure their safety. Reintegration efforts should also be directed at giving children positive alternatives, so that they are not tempted back into the ranks.

## Notes

<sup>88</sup> Interview with girl formerly associated with an armed group carried out by the Child Protection Manager in Côte d'Ivoire in 2007

<sup>89</sup> M. Korthals Altes, *op cit* 76, 2007; interviews with staff in Sri Lanka, *op cit* 58, 2007

<sup>90</sup> “*Jaffna Case Study*”, Case study materials provided by Save the Children in Sri Lanka, 2007 [unpublished document]

<sup>91</sup> National child protection adviser, Save the Children in Uganda; Save the Children in Uganda field office reports

<sup>92</sup> *Documenting Save the Children US's Work, op cit* 9, 2007

<sup>93</sup> Based on interviews with senior child protection advisers, Save the Children's Uganda programme

# 16 Justice issues

## Challenging the impunity of perpetrators

The issue of impunity for acts committed during conflict is a highly charged one. Significant attention has been given to the stalemate that occurred in northern Uganda over the International Criminal Court's indictments of the LRA leadership. It would appear that those indictments delayed any further release of children and prolonged the suffering of children living in displaced camps and the rest of the conflict zone. The long-term effects have yet to be determined. On the other hand, in Sierra Leone, the post-war views of children and their families on impunity were relatively clear. Many of those who took part in this research argued that war crimes trials for those that encourage children's recruitment deliver clear messages about the negative consequences of using child soldiers.<sup>94</sup>

## Children at risk of prosecution

Children cannot be effectively reintegrated if they are at risk of being prosecuted or otherwise targeted for acts allegedly committed while armed forces and groups unlawfully used them. In Sri Lanka, for example, there is no legal differentiation between a child and an adult deemed to have been associating with "terrorists". In Nepal:

*Some of the children were captured and arrested on crimes like murder or [theft] instead of being charged under the terrorist legislation, this makes it more difficult to negotiate their release from the government detention centers. They also get criminal records.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>95</sup>

## Legal discrimination

As mentioned earlier, there often remain legal issues to be clarified on behalf of children born into forced marriages or as a result of rape. These children and many others are often not issued with birth certificates and thus can face long-lasting difficulties that impede their access to basic services and even citizenship. A national children's agenda – as part of an overall reintegration strategy – should address this gap.

*In most cases, girls who do not have birth certificates have been refused access to the formal schooling system by local authorities. (As many as 80 to 90 per cent of children in western Côte d'Ivoire do not have birth certificates, either because they never received them at birth or because some certificates were destroyed during the conflict.)*

Save the Children UK,  
Côte d'Ivoire<sup>96</sup>

Over the past decade, several agencies joined together in Rwanda to lobby the government to change inheritance laws in favour of women and children. In Sierra Leone, pregnant girls were only allowed to attend government schools after an inter-agency advocacy campaign. This issue continues to need attention in post-conflict settings, especially to link up with policy discussions on children affected by HIV and AIDS.

Legal discrimination faced by street boys and girls is well known and documented.<sup>97</sup> It is of heightened concern in the post-conflict period as the number of children concerned often escalates sharply, and over-stretched police forces are frequently comprised of former soldiers with little civilian police training.

These children routinely have no legal representation and may linger in jails for weeks and months without support.

Justice issues have not yet received the attention they warrant from agencies involved in reintegration. There is much to be learned about the medium and longer-term impact of failing to address these dimensions of children's rights. There is a need for stronger partnerships between the human rights and legal organisations and those concerned with programming in conflict-affected countries.

## Notes

<sup>94</sup> E. Delap, *Fighting Back: Child and community led strategies to avoid children's recruitment into armed forces and armed groups in West Africa*, Save the Children UK, 2005 pp 24

<sup>95</sup> *Documenting Save the Children US's Work, op cit 9*, 2007 pp 10

<sup>96</sup> *Rehabilitation of girls associated with armed groups in Western Côte d'Ivoire*, Save the Children UK, Côte d'Ivoire, 2007 pp 10 [unpublished evaluation report]

<sup>97</sup> *Asesinatos y criminalización de niños y niñas, adolescentes y jóvenes en sector de Bogotá*, Caso COL 271004.CC, Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura [World Organisation Against Torture], 2004; *Haiti: Disarmament delayed, justice denied*, Amnesty International (2005). Available at: [www.web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR360052005](http://www.web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR360052005)

## 17 Funding issues

Most child protection programmes struggle with short-term emergency funding that does not recognise the long-term nature of reintegrating children affected by conflict and building community-based child protection structures.

*One of the biggest challenges for the CAAFAG program is the short-term funding. During the various discussions in Nepal, concerns regarding limited and short-term funding were voiced by NGOs, CPC groups and the children themselves. All of the above emphasised the need for long-term programming in order to effectively reintegrate CAAFAG into their community. One-year programs do not allow enough time to train, identify and implement programs to support these children.*

Save the Children USA, Nepal<sup>98</sup>

*The gap between 'emergency' work and 'post-conflict' work simply must be addressed. Otherwise, projects have an on-again, off-again quality that is extremely disruptive to the lives of beneficiaries. There are also major consequences for staff morale and continuity. At one point, [we] had to let go of nearly [the] entire protection staff, only to rehire many of them a few months later when new funding came through (from the same donor)... The bottom line is that our reintegration work is currently lodged between 'emergency' and 'post-conflict' funding phases, and it is a daily struggle to keep afloat the child protection committees and non-formal education centres that form the core of our work.*

Save the Children UK, Côte d'Ivoire<sup>99</sup>

This tension is even more apparent in situations of ongoing conflict or fragile peace. While delays in funding or changes of focus are difficult for any programme, they are of particular concern when working with children associated with armed forces and groups, who are often highly sensitive to false promises of assistance. Not only do delays risk

undermining the overall reintegration effort, but they also risk undermining the peace process itself.

In interviews with children in Aveba, Ituri, in April 2007, staff were informed that the lack of access to services and provisions were likely to force many children back to picking up arms. On another occasion, girls in a transit centre in Goma informed staff that had they known what was on offer following demobilisation, they would never have chosen to leave. The impact of interrupted programming or a stark difference between the packages on offer for children and adults is extremely damaging, primarily to children, but also to their communities. It damages their faith in the international community.<sup>100</sup>

Experience in Southern Sudan shows that short-term funding allocations from the Common Humanitarian Fund and UN sources for child-focused reintegration programmes is hindering the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of reintegration. This is because the operational context is one where implementation continues to be hampered by security concerns and logistical difficulties, as well as working with a newly formed and inexperienced government.

It is important that the intensive amount of resources devoted to the very short period of disarmament and demobilisation is balanced with the longer-term reintegration needs of children. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, the recognition for the 'R' part of the DDR process is considered crucial by national authorities.

*We met with the head of the 'R' section (the National Programme for Reintegration and Community Rehabilitation), and he made the point very clearly that he thought that his agency's work should eventually segue into fully-fledged economic development work.*

Save the Children UK, Côte d'Ivoire<sup>101</sup>



It has also been our experience that funding mechanisms have been slow to deliver essential funding for programme implementation that forms a key component of reintegration work.

### Case study: Southern Sudan<sup>102</sup>

“The Southern Sudan Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) had received pledges totalling US\$345m, but just \$185m has been paid to date and the disbursement of these funds has been considerably delayed. Bureaucracy has weighed down the MDTF process, with conditions proving too rigid for the emerging government ministries to operate within. This experience has been further marred by a gradual draining of resources through the employment of technical experts to assist ministries in establishing effective and, ironically, efficient systems. To date, there is little evidence of resources being released for the proposal to improve access to quality education. The anticipated flow of resources to support education in Southern Sudan has been affected by internal agency administration, the low prioritisation of education by donors, and a donor fixation on providing emergency aid. Competition among the UN, international and local NGOs for the meagre resources that are available has resulted in duplication and rivalry rather than a co-ordinated and harmonised response. The financing of education remains fragmented, unco-ordinated and at the mercy of fading interest.”

In short, donors and operational partners have a shared responsibility to ensure that funding is not all front-loaded at the disarmament and demobilisation end of DDR to the detriment of reintegration. While the pressures to do so are understandable, they are short-sighted both in terms of sustainable peace and the true involvement of children and young people in post-conflict development.

## Notes

<sup>98</sup> *Documenting Save the Children's work, op cit 9*, 2007 pp 7

<sup>99</sup> Internal communication on funding, Save the Children UK, Côte d'Ivoire, 2007

<sup>100</sup> Based on interviews with staff in the DRC, Save the Children UK

<sup>101</sup> Personal communication with Côte d'Ivoire's Child Protection Manager, Save the Children UK, June 2007

<sup>102</sup> *Last in Line, Last in School, op cit 34*, 2007 pp 24

## 18 Peace processes

In order to ensure that children benefit as fully as possible, Save the Children and our partners advocate that the issues of children and armed conflict should be on the table from the outset in all peace processes.

In several recent peace processes, there have been clear references to children. In Sri Lanka, although the ceasefire agreement of 22 February 2002 did not mention children adequately, the peace talks that followed did address children's situation. Eventually, an 'Action Plan for Children Affected by War' was agreed and signed by the government, the LTTE and international agencies.

The Sierra Leone agreement (Lomé Accord, 1999) also mentions the needs of children. The preamble recognises that children in Sierra Leone are entitled to special protection and care in accordance with the UNCRC. Part V, on child combatants, states that "governments will mobilise resources to address the special needs of children within the DDR process, in co-operation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, UNICEF and other agencies".<sup>103</sup>

### Implementation and monitoring of peace agreements

Whether peace agreements have included specific reference to children or children's issues are implicit, evidence has also shown that peace agreements do not always mean peace and stability; the test is in their implementation, informed by adequate and child-sensitive monitoring to ensure that commitments made are fulfilled.

In Southern Sudan, for example, parties to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), including the SPLA/M, committed themselves to "... *the demobilisation of all child soldiers within six months of the signature of the CPA*". Two years after the signing of this agreement, however, the demobilisation of children still continues to take place while in some areas it has been noted that children have returned to the armed forces, either driven to re-join through poverty or forcibly re-recruited. The issue now is to ensure that the SPLA becomes and remains a 'child-free zone', strictly monitoring the clause in the CPA, as well as ensuring the successful reintegration of children formerly associated with the armed forces into their communities.<sup>104</sup>

In Côte d'Ivoire, the accord signed in March 2007 attempts to reunite the country, where weapons are still freely available (particularly in the western districts of Guiglo and Moyen Cavally, where armed militia groups are present).<sup>105</sup>

In other locations there is a fear that election results (on the basis of very fragile ceasefire agreements) will lead to a resumption of violence, as in Nepal, where there were a number of other armed groups. As the peace begins, there are fears that there will be more splinter groups from the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist (CPN–M), such as the Terai Movement. There are reports that these groups are already using children in fighting.

Much can be learned from integrating women's experiences and human rights issues into peace processes. The earlier that children's issues are introduced, for instance, the less controversial

they become. Making specific reference to children's reintegration into peace agreements levers funding, facilitates programming and helps countries recovering from conflict to start living up to their obligations to children.

## Notes

<sup>103</sup> [www.sierra-leone.org/abidjanaccord.html](http://www.sierra-leone.org/abidjanaccord.html); see also A. Jefferys, *Can the Powerful Protect: How the UN Security Council needs to shape up to protect children*, Save the Children UK, 2007

<sup>104</sup> See *Comprehensive Peace Agreement Provision on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration 2006 Article 24.9* produced by UNMIS (UN Mission to Sudan), UNDP (UN Development Programme) and UNICEF

<sup>105</sup> Personal communication with Côte d'Ivoire's Country Director, Save the Children UK, 2007

# 19 Post-conflict opportunities for improving children's lives

In any post-conflict situation where there is a transition to peace, governments may face numerous challenges in building a relationship of mutual trust with their citizens. Despite these difficulties, as countries invest in peace, there is an opportunity to review and revise national legislation and policy to the benefit of children. Often there is fresh energy among ministries in a new government and increased involvement by the international community and national civil society, including professional groups such as lawyers and social workers.

*Advocacy work with the Bureau of Social Welfare within the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare led to the reinforcement of existing policies regarding child care institutions that were dormant and had never been applied before. As a result 4 substandard childcare institutions that exploited children were closed. Another 36 are still pending closure following Save the Children UK's recommendations. A policy on child care institutions has been drafted in collaboration with other child protection agencies.*

Save the Children UK, Liberia<sup>106</sup>

*... we have been working with other partners (particularly UNICEF) and the Ministry for Gender, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs on a number of policy issues affecting children and young people: the commencement of discussions on national child care standards; and working with the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs on drafting a child-friendly penal code to take forward to the legislature.*

Save the Children UK, Southern Sudan<sup>107</sup>

Children have important contributions to make to a myriad of post-conflict decisions that are not traditionally seen as their domain. In Sierra Leone, boys and girls raised a number of concerns that should have been incorporated into the renewed local infrastructure.

*Focus infrastructure repair on the areas that need it most, rather than those that are most accessible, to promote livelihoods rehabilitation. Take measures to prevent the corrupt use of limited resources and consult children on the impact of infrastructure repair on their lives. Remember that infrastructure repair and development can be as important to children's reintegration as elements more usually focused on, such as skills training.*

Save the Children UK, Sierra Leone<sup>108</sup>

## Notes

<sup>106</sup> *Global Impact Assessment Report Liberia 2004–2005: Social Welfare and Protection Liberia Programme*, Save the Children UK, Liberia, 2004–2005 pp 11

<sup>107</sup> *South Sudan Programme Annual Report 2006–2007* pp 3 [unpublished document]

<sup>108</sup> Delap, *op cit* 3, 2004 pp 28

## 20 Institutional issues

### Co-ordination

At the earliest stage of intervention possible, clear co-ordination of child protection actors can have a significant impact on the welfare of children living through a conflict. For example, in Sri Lanka, the development of an 'Action Plan for Children Affected by War' made significant changes to the pattern of child recruitment and release; in West Africa, cross-border contingency planning was made possible by established networks of child protection agencies in the sub-region. Starting co-ordination and contingency planning at the earliest possible stage ensures that there is no last-minute scramble to respond to unforeseen events such as a mass release or a resumption of recruitment. Equally, a lack of co-ordination and agreement on common approaches and tools leads to wasted resources, frustration and mistakes. For instance, it is common that when material assistance packages for reintegration vary widely, it can cause disruption to programming, anger and even violence among recipients.

*Experiences in Liberia also demonstrated the problems caused by inconsistencies in the practices of different agencies. For example, some agencies offered participants on skill-training programs US\$30 a month, while others offered a daily meal. Children shopped around and registered in the program that offered the best perks, rather than the one which best suited their needs. Some programs, which did not offer direct incentives, were finding it difficult to maintain children. It is important to maintain co-ordination between donors in order to ensure harmony rather than competition between implementing agencies and programs.<sup>109</sup>*

In countries such as Nepal and Liberia, there have been concerted efforts to adopt common guidelines for reintegration and other child protection issues.

The most notable example is in the West Africa sub-region, where Save the Children led the development of interagency guidelines for reintegration, which are currently being field tested. Wherever possible, agencies should have a common set of indicators against which to measure progress.

In addition to improved co-ordination within the child protection sector, other sectors should be encouraged to collaborate, as there are many inter-linkages. For example, health professionals need to gear up to deal with increased transmission of HIV as transport routes open up or to handle new injuries owing to uncleared minefields and unexploded ordnance, while education and food security colleagues may need to collaborate on accelerated learning programmes. Appointing a national and local focal point for each sector assists in the flow of information and programme co-ordination.

### Consistency regarding age limits

It is important to ensure consistency regarding the age-related entitlement for DDR programming and its concomitant benefits. Some programmes include only those who are currently under 18; others work with people who were under 18 when recruited; others with young people who were 18 at the time of registration while still others work with young people aged 12–25.

This issue has been raised by other agencies. In one Ugandan report,<sup>110</sup> it was stated that the needs of youth (up to age 24) are greater in many cases in relation to education and literacy. The number of returnees can also be predominantly from this age group. However, if agencies feel that it is easier to access funds that are available for child-focused work, this group may not receive the attention it requires.

There needs to be clarity about how to manage this problem, so as to use all available funding and advocacy opportunities to maximum effect.

Whatever the decisions made, there is a clear need for accountability. Frequently, the decision-making process is unclear and non-transparent and child protection actors may be marginalised from these processes in order to prioritise other interests. This is particularly apparent where there is an integrated UN mission in theatre, with potentially associated conflicting priorities and imperatives.

## Co-ordination with adult DDR programmes

There is no doubt that decisions made about the demobilisation of adult fighters have a huge impact on the children who are associated with them; this will continue to be the case even if the above-mentioned frameworks are adopted or even if there is no formal demobilisation of children and an exclusively community-based approach is taken.

*A great challenge underlined by both parents and DCS [demobilised child soldiers] is that many DCS were not given a Termination of Service fund while other demobilised soldiers (both regular forces and infiltrators) got it.*

Save the Children UK, Rwanda<sup>111</sup>

In the DRC, the adult soldiers received bicycles and US\$25 per month after demobilisation from the Commission Nationale de la Démobilisation et Reinsertion (CONADER). On some occasions, CONADER has given children as young as 15 the same kind of financial assistance and this has consequently caused severe difficulties for child protection programmes due to lack of harmonisation between benefits provided for adults and children.<sup>112</sup> Agencies are responsible for ensuring that all approaches for adult and child DDR programmes are co-ordinated in order to enhance their impact, without it being negative for one group or the other.

## Notes

<sup>109</sup> *Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa, op cit 70, 2006* pp 23

<sup>110</sup> *The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda*, UNICEF and Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale, 2006

<sup>111</sup> "Evaluation report of Baratashye project, Rwanda", *op cit 74, 2004*, pp 21

<sup>112</sup> Personal communication with Save the Children UK Child Protection Manager, Goma, DRC. June 2007

## 21 Conclusion: the enforcement of agreed and/or international standards

The international legal and policy frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict have developed significantly since the 1996 Machel report. Most notable among these are the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict to the UNCRC, the International Criminal Court Statute, Security Council resolutions (both those addressing children and armed conflict thematically and those which include specific reference to children in addressing geographical situations) and jurisprudence emerging from international and hybrid tribunals. This burgeoning of international law has been mirrored, of late, with internationally negotiated and endorsed policy, particularly regarding the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The Paris Principles and the International Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) modules 5.30 on children, 5.20 on youth and 5.10 on women and gender, provide standards for engagement in all areas, including programme approaches.

Nevertheless, Save the Children remains concerned that internationally agreed policy may be honoured more in the breach than the observance at the practical, field level. The Paris Principles, which provide a good blueprint for work on children's DDR, were agreed at a Ministerial-level meeting but are not enforceable. An energetic and committed effort is needed to ensure that, for instance, every

country-level Special Representative of the Secretary-General is aware of the Principles and uses them as the basis for the release and reintegration of children. At the same time, the Paris Principles need to be widely promulgated so that they become a common reference point, in much the same way as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement have become the operational guidelines for all situations of internal displacement and, in many cases, have been imported into national law and policy.

Integrating the Paris Principles into the work of the UN and international NGOs at headquarter as well as field level would ensure that peace processes address child protection issues, as well as ensuring that programming for the release and reintegration of children adheres to the core principles of the UNCRC, to name just two examples. We recommend that, in order to facilitate the universal application of the Paris Principles, a two-pronged approach is adopted, learning from the experience of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. First, there needs to be a 'roll-out' programme across regions, including national and regional meetings to publicise the Principles and to obtain governmental and civil society endorsement. Second, the key bodies of the UN – the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly – need to be mobilised to ensure that the Paris Principles are at the centre of all resolutions and programme activities, as applicable.

## 22 Recommendations

In Save the Children's experience, inclusive programming that is community based is our most powerful approach in meeting our objectives for successful reintegration of children associated with armed groups. While the challenges remaining for effective and sustainable reintegration sometimes arise from a gap in international, regional or national law, we mostly see that the problems arise from a lack of implementation and enforcement of existing norms and standards, which support this approach. In order to ensure that all reintegration work is inclusive, community based and adequately funded, we are calling for the following:

### I. Funding for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of children

- (i) Responsible agencies, including the UN, international NGOs and donors, should draw up a protocol with a *standardised set of requirements for programme implementation* for application in countries where children may have been associated with armed forces and groups.<sup>113</sup> The purpose of such a protocol is to ensure that there is an agreed, predictable, reliable and funded response to the rights, needs and well-being of children affected by armed conflict.
- (ii) The protocol should also ensure that country-based senior UN Representatives and their operational partners, within their mandates, are adequately prepared in advance and are supported in taking collective and separate responsibility for adherence to these principles and to implementing the Paris Principles. This process should also take necessary steps to resolve ongoing issues around the DDR approaches adopted for both children and adults.
- (iii) The protocol should also stipulate that *responsible agencies, at the beginning of a DDR process, are to make joint decisions regarding programme design and implementation*. These will include but not be limited to: the type and level of material assistance to be provided to children or their families; the age and circumstances at which children cease to be eligible for support under DDR programming; and the use of residential or interim care facilities. These decisions should adhere to the principles of the UNCRC and the Paris Principles. While these decisions should be kept under review, they should be adhered to by all responsible agencies unless or until they are revised.
- (iv) The above framework/protocol should be adopted where regional bodies such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) or alliances of member states are responsible for peacekeeping, peace building or other operations in countries affected by armed conflict.
- (v) Responsible agencies should ensure *an independent assessment of each programme for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of children or adults* to evaluate the impact of these programmes on children, to learn lessons regarding effective programming that supports the rights of children (whether part of the programme or otherwise affected by the programme), to identify obstacles to effective programming and means to overcome them, and to ensure that good practice is repeated where possible and practices with negative impact are not replicated.



- (vi) Donor governments and the World Bank should make *funds* available for programming for children that enables *effective and sustainable reintegration over the appropriate time frame* and particularly to recognise that reintegration needs continue long after the ‘emergency’ phase of post-conflict programming or programming in times of armed conflict.
- (vii) Donors and programming agencies and organisations should ensure that *adequate resources are dedicated to education* for children affected by armed conflict.
- (viii) Donor strategies should recognise *the links between DDR and the building and rebuilding of local economies*, with conflict-sensitive and pro-poor interventions in the post-conflict reconstruction phase.
- (iii) *The Paris Principles should form the basis of any national action plans* on children who are or have been associated with armed forces and groups, particularly but not restricted to those developed pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 1539 and 1612.
- (iv) Responsible agencies (particularly UNICEF and the OHCHR) should ensure that the *necessary legislative or policy change* is compliant with relevant international human rights law, including the UNCRC, *to adequately protect children affected by conflict, and those formerly associated with armed forces and groups.*
- (v) To address the pervasive nature of recruitment and re-recruitment, UN member states – both permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council – *should more effectively utilise the instruments at their disposal to end impunity* of parties to armed conflicts who continue to unlawfully recruit or use children in armed forces or groups. *The effectiveness of the implementation of these instruments needs to also be monitored.* Member states that are not members of the Security Council have a role in applying pressure to those members and in their individual or regional capacities to ensure effective action against parties committing egregious violations of children’s rights.

## 2. Implementation and enforcement of norms and standards

- (i) UN member states should give active consideration to formally *adopting the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles) at the General Assembly.* The Paris Principles were endorsed and welcomed by many member states in February 2007. To ensure the widest possible acceptance and implementation, the document needs to be adopted by a resolution of the General Assembly.
- (ii) In order to facilitate compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1612, UN member states should authorise from the allocated budget or enable by voluntary contributions adequate *dedicated child protection expertise to be created within the Headquarters of the Department for Peacekeeping Operations and the Department for Political Affairs.* The experience of gender advisers in peace support operations has demonstrated the value of having a dedicated capacity at headquarters.

## 3. Effective response to sexual exploitation and abuse

- (i) In order to effectively respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, there is an urgent need to immediately create and implement an *interagency protocol or memorandum of understanding regarding sexual exploitation and abuse* to which all operational partners (UN, NGO, bilateral or multilateral donors) must adhere.
- (ii) Implementation of this protocol or memorandum should be overseen by an independent and mandated monitoring body

(either a new body, or an expanded mandate of the appropriate mechanism) located in the area of humanitarian response and not linked to any of the implementing agencies providing assistance on the ground (UN or international NGO). Save the Children calls for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG) to lead the process of initiating discussion and action.

#### 4. Peace processes

- (i) Security Council Resolution 1612 (OP 14) urges parties to armed conflict and all parties involved in peace processes to ensure that the protection, rights and well-being of children are specifically integrated into all peace processes and peace agreements. To this end, language relating to children's rights should be integrated into all peace agreements (including ceasefires).
- (ii) Member states should ensure that provisions relating to the *protection, rights and well-being of children are included in the mandates of peacekeeping and peace-building operations*, not limited to the inclusion of child protection advisers in theatres of operations.<sup>114</sup>
- (iii) To inform the above, an *Expert Group Meeting* should be convened by UNICEF, the OSRSG for Children and Armed Conflict and the International Save the Children Alliance *to increase understanding of the relationship between peace processes and children's rights* and to create models for language that can be included in peace agreements.

#### 5. Arms trade, small arms and light weapons

- (i) Save the Children supports the Control Arms global campaign, which calls for UN member states to adopt the *global Arms Trade Treaty* that has already been the subject of advocacy by NGOs, civilians affected by armed conflict and some member states.
- (ii) Parties to armed conflicts, UN agencies and NGOs should adopt a *community participation and children's rights approach to disarmament and the disposal of arms*.
- (iii) Save the Children supports the Handicap International-led Cluster Munitions Coalition, which calls for *a ban on the production and trade of cluster munitions*. We also support the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) campaign to *stop the proliferation of small arms and light weapons*, through a global approach that aims to establish internationally accepted norms, including the reliable and universal system of marking of small arms and light weapons, central national registers to systematically record national and international weapons transfers, and strengthening of capacities and co-operation between enforcement agencies.

#### Notes

<sup>113</sup> In order to ensure compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and adherence to the principles of the UNCRC, including best interests of the child, non-discrimination, survival and development and child protection

<sup>114</sup> Security Council Resolution 1539 paragraph 7. See also Jefferys, *op cit* 103, 2007

# Appendix: the International Save the Children Alliance's work with children affected by armed conflict

The International Save the Children Alliance has worked with children affected by armed conflict (CAAC) since its inception in 1919. This work has included: basic medical assistance, feeding centres, family tracing and reunification, support to education and for the economic livelihoods of children and families, as well as psychosocial support to individual children. We have also consistently advocated for compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law as it relates to children, particularly with regard to attacks on schools and the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups.

Of the 119 countries in which we currently work, more than 20 are experiencing or recovering from emergencies. As well as aiming to prevent crises arising or resurfacing, we operate long-term initiatives in these areas, sometimes for decades, to bring about change for children.

As a children's rights-based organisation, we work with all children regardless of their status in a country. We have extensive experience with refugees and internally displaced children, those without identification papers and those who have been separated from their families, children who have been associated with armed forces and groups, child victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and returnees, among others.

Save the Children has daily experience of the changing nature of armed conflict that devastates children's lives. Not only are armed conflicts frequently internal in nature, but also they are increasingly gang

or militia-based with neither obvious channels of accountability nor any clear end to the fear and havoc they wreak. Children in Colombia, Haiti, the occupied Palestinian territory, and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – to name but a few – grow up surrounded by actual or threatened fighting. With several recent armed conflicts being at least in part over the control of mineral wealth (eg, DRC, Sudan, Colombia), we see a trend of increased conflict over access to more basic natural resources such as water, fuel or agricultural land.<sup>115</sup> These and other developments, such as the growth of transnational armed groups and the global 'war on terror', mean that the picture for children remains bleak.

Since the 1996 report by Graça Machel on the impact of conflict on children, Save the Children has undertaken several measures to improve how we work to protect children affected by armed conflict. Child protection is now a key component and at the centre of how we respond operationally to emergencies. We continue to refine our knowledge and approach; for example, improving the effectiveness of tools such as an interagency database<sup>116</sup> for separated and unaccompanied children, and enhancing our human resource capacity to provide quality protection programmes through schemes such as the child protection trainee scheme<sup>117</sup> in the UK.

Save the Children participates actively in the development of global policy, the most recent example of our achievement in this area being the Paris

Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups (the Paris Principles).<sup>118</sup> Key tools for the protection of children such as *Action on the Rights of the Child* have been refined and updated based on years of experience to ensure they remain appropriate for their intended use. We also contribute to shaping reformed UN mechanisms for humanitarian response, including the “protection cluster”, both at the Geneva HQ and field levels.

## Notes

<sup>115</sup> *Legacy of Disasters: The impact of climate change on children*, Save the Children UK, 2007

<sup>116</sup> This refers to a case management and family tracing database, which is used in a variety of contexts. It is used in collaboration by a number of agencies in the field, and is maintained on an ongoing basis by Save the Children, International Rescue Committee and UNICEF

<sup>117</sup> <http://jobsearch.savethechildren.org.uk/viewvacancies.cfm?ID=153639>

<sup>118</sup> [www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/Paris\\_Commitments\\_February\\_2007.pdf](http://www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/Paris_Commitments_February_2007.pdf)







